

Urgent Care: Adultery & Emotional Affairs



CONGREGATION & VISITORS



Adultery and Emotional Affairs

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Leader's Guide

How to use "Urgent Care: Adultery and Emotional Affairs" by Building Church Leaders.

Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: URGENT CARE. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help equip you and your leaders to minister in the crisis situations that often leave us speechless.

Urgent Care handouts give a succinct and practical overview of the issues relevant in your situation. All of the authors are familiar with ministry in the wake of marital unfaithfulness, and a certified Christian counselor has reviewed all of this material. We hope you use their hands-on advice, theological guidance, and careful warnings in order that you may offer the best ministry possible in the toughest of situations.

These tools are specifically designed for easy and quick use by church leaders in crisis situations. If you have an urgent need, select the article most relevant to the demands you face, and follow the article's guidance. If time is on your side, use these handouts to launch a discussion and training for leaders in your church.

Select & Copy

This specific theme is designed to help equip pastors and leaders who need to minister to the friends, family, and the congregation after an extramarital affair. Simply print and photocopy the handouts and distribute them as needed. (You do not need to ask for permission provided you are making fewer than 1,000 copies, are using the material in a church or educational setting, and are not charging for it.)

The following articles cover a variety of topics. For example, to learn the basic facts about adultery, read "Why Affairs Happen" and "An Overview of Affairs." For advice on how to help estranged couples achieve reconciliation and forgiveness, see "Healing the Wounds" and "Four Hurdles to Reconciliation." To learn how the subject can be handled from the pulpit, see "The Myth of No-Consequence Sex." For an overview of action steps and important concerns that need to be remembered, see "Quick Guide for Action."

Pray

Ask God to equip your church to minister sensitively and with great hope—even in the saddest situations.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

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A Quick Guide For Action

Key points for caregiving ministry.

Urgent care situations often require an immediate response from church leaders. This overview outlines major steps you should take in addressing adultery or an emotional affair. These action steps are explored in greater depth and detail in the remainder of this packet.

Immediate Concerns

1. The emotional stability of each spouse demands first attention.
2. You may need to try to forestall permanent “solutions” (divorce, revenge) born in anger or despair.

Keep in Mind

1. Truthfulness may hurt like an incision, but it begins the healing process.
2. Lust has its attraction. It needs to be replaced with something better rather than preached into submission.

What to Do or Say

1. Hear the story without condemning. Let it all come out. It’s probably been bottled up a long time.
2. Stand for righteousness, but in an inviting way that makes the right more compelling than the wrong.
3. Work with both spouses if possible. If not, build up the will and emotional strength of the cooperative one.
4. Use the power of prayer, Scripture, the sacraments, and great music to reach deeper than the intellect.
5. Radiate hope for the ability to make things right.

What Not to Do or Say

1. Do not denounce persons, only sin.
2. Do not neglect the seemingly strong party. Outward calm can mask internal emotions.
3. Do not allow confidences to be broken.

Plan Ahead

1. Help people fundamentally change their attitudes by exploring the behavioral roots of infidelity.
2. Help develop a plan to prevent a recurrence. Establish structures of accountability.
3. Do not expect easy resolution.

An Overview of Affairs

Understanding the personal and societal factors that create the climate for adultery.

Jude 7

by Peggy Vaughan

An expert on extramarital affairs, Peggy Vaughan has identified the primary components of these relationships. When she refers to “the monogamy myth,” her intent is not to question the legitimacy of monogamy. Rather, she is referring to a set of beliefs about monogamy that make it difficult for people to sustain their intention to be monogamous.

Why Affairs Happen

The reasons for affairs are a combination of three different kinds of factors:

- Factors that *push* people into affairs (problems/faults/shortcomings of individuals or relationship).
- Factors that *pull* people into affairs. These include excitement, curiosity, enhanced self-image, “falling in love.”
- Societal factors that contribute to affairs. These include fascination with affairs, using sex to sell, deception learned as teens due to inability to talk honestly about sexual issues, and the secrecy surrounding this issue that serves to protect those having affairs from dealing with the consequences of their actions.

How to Prevent Affairs

- What will *not* work: Assuming it can’t happen to you, being “in love,” promising to be faithful, threats or ultimatums, having more children, repeating the marriage vows, spicing up your sex life, trying to be “perfect,” and trying to meet all your partner’s needs.
- What is more likely to work: Being aware that no one is immune from having an affair, making a commitment to honesty (rather than just a promise of monogamy), and engaging in ongoing honest communication about everything that impacts your relationship, including attractions to others.

Ways to Rebuild the Marriage After an Affair

- Answer all questions and persevere through the inevitable emotional turmoil.
- Sever contact with the third party and build trust through actions, not promises.
- Make a commitment to honesty and to ongoing honest communication.
- Accept the fact that monogamy is an issue that’s never settled once and for all.

Recovering from the Emotional Impact

- Accept the fact that it happened (no more “if only” or “why me?”).

- Deliberately focus on dealing with it and talking openly about what happened.
- Allow time to heal—and, most of all, believe it's possible to recover.
- Understand that this is not just personal failure, but that societal factors play a part as well. Seeing affairs *only* as a personal failure of a marriage partner inevitably leads to personal blame, personal shame, wounded pride, and almost universal feelings of devastation. Self-help strategies alone seldom bring full recovery from this experience, either as a couple or individually. Recovery depends on getting beyond a strictly personal view of affairs and gaining an understanding of them within a broader framework.

The “Monogamy Myth”

- Monogamy is the norm in our society and society as a whole supports monogamy.
- You can assume monogamy when you get married, so there's no need to discuss it.
- Most people are monogamous, so an affair indicates a personal failure of your particular marriage.

