

Facing Marital Unfaithfulness

By Paul Hill, Executive Pastor along with Kurt Bruner, The Center for Strong Families

Facing marital struggles is common to anyone that has taken marriage vows. Men and women are different which is cause enough for challenges. However, when a marriage stands the test of infidelity, how do you survive? How does a marriage experience healing? Is it possible to heal? As you think through the following steps, pray over and evaluate your situation.

STEP ONE – Don't Ignore the Signs

Our enemy wants us to think that sin is not really that big of a deal. He would prefer that when we see things that concern us, we blow them off as commonplace, eliminating any cause for real concern. This gives way to a shroud of darkness to hide sin that grows over time. Marital unfaithfulness is not just adultery. It can start early with the small, "innocent" steps which lead to infidelity. Whether you are the one being tempted or your spouse is that person, caution is on your side and there is no such thing as being overly cautious. Don't accept the lie that little things are not important. Affairs begin in the heart and mind and not in the bedroom.

STEP TWO – Ask For Help Early!

When sin is exposed, one of our major pitfalls is isolation. Our pride tends to cause profound embarrassment and all we want to do is hide. We would prefer that no one knows. We believe lies that tell us we are the only one and no one can understand or relate. We allow ourselves to remain alone and helpless. The truth is that many people have faced the very thing you are facing. They have come out on the other side and are experiencing healing and restoration. God has allowed His kingdom to include people that are called by God to help people in your exact situation. They are gifted, skilled, trained and experienced. Don't let your embarrassment deprive you of God's blessing through the help of another.

STEP THREE – Anticipate Hope (from Barry Bandara)

Major problems arise in a marriage when someone abuses or abandons their biblical role. This could be the husband not showing love to his wife or the wife not showing respect to her husband. This sometimes accelerates to the point of someone breaking faith with their spouse and violating their wedding vows. (Malachi 2:16). While God hates divorce, He permits it for marital unfaithfulness (Matthew 19:8-9) or abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (I Corinthians 7:15). In God's grace, he allows men and women whose spouses have been unfaithful the freedom to start over.

Nevertheless, God is in the business of helping couples redeem what many would see as a hopeless situation. "Even marriages that have faced one or more of the big 'A's – abuse, affairs, or addictions – can be saved," says Mitch Temple, a licensed counselor from Focus on the Family ministry. There are numerous examples of couples who have come through the dark valley of these big 'A's and are now more in love than ever before! Is it hard work? YES! Is it possible when both spouses allow God to help them? YES!

STEP FOUR – Do The Unthinkable...Treat Your Spouse With Kindness

God's word tells us that His grace is sufficient for *anything* we might face (I Corinthians 12:9-10) and that that revenge is God's job. (Romans 12:19). These are not trite religious sayings from a being who has no idea what we are facing. They come from the Almighty God who built us and knows exactly how we feel. God's Word also tells us to "be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). Are these Biblical principles hard to live out? Yes! Are there extreme situations that trump what these passages say, giving us cause to act in a way that ignores God's Word? No! Perhaps the hardest thing for a wounded spouse to do is to treat their spouse with kindness and tenderness. God promises to stand along-side you as you honor him in your actions, but He still asks you to be willing to do these things, through the power of His Spirit.

STEP FIVE – Choose The Impossible...Forgive!

The very thought of forgiving unfaithfulness might cause you to feel sick. How does a person forgive such deep hurt? The answer is only found in the power of God's Spirit and in your willingness to submit to Him. Living according to God and His Word requires three things as it relates to forgiveness. 1. God asks us to forgive others indefinitely (Matthew 18:21-22). 2. God will not accept our Worship if we harbor unforgiveness (Matthew 5:23-24). 3. God will not forgive us our sins if we don't forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15). As hard as it may be to imagine forgiving one that has hurt you deeply, choosing to not forgive them will result in your inner decay as bitterness and anger eat away at you like poison. Through the power of God, you are able to forgive anything.

Take advantage of the Going Further resources for help from others who have been in your situation.

Going Further - Resources

Recommended Books:

- *Love Must Be Tough* by Dr. James Dobson
- *Torn Asunder – Recovering from Extramarital Affairs* by Dave Carder
- *Every Heart Restored* by Stephen Arterburn & Fred and Brenda Stoeker
- *Desperate Marriages* by Gary Chapman
- *Unfaithful: Rebuilding Trust After Infidelity* by Gary & Monica Shriver

Recommended Websites:

- www.nationalcoalition.org
- www.beyondaffairs.com
- www.marriagebuilders.com
- www.focusonthefamily.com

Other Resources:

- **Bellevue Community Services:** Sexual addiction counseling; (425) 454-0616
- **Alpha Counseling:** Dr. Richard Maxwell; (360) 779-3624; Christian Counseling