Challenging Society's Monogamy Myth

- Monogamy is not the norm. Society gives lip service to monogamy, but actually supports affairs.
- No marriage is immune from affairs. There needs to be ongoing honest communication.
- No couple can fully understand why an affair happens by looking **ONLY** at their own marriage.

Recognizing the Power of Honesty

- Definition: Honesty is more than just “not lying;” it's “not withholding relevant information.”
- Prevention: Despite whatever factors lead someone to be tempted to have an affair, whether or not they act on the temptation depends on their willingness to be dishonest and deceptive.
- Recovering: Ongoing honesty is essential to both personal recovery and to rebuilding the marriage.
- Society's role: While this is an intensely personal problem, it is also a societal problem. Any effort to help people deal with this issue on a personal basis requires that we also address the societal factors, especially replacing the general secrecy and hypocrisy about this issue with responsible honesty.

—Peggy Vaughan is author of [The Monogamy Myth: A Personal Handbook for Recovering from Affairs](#). She is the founder of the international [Beyond Affairs Network \(BAN\)](#) [www.beyondaffairs.com](#) and founder and editor of [www.dearpeggy.com](#), which provides resources for dealing with affairs.

From Peggy Vaughan's keynote speech, "The Monogamy Myth", at the Smart Marriages Annual Conference. For information on the conference or to order recordings of presentations by Vaughan and other infidelity experts, visit [www.smartmarriages.com](#). Used by permission.

Why Affairs Happen

What you need to know about prevention and recovery.

2 Peter 2:14

by Cindy Crosby

As many as 65 percent of men and 55 percent of women will have an extramarital affair by the time they are 40, according to the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*. A CHRISTIANITY TODAY survey found that 23 percent of the 300 pastors who responded admitted to sexually inappropriate behavior with someone other than their wives while in the ministry.

In Dave Carder's and Duncan Jaenicke's book, *Torn Asunder: Recovering from Extramarital Affairs* (Moody), Carder notes that adultery and divorce rates in the evangelical population are nearly the same as the general population in the United States. Being a Christian does not lessen our chances of having an affair. Through his counseling experiences, however, Carder has found several "shared threads" woven throughout the experiences of married couples who become tangled in an affair. These patterns can serve as warning signals that married couples should be alert to.

In an interview with MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP magazine, Carder discusses how to help people who are contemplating affairs, have experienced an affair, or expect an affair to impact their marriages.

What types of affairs do Christians tend to fall into?

All types. There's the "Class One" affair, which is the one-night stand. Then, there is the "Class Two" affair, which is a love relationship that starts as a friendship and grows primarily because of a deficit in the marriage. These often have a powerful emotional connection and involve a shared task or orientation, such as a common ministry or a shared passion. And there is the "Class Three" affair, which involves sexual addiction. Other addictions often go along with it, and many times there is a history of molestation or sexual activity on the part of the person before puberty.

What about the classic "mid-life crisis" people joke about?

We're finding that these types of affairs are happening when men and women are in their late 30s and 40s. There's a pattern to them. Usually they happen in a marriage where there is little spousal interaction. Maybe the couple does everything as a family. When the children in the family grow older, the spouses become vulnerable.

Tell us more about emotional affairs. If there's no sex, just the emotional attachment, is it as serious as a sexual affair?

An emotional affair without sex occurs when two parties share their feelings for each other. These affairs are supercharged with emotion. The sound of her voice, the style of his e-mail—they are all loaded. But if you confront them, they'll insist they've done nothing wrong. These secret emotional affairs are powerful influences in the individuals' lives. They often live in a fantasy world, where they imagine what the other party is doing, even while appearing to watch sports on TV or doing some other task.

These individuals rob their marriages of emotional energy. They will save topics of conversation to talk over with the people they are having the emotional affair with,

rather than their spouses. They also struggle with feelings of betrayal when they have sex with their spouse. But a lot of these emotional affairs remain non-sexual. They are the hardest affairs to recover from, because there is no guilt.

Should you always tell your spouse if you've had an affair?

Almost always. Remember, marriage is a contract and you broke it. The other party has a right to know. The only exception to this is if there is a history of violence on the part of the spouse: if she has a gun or if he has been abusive when he drinks. In this case, you will need a professional to help you know what to disclose.

The same goes for emotional affairs?

I still think you need to tell. Anything that is a secret for you can be enjoyed in private, and this is what we are trying to do away with. And it is very important that there is absolutely no contact between the two people who have had the emotional affair. It is very difficult to break them off.

What kind of things should married couples be aware of that can lead to an affair?

The fastest growing rate of infidelity is among young married women. Many of them have been molested or are the adult children of divorce. They are looking for marriage to make up a deficit that comes from their childhood. "Intimacy deficits" stem from your family of origin. They may be from a lack of touching or hugging, from a need for a lot of admiration, affirmation, and adoration, or from another vacuum that a spouse wants satisfied. Everybody has deficits.

How does a cheating spouse handle his or her emotions?

He or she is usually overwhelmed with guilt. They are sure that revealing the affair to their spouse will absolutely kill him or her. And they don't want to ruin the image of family they've built.

How can you tell if someone is tempting you to cheat?

If someone tells you things that you know are much better than they really are about yourself, then run. If someone admires you at a level beyond what you know to be true, it can get dangerous. And remember: there are beautiful, bright, charming, or caring women out in the workforce in big numbers who are better at seducing your husband than your husband is at being able to resist.

What are some other risky situations?

If a couple doesn't share a ministry, one spouse may get into a ministry with another individual and boom! They are in trouble. Or perhaps one spouse has a hobby that they share with someone of the opposite sex. Think about this: What don't I have in my marriage that I have the urgent need to share with someone?

You wrote that the tendency toward extramarital affairs runs in families. Why is this so?

We don't know why. Part of the homework I give a couple in counseling for infidelity is to explore what their parents did. Go back and ask them. Not to embarrass them. Ask them how they handled infidelity, if it happened in their marriage. Why did they stay together? What advice do they have? It's amazing how many of the couples I counsel talk to their family members and are shocked at what they find out.

So, is it inevitable, if you have a family where infidelity has occurred, that you will cheat on your partner?

No. But I believe it is inevitable that you will be tempted to have an affair.

How difficult is it to trust your spouse after an affair?

Trust is the big question. You have to forgive your spouse before you can trust him or her again. The repentant spouse must be careful to keep his or her word. No matter how small or unimportant a promise may seem, he or she can't afford to make promises that won't be kept anymore.

What about sex?

First you have to rebuild non-sexual touch. If you don't have good touch, you don't have anything special. It's also important to have the cheating spouse cleared by a physician before you have sex again. There should be no unprotected sex between you until he or she is checked for sexually transmitted diseases.

If there wasn't much sex in the marriage before, it will be difficult to initiate sexual activity after the affair. But in many cases, there is often a lot of sex between the spouses after an affair. Women will think, "I'll show my husband that I'm better than this other woman."

A husband might wonder, "Am I as good as the person whom she was with?" Then, the wronged spouse becomes disgusted again, and anger and withdrawal follow. Communication is key here. This is a topic you will have to talk about.

How does anger factor into all this?

It's different for everyone. If the wife has an affair, the guy's rage is often never resolved. It just doesn't take much to bring the affair back to his mind. Women seem to be able to let go of their anger more easily.

Anger can play a positive role. I encourage the wives I counsel who have been cheated on to try to find and enlarge pictures of the husband and the other woman, lay the pictures on a bed, then beat the snot out of them. I tell her not to stop beating until she is sobbing and exhausted. If she doesn't get angry about the affair, the anger will eventually leak out all over the relationship in a variety of ways.

Um, that sounds a bit extreme ...

When Jesus was in the garden before the crucifixion, he was bloody, teary, messy, and sweaty. He was working through emotional upheaval. Betrayal and abandonment are two of the most painful emotions known to man.

What do you tell the kids?

Children are your first priority here. Make sure you don't injure them for life. Both of you need to sit down together with the child or the children, and both of you need to take responsibility for whatever you have contributed to the experience—not to the affair, necessarily, but for the tension that exists in the family environment.

Does age impact this?

If your children are under eight years old, they've already made up their own story. They are egocentric and will think they have caused the tension. If your children are teenagers, the kids probably already suspect the affair. Tell them the whole story: Dad had a girlfriend; Mom got involved with someone at work. Sharing the truth allows them to process the issue with Mom and Dad instead of guessing and keeps them from expending emotional energy checking on how well Mom and Dad are doing.

That's a lot of honesty.

The issues for your kids are, "Will Mom and Dad make it? Will we stay together as a family?" Do not lie. If you are not sure your marriage can be saved, tell them to pray; tell them you are seeing a counselor. Then, give lots and lots of touching and hugging and stroking and eye contact to your child. They need that reassurance.

Whom else should we tell?

Each person going through recovery from an affair needs a same-sex friend. The key here is that the person is available 24/7. You need to be able to talk with them anytime. Don't tough it out on your own. If you do, you'll prolong the recovery process, and spend a lot more money on your therapist. Save the money for a vacation.

After an affair, how long can it take for a couple to put their marriage back together?

Think about adolescence, when you put your identity together. It took a long time—maybe six or seven years. This is the same kind of process of shaping your identities, to redo and reform them. Two years is a good point of reference to use. And I don't mean that you will be in crisis for the whole time; the emotions will still be near the surface. Healing takes time, whether you are wounded physically or emotionally.

At what point do you give up on your marriage?

I tell couples to do three things before they throw in the towel, or else they will take all the anger and betrayal they feel into the next marriage. And another man or woman will not take care of the problems. First, know how and why the affair happened. Life is cyclical. If you had an affair, you will probably go through the same pattern in your next

marriage. Second, you have to forgive—for yourself—whether you want to or not. Third, you have to rebuild the trust you had. Even if you divorce, you will still have financial ties, ties with your children, grandchildren, events you will attend together such as weddings and graduations and birthdays, and you have to be able to trust each other. The goal in therapy is to have these three components.

If 20 percent of your marital history before the affair was not what I would rank a “4” or a “5” mutually—with “5” being the highest satisfaction and happiness—you will need a miracle to keep your marriage together. Not every marriage is salvageable after an affair.

If a couple decides to find a therapist or counselor to help, what should they look for?

Look for someone who will give you structure and hold you on course. A counselor should give you follow-up work to complete, things to work on every day. You need to find a counselor who will help you work on the marriage, not just the affair. Pastors are actually quite good at providing structure and helping couples work through this.

—Cindy Crosby is the author of Waiting for Morning: Hearing God’s Voice in the Darkness to be published by Baker Book House.

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Treatment for Infidelity Fallout

Forgiveness is an important first step to reconciliation—but not the only step.

Psalm 51:12

by Louis McBurney

A young couple came to my office working through a serious marital crisis: infidelity. A few months earlier she had discovered his involvement with another woman. She confronted him, and he confessed. They wanted to quickly move away from the pain, so he asked her forgiveness and pledged to never see the other woman again.

Her “I forgive you” was said, and life moved on. But after several months, for reasons they didn’t understand, they remained confused and angry with each other. She reiterated her forgiveness, and he kept telling her everything was in the past. Somehow that wasn’t enough to bring healing.

They had completed only one part of the very difficult process of reconciliation. There is more to rebuilding a relationship than just forgiving. In counseling couples facing this struggle, I find several specific steps helpful.

Exploring the Painful Alternatives

Many of the couples I see have never considered their options. They’ve made up their minds either to bail out or grit it out—without pausing to recognize their freedom to choose. I find it’s healthy to stop and talk together about the choices.

One choice, of course, is to murmur “I’m sorry ... I forgive you” and slide right back into familiar patterns of relating—the patterns that led to the breakdown in the first place.

A second option is divorce. I know many Christians say divorce is not an option. I, too, am firmly committed to the permanence of marriage and always work toward following the biblical position. In counseling troubled couples, however, I’ve found that a hard-line, frontal assault with Scripture verses flying often only increases defensiveness and resistance, which makes couples feel trapped and less willing to work on necessary changes.

I’ve had better results openly dissecting the messy details of divorce, first examining the world’s view of divorce as quick relief and then holding up for inspection the long-term negative aspects. Considering all the options—divorce included—exposes as a myth the unspoken notion of divorce as the easy solution. I make it clear that after the initial relief, most people face a period of grief for a year or more. It can be very severe, depending on the circumstances. Other factors include a loss of self-esteem, the financial devastation of divorce, the dissolution of the nuclear family, and increased behavioral problems of the children,

Even after the pain of infidelity, couples considering divorce, I’ve discovered, need to stare the potential cost in the face. I implant visions of hard realities beyond the immediate relief from tension.

Probing the Commitment to Reconcile

Realizing that divorce is a costly alternative can be a practical motivation to choose recommitment to the marriage. Join that to the unmistakable Christian position upholding the permanence of marriage, and there is little question of the preference for reconciliation.

The decision to work toward oneness can be communicated in countless ways, and knowing the best way to say it to one's spouse improves the chances of success.

Often the guilty partner would prefer the whole sticky situation just disappear. I've heard some men say, "It's not such a big deal." It is a big deal, however, and the betrayed partner critically needs to sense understanding. By listening to the hurt and showing he understands why it's there, the guilty spouse can help the healing happen.

I try to help each person experience the other's pain. I may ask the husband, "How did it feel to you when you were ignored (or criticized, or deceived) at some time in your life?" As he recalls that feeling, it is easier for him to respond in a nondefensive way to his wife's similar hurt. I may interpret for a wife how I believe her husband feels—trapped or suffocated or mistrusted—emotions he may be unable or unwilling to communicate.

Repairing Broken Trust and Esteem

Rebuilding trust requires effort by both husband and wife. The offending mate must make special efforts to reaffirm faithfulness. This means telling one's spouse about activities and companions. It means restricting special expressions of affection. It means finding time to be alone together. It means being truthful and keeping commitments.

For the betrayed spouse, rebuilding trust includes accepting what the other says without expressing doubt through accusations. When doubts arise, first-person feeling statements—"I'm still having a hard time with my doubts and fears; I want to trust you, but my anxiety sometimes pushes me into mistrust"—work better than indictments like "Where have you been? You don't care if I'm alone and worried! You've been talking to her (or him) again, haven't you?"

The second major victim of infidelity is the self-esteem of the injured spouse, which must be taken into account in reconciliation. The fact that the unfaithful mate chose to stay has little effect on the level of insult felt. The overriding questions are: *What's wrong with me as a woman (or man) that I couldn't hold my mate? Am I inadequate as a person? Have I lost my attractiveness?*

Sadly, many extramarital affairs take place during the midlife transition, a time of reassessment. Both men and women evidence a growing concern about aging and physical appearance. The sad truth is that the lover is often a younger and more sexually attractive female or a more successful, powerful male. Both scenarios reinforce the inner doubts about self-worth in the betrayed spouse.

Shame and embarrassment damage the self-image of both parties. Practically every betrayed spouse reports a heavy sense of embarrassment. They begin to imagine what

others are saying about them and find it difficult to go out socially. They feel they are being blamed for their mate's unfaithfulness and, in fact, they may blame themselves.

Clearing the Way for Forgiveness

Anger walks hand in hand with guilt. In the wake of an affair, the marriage may seem so insecure that both partners avoid expressing anger for fear of driving the mate away completely. The anger remains, however, and needs to be expressed. Anger, in itself, is no sin; it can be handled without destroying anyone. I try to prepare couples for positive uses of anger and reassure them that it can be worked through.

God provides an effective way of dealing with even the severest kinds of emotional injury: recognizing the damage and anger, communicating it directly to the offending person, and choosing to forgive. Forgiveness is not a one-time, magical act that removes all memory and pain; it's a repetitive choice. The outcome is a freeing of brain energy and neural pathways that allows for positive thoughts and reconciling behavior.

When I explain this aspect of forgiveness, many couples find it fits their personal experience and helps them see forgiveness as a volitional act rather than a feeling. It also helps them remain hopeful when the old memory comes to mind. They begin to see forgiveness as a process rather than an instant cure.

Controlling Curiosity

The next step proves difficult for the injured spouse. It necessitates overcoming a strong natural drive—the universal curiosity about what happened. All the when, where, and hows become compelling questions, but I've discovered that hearing the answers only intensifies the feelings of rejection.

Learning the specific details creates distressing visual images of the mate with the lover, and this may destroy positive associations of the marriage. Questioning also tends to alienate the guilty spouse. One man told me of his difficulty keeping quiet when his wife focused so on the other woman. She'd ask, "Well, did your girlfriend do that better than me?"

He knew he had done wrong, and he understood his wife's angry feelings, but he did not want to badmouth the other woman. Hearing her attacked not only made him angry and defensive but lowered his respect for his wife. It also retained the girlfriend on center stage. That sort of reaction can be avoided if the injured spouse confines curiosity to sessions with a counselor.

Focusing on the Positive

How can a couple accentuate the positive in a marriage disrupted by infidelity? One way is to arouse the many positive shared experiences. Help couples remember the initial attraction they felt for each other. Have them talk about the special events they enjoyed together or recall the struggles they have come through together.

The positive can also be accentuated by keeping a sense of humor. The key is to laugh at one's self instead of the other person. The fine line between humor and hostility blurs

easily. When ridiculing a mate begins, the fun is over! To dispel some of the heavy gloom in counseling, I will gently share some foolish behavior of mine in a situation similar to the couple's. Usually such behavior touches a responsive chord, and those I'm counseling begin to see the humor in their own patterns.

I want a couple to move into the future together with optimism, to rebuild dreams and be excited that the level of oneness can be deeper than ever before. This calls for faith that even from this painful, sinful event, God's Spirit can bring good. And I have seen that happen repeatedly. People need to believe the intense feelings of hurt and loss will be replaced by joy and peace, and even by being "in love" again.

Exposing the "Me First" Fallacy

Researchers Dave and Vera Mace have found that couples intent on fulfilling one another's needs are the happiest. Conversely, when unmet needs and disappointments become the focus, the marital squabbles unleash criticism and withdrawal. The unmet needs loom as giants blocking the path to happiness.

Couples do need to communicate areas of disappointment—diplomatically—but they can't remain locked in a critical mode. Rather, each partner must determinedly focus on pleasing his or her spouse, looking for ways to more effectively meet the other person's needs.

The sin of adultery is forgivable. And while no magic will make the past disappear, pastoral help can make it dissipate. Relationships can be restored—sometimes to heights never before realized or even thought possible.

It's not easy, but neither is marriage under any circumstance.

—Louis McBurney, with his wife Melissa, is co-founder of Marble Retreat, a Christian counseling center.

Healing the Wounds

Five steps to repairing the damage caused by infidelity.

Colossians 3:13

by Louis and Melissa McBurney

In the ideal scenario, confessing to an affair results in repentance, forgiveness, and a resolve not to repeat the sin. But the forgiveness can be slow to appear, and the fears of reoccurrence very strong. Here are five keys to heal the wounds caused by infidelity.

Genuine Remorse

As we hear from adulterers in counseling, we find that many try to minimize the significance of betraying their vows. Our secular culture reinforces the notion that just a “one-night stand” isn’t such a big deal. But that thinking is a dangerous deception. All adultery creates hurt and a huge barrier to ever trusting again. Not only was your marriage jeopardized, but any kind of casual attitude about the sinful choice also jeopardizes relationships with your family and God. While there can be repentance, grace, and forgiveness, they have a price.

Genuine Confession

Make no attempt to justify or minimize the sin. That helps rebuild the relationship and makes you aware of your vulnerability. You have a will and the power to make your choices. As a Christian, you also have the Holy Spirit to help you avoid giving in to the temptation. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says: “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

Develop Self-understanding

You said you don’t know why you had an affair. But if you honestly seek the truth and explore the underlying causes of your adulterous relationship, you’ll find answers. Often they lie in self doubts about being attractive or desired. At other times it may be a need for excitement and risk taking. There may be an impulsivity left over from adolescence. While there are many reasons that can contribute to adulterous behavior, they’re explanations, not excuses.

Spiritual Forgiveness Before God

We can understand Psalm 51 in which King David expressed his broken heart to God about his adultery with Bathsheba. He realized his sin was ultimately an affront to God: “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (verse 4). Realizing the destructive spiritual consequences of adultery is essential to total restoration. David went on to plead, “Create in me a pure heart, O God” (verse 10). And he does! Every time.

Set Firm Behavioral Boundaries

Don’t allow yourself to go into relationships and situations where you might be in danger. I (Louis) know when a woman is coming on to me in a seductive way—most men do! And I know I’m titillated by the flirtatious attention. I also know that’s a temptation I

don't need. I can flirt with that woman and expose myself to the excitement of her sensuality (and the risk of indulging in inappropriate touch or talk), or I can make sure I steer clear of her. Choose to set boundaries that will keep you from falling.

*—Louis and Melissa McBurney are therapists and co-founders of
Marble Retreat, a Christian counseling center.*

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Four Hurdles to Restoration

Help wounded couples rebuild based on trust, honesty, and realistic thinking.

Numbers 30:2

by Bruce McNicol and Bill Thrall

It's been three months since Jim confessed to Kim his adulterous behavior with two different women, including her friend Bonnie. Jim has said he's sorry and asked Kim to forgive him. He has tearfully promised he will never do it again. The two have agreed to stay together and to negotiate the problems.

If you and your spouse are trying to rebuild your relationship after an affair, you will most likely face four major hurdles. By conquering these hurdles, hurting spouses can overcome the damage of infidelity, learn to trust God in a much deeper way, and enjoy a more fulfilling marriage.

Hurdle #1: Wrong thinking

Many people mistakenly think that adultery is simply a wrong action, but it is also a violation of God's divine order for marriage. A person who has had an affair must seek his spouse's forgiveness, not just for the act, but also for violating the marriage covenant. An intact marriage covenant creates an atmosphere of security and trust, which is what Kim needs in order to give herself freely to Jim.

Hurdle #2: A multi-faceted struggle

A wounded spouse will struggle with multiple issues. On one hand, her own sexual identity has become confused. Because of Jim's act of immorality Kim finds herself asking, *What is wrong with me that he would want someone else?* There is also the issue of shame emerging in her spirit: shame that he would want any other woman, and especially that it was her friend Bonnie. Another facet of Kim's struggle is her confusion over her lack of peace. Although she has forgiven Jim's acts, she needs to process and eventually forgive him for the ways she has been affected by his violation of their marriage vows.

Hurdle #3: Getting to the real problem

On the surface, it may appear that one's behavior is the problem, and that a promise to change is the solution. However, the real problem is that Jim granted himself permission to break his marriage vows. To address only his behavior and overlook this issue of permission will leave both Kim and Jim in limbo. Without getting to the real problem, both spouses are destined to continue feeling as though something is wrong, but neither will understand what.

Hurdle #4: Inability to trust or be trusted

Once a marital covenant has been breached, trust will be difficult—but necessary—to restore. To set the stage for restored trust, Jim must be able to humbly admit that he is unable to manage his sin or keep his promises, and that he is deeply addicted to the pleasure of sin. At that point, he will be in a position to receive God's freeing grace and empowerment to choose differently. Jim will also be putting himself in a position where

Kim can begin to trust him again. As renewed trust grows between them, the couple will be able to enjoy rich intimacy, true fulfillment and sustaining joy.

—Bruce McNicol and Bill Thrall direct Leadership Catalyst, Inc. and are co-authors of the book TrueFaced (NavPress).

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Don't Let It Happen Again

These safeguarding measures can help prevent another affair from taking place.

James 1:14–15

by Jill Savage

The young mom chatted with me after a Hearts at Home conference. “Have you ever thought about having a conference for stay-at-home dads?” she asked. “There’s a stay-at-home dad in our neighborhood who’s become my best friend. We take the kids to the park, shop, and even do our once-a-month cooking together. He’s a great guy!”

Sirens, whistles, and red flags went off in my head. I wanted to scream, “No! Don’t be naïve. Remove the blinders! Put boundaries in place and build a hedge of protection around your marriage!” It was obvious she had no idea about the danger of this seemingly harmless situation.

My husband, Mark, and I spend countless hours mentoring hurting marriages. We counsel others based on our own “back from the brink” experience many years ago when our marriage seemed hopeless. Many of these couples are dealing with damage caused by infidelity. The story is always the same: the unfaithful spouse develops a relationship that started as an innocent friendship. It was someone to talk to who listened and cared.

We know that story all too well. Even though no lines of unfaithfulness were crossed in our marriage, at the most difficult time of our relationship, I experienced attraction for a man I worked with. Luckily I realized the dangerous place I was in and got honest with Mark. We recognized the need for establishing boundaries in our personal lives that exist specifically to keep temptation at bay.

The Bible tells us that “each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:14–15). Temptation, enticement, desire, sin, death those are the steps infidelity takes. Because of that, we have to put boundaries in place that keep us from stepping into situations where temptation can take place.

As we talk to hurting couples about advance decisions needed to protect our marriages, we use as an example the line of trees along the west side of our house. The previous owners had wisely planted the trees to provide a hedge of protection against the winds that rage across the cornfields. When the hedge of trees was planted on our property, each tree was planted individually. As the trees grew in size and strength they worked together to protect our home from the unpredictable weather and wind.

In the same way, we need to plant a hedge of protection around our marriage, that is, we need to make advance decisions that will keep temptation at bay and the marriage a priority. Each hedge that we plant around our marriage will do the same. Each time we make one advance decision to protect our marriage we are on our way to building a marriage that is marked by faithfulness and on its way to lasting a lifetime.

Hedge 1: Choose wisely. Avoid unnecessarily spending time with someone of the opposite sex. For instance, if you’re looking for a personal trainer at the local gym, choose someone of the same sex.

Hedge 2: Share carefully. If you find yourself sharing things about yourself or your marriage that you haven't or wouldn't share with your spouse, that's a red flag. Not all affairs are physical—an emotional affair is just as damaging.

Hedge 3: Stay in large, public settings. Determine not to meet one-on-one with anyone of the opposite sex. If your coworker asks if he or she can join you for lunch, ask a third person to join you as well. If necessary, don't hesitate to share the boundary you and your spouse have agreed upon in your marriage. You just might lead by example.

Hedge 4: Don't be naïve. Most people who end up in affairs don't set out to have one. Infidelity usually begins with an innocent relationship that, in time, moves to an emotional depth that crosses a line of fidelity.

Hedge 5: Increase your investment at home. Solid marriages are built by spending time together, laughing together, and playing together. If you aren't dating your mate, set up dates for the coming months and make spending time together a priority.

Hedge 6: Pay attention to your thought life. When all you think about is your spouse's faults, any other man or woman will look better. Make a list of the strengths that initially attracted you to your spouse. Increase encouragement and decrease criticism.

Hedge 7: Don't play the comparison game. We all make mistakes, have bad habits and annoying behaviors. When we compare a "new friend" to our spouse, it's an unfair comparison because we aren't seeing that person in a "living under the same roof, taking care of kids at 3 A.M., struggling to make ends meet" reality.

Hedge 8: Seek help. Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. A Christian counselor can provide valuable perspective and help set new strategies for a marriage that can go the distance.

—Jill Savage is the founder of Hearts at Home, www.jillsavage.org

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The Real and Untold Cost

Help wandering people prevent a reoccurrence of affairs with this “debit sheet.”

Proverbs 6:32

by Randy Alcorn

Whenever someone feels particularly vulnerable to sexual temptation, it is helpful to review what effects the action could have. Ask the person you’re helping to insert the names of wives, family, and friends onto this list.

- Grieving the Lord who redeemed me.
- Dragging his sacred name into the mud.
- One day having to look Jesus, the Righteous Judge, in the face and give an account of my actions.
- Following in the footsteps of these people whose immorality forfeited their leadership and caused me to shudder: (list names)
- Inflicting untold hurt on my loyal wife.
- Losing my wife’s respect and trust.
- Hurting my children: (list names)
- Destroying my example and credibility with my children, and nullifying both present and future efforts to teach them to obey God (“Why listen to a man who betrayed Mom and us?”).
- If my blindness should continue or my wife be unable to forgive, perhaps losing my wife and my children forever.
- Causing shame to my family.
- Losing self-respect.
- Creating a form of guilt awfully hard to shake. Even though God would forgive me, would I forgive myself?
- Forming memories and flashbacks that could plague future intimacy with my wife.
- Wasting years of training and experience for a long time, maybe permanently.
- Forfeiting the effect of years of witnessing to people and reinforcing any distrust of Christians they may have.
- Undermining the faithful example and hard work of other Christians in our community.
- Bringing great pleasure to Satan, the enemy of God and all that is good.
- Heaping judgment and endless difficulty on the person with whom I committed adultery.

- Possibly bearing the physical consequences of such diseases as gonorrhea, syphilis, chlamydia, herpes, and AIDS; perhaps infecting my wife or, in the case of AIDS, even causing her death.
- Possibly causing pregnancy, with the personal and financial implications, including a lifelong reminder of my sin.
- Bringing shame and hurt to these fellow leaders: (list names)
- Causing shame and hurt to these friends, especially those I've led to Christ and discipled: (list names)
- Invoking shame and lifelong embarrassment upon myself.

—Randy Alcorn is the founder and director of Eternal Perspectives Ministries and is the author of books including The Purity Principle (Lifeway Press).

The Myth of No-Consequence Sex

Sex is given by God to strengthen absolute commitment to our spouse.

Exodus 20:14

by Derek Helt

Biblical teaching is at odds with cultural assumptions about sex, and many Christians struggle in their marriages because of misunderstandings of sexuality. Here is an example of one pastor's "sex sermon" that takes on cultural lies, God's truth, and the implications of both for Christian marriage.

I. Introduction

1. *Speaking about sex provides ways to be misunderstood or to misspeak.* A third-grader once defined adultery as, "when a kid lies about his age."
2. *Christians are often conflicted about discussing sex.* A preacher tells of Abraham and Sarah being told they would have a baby, and asks the church: "What do you suppose Abraham and Sarah went home and did after the angel finished with this message?" Then he paused for effect and asked, "What do you suppose Abraham and Sarah went home and did after the angel finished with this message?" The preacher said he was initially shocked by a period of absolute silence. Then the chuckling started, and quickly turned into gales of laughter. The only thing left for him to do was say the closing prayer. That's the kind of potential pitfall one can get into. It is very easy to say something completely innocent and have it taken the wrong way.
3. *Scripture is frank on the topic of sex.* God has given us the gift of sex to be the fullest expression of union between a husband and wife. Sex, kept in the proper context, solidifies the marriage bond like nothing else.

II. We need to understand cultural myths about sex—and then God's truths.

1. *The first myth is that sex is merely a physical act.* To assert that sex is merely a physical act is to reduce people to being mere animals. The simple fact is that so much of what we see, hear, and experience in our everyday lives is sending us the message—on one level or another—that sex is merely something physical, that it is no more meaningful than satisfying a hunger for food, scratching an itch, or fulfilling a desire to get in out of the rain. Nothing could be further from truth. To assert that sex is merely a physical act between two people is to reduce people to being mere animals.
2. *Sex joins two people in a unique way.* Sex in a marriage relationship solidifies two people into "one flesh," bonding them emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically. It sets the relationship between husband and wife. That's the purpose of the sexual component of the relationship.
3. *Sex has very real consequences.* We readily warn people about the physical consequences of sex: pregnancy, disease, and so on. But we're always trying to convince ourselves that there are no spiritual, emotional, or psychological consequences. The shows we watch, the movies we see, the books we read, and the advertising we're constantly exposed to—it all depicts the illicit thrill of

supposed sex with no consequences. However, God reassures us that sex has very real consequences. It is more than a mere physical act.

4. *The second myth about sex is that our passions must be fulfilled at any cost.* When people seek to justify immorality, they cite their passion as the reason: “We got caught up in the heat of moment. We couldn’t help ourselves. Lust overcame us. We felt like we were really in love. My feelings were real; they couldn’t be denied.” The underlying presupposition is that the passions and urges were so strong that they absolutely could not be ignored, denied, or suppressed. However, this line of reasoning neglects the fact that there have been and are now plenty—millions!—of people who are living full, joy-filled lives without enjoying sexual relations of any kind with anyone. Sex is not necessary for our day-to-day survival, as much as some might like to think it is.
5. *Many passions and urges need to be suppressed when they are not appropriate.* Also, if we say that sexual urges and passions cannot be denied, do we say the same of other urges and passions? For example, I might get intensely angry with someone. Does this mean that I can give in to the urge to hit them and then say, “I was caught up in the moment? I couldn’t deny my feelings. They were real feelings. I was very angry at the time. So, it’s okay, right?” Many passions and urges need to be suppressed when they are not appropriate. Sexual passion is often one of them.
6. *The third cultural myth is that sex is dirty.* Sex is not dirty. It is abused, made light of, talked about in the wrong way by many people. It is used for the wrong reasons, flaunted as if it were as inconsequential as going to the store and buying groceries. However, just because it is abused by some, that does not make it dirty. What attaches a sense of guilt, a sense of dirtiness, to sex is its misuse, not its proper use. Sex within marriage is holy, pure, and God-given.

III. We need to understand God’s truth about sex.

1. *Sex is for marriage, period.* My wife and I know a woman who was divorced and met a man who was also divorced. They began to date, and eventually, before we knew them, they had a child together. He asked her to marry him, but, for some reason, she was reluctant to get married. Eventually the couple actually did move in together, though they still had not married. The boy’s mother said that she wanted to—was ready to—get married to his father. Then, not surprisingly, the boy’s father was in no rush to get married to his mother.

Now, the couple is not together at all. The little boy has a “new dad” that his mother has married. Things seem to be going well for them, but I wonder what the long-term effect of all the confusion and uncertainty of his early years will eventually have on him. You see, things were not done right, and now the most innocent party in the whole mess is the one paying the price.

2. *Sex outside its proper boundaries can be destructive.* Sex is somewhat like fire: it has great power. In the right place and right time, used right way, it is constructive, pleasurable, and wonderful. But outside of its proper boundaries, it can cut loose with an amazingly destructive force.
3. *Don't apologize for speaking God's wisdom on the subject.* Many people live together before marriage these days. That's wrong, because God says so, and God says so because it's like playing with fire. You're jumping the gun, and any number of things can go wrong. Marriage is more than just the ultimate friendship; it is a covenant relationship, a sacred trust. Sex is so intimate, so powerful, that it can only be entrusted to someone with whom you've entered into this sacred trust.

IV. Forgiveness is always possible.

1. *Sexual sin is dangerous.* Jesus' words in Matthew 5:29 and following, about gouging out your eye if it causes you to sin, or cutting off your hand if you sin with it—they are not meant to be taken literally. They are meant to be an expression of just how dangerous sexual sin is. Jesus is saying to us that sexual sin needs be avoided at all costs. However, it is nothing new that people fail miserably to take Jesus' warning seriously. Many people are overcome by the guilt of a past sexual sin. Some people even sabotage their own lives because of guilt, or they think that God will ruin their lives because of some specific sin in this area.
2. *God is a God of forgiveness.* The biblical word *grace* describes the wonderful actions of God that allow us to overcome our pasts, to have our sin nullified, to be right with him, even though we've done some very terrible things. Following the Ten Commandments does not save us, nor are we condemned by our failure to follow them. We're saved if we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and condemned when we reject him and seek do it all on own.

Conclusion


1. *God's commandments are wisdom for us, including the commandment not to misuse sex.* If we're married, we need to strive to remain faithful in thought and deed. If we're single, we need to work hard at remaining pure for our own good. If we've failed in this area in the past, we need to repent, to seek God's forgiveness, to see the wisdom of God for us and pledge to do better in future.


2. *God uses sex to strengthen our commitment to our spouse.* Any use of sex that does not do that is a misuse of sex. Former Senator Rick Santorum tells of a preacher who became a college president yet quit to care for his wife with Alzheimer's, because of his love and promise. His colleagues came to him and said, "What are you doing? Your wife doesn't even know who you are!" The man answered, "She might not know who I am, but I know who she is. She's the woman I made a promise to until death do us part."


—Derek Helt is the pastor of First Christian Church in Newport, Oregon.


Further Resources


Books and resources to equip you to respond to extramarital affairs.


-  **BuildingChurchLeaders.com.** Leadership training resources from Christianity Today.
 - “Giving Help to the Hurting” Assessment Pack
 - “Counseling Church Members” Practical Ministry Skills
 - “Spiritual Care” Training Theme and PowerPoint
 - “Shepherding Others” Training Theme and PowerPoint


-  **LeadershipJournal.net.** This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.


-  **Focus on the Family.** www.family.org. Includes resources on relationships and marriage.


-  **Marriage Savers** www.marriagesavers.org. Co-founded by Michael and Harriet McManus, this organization works through local congregations to strengthen marriage.


-  **SmartMarriages.com.** The website of the Coalition for Marriage, Family, and Couples Education, a non-denominational and non-sectarian marriage education organization.


-  **His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage** by Willard F. Harley Jr. Tools for couples to learn about what’s most important in marriage. (Revell, 2001; ISBN 0800717880)

-  **Hope for the Separated** by Gary Chapman. Based on the biblical standard that the best goal for a separated couple is reconciliation. (Moody, 2005; ISBN 0802436390)

-  **Marriage Savers** by Michael J. McManus. The co-founder of the Marriage Savers movement offers ways churches can help reduce the rate of divorce in their communities. (Zondervan, 1995; ISBN 0310386616)

-  **The Monogamy Myth: A Personal Handbook for Recovering from Affairs** by Peggy Vaughan. Aims to substitute realistic views about monogamy for realistic ones that strengthen marriage. (Newmarket Press, 2003; ISBN 1557045429)

-  **Surviving an Affair** by Willard F. Harley Jr. and Jennifer Harley Chalmers. A guide to understanding and surviving every aspect of infidelity. (Revell, 1998; ISBN 0800717589)

-  **Torn Asunder: Recovering from Extramarital Affairs** by Dave Carder and Duncan Jaenicke. Written to offer couples, hope, healing, and encouragement in the face of adultery. (Moody, 1995; ISBN 0802477488)