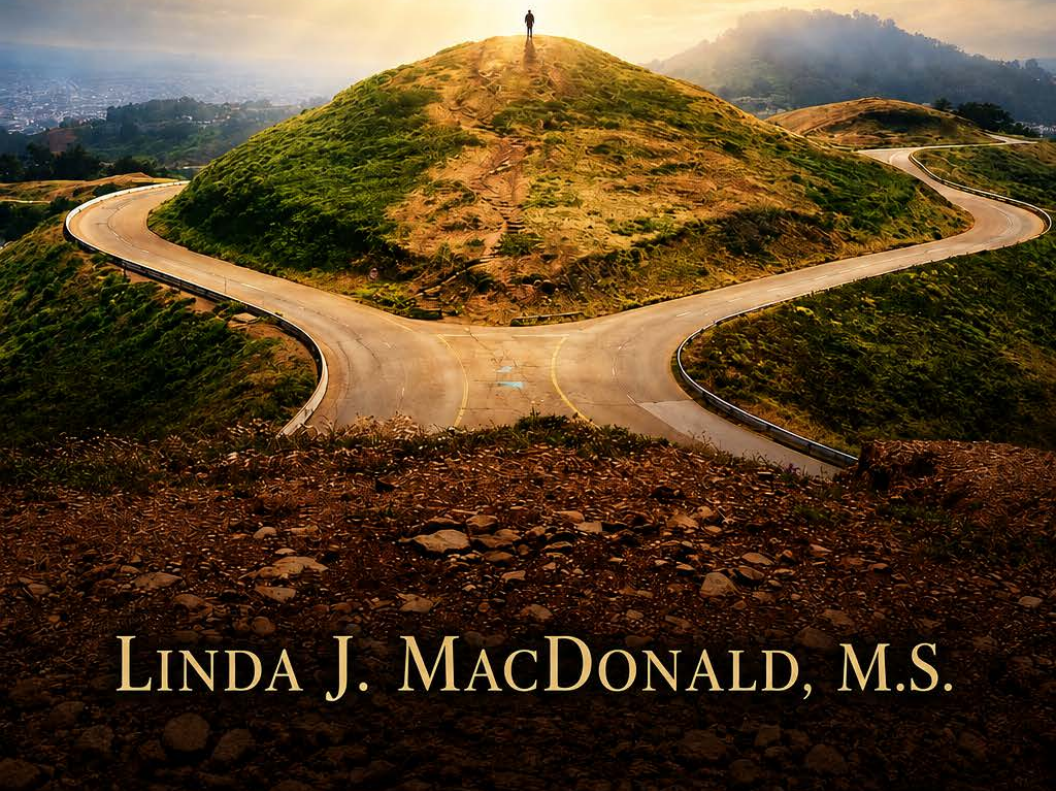


WHO WILL YOU BECOME?



*The Decision That Will Shape
the Rest of Your Life*

A Spiritual Wake-Up Call
for the Unfaithful



LINDA J. MACDONALD, M.S.

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Events described in this book are to the best of the author's recollection. In most cases, the names and details of the people and situations have been changed or presented in composite form in order to insure the privacy of the individuals involved.

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DEDICATION

To all the formerly unfaithful clients and friends I've known over the years who have accepted responsibility for their personal issues, done an about-face, and embarked on the bravest journey imaginable: choosing mature love over dazzling, temporary emotions. They made the effort despite not knowing whether their hard-fought changes would succeed in winning back their betrayed spouses or not. They have my utmost admiration.

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Preface

If you read my first book, *How to Help Your Spouse Heal from Your Affair: A Compact Manual for the Unfaithful*, you already know that I am passionate about saving marriages, whenever possible. Yet, along with my fervor, I despair whenever I watch an unfaithful person give up too soon. I guess I am one of those people who believes while there is breath, there is hope.

I understand why the work to salvage a very damaged relationship might seem daunting to folks who wander from their marriages to taste the honey that accompanies affairs. It is difficult to face the shame, the emotional ups and downs, and potential fear their efforts will still end up in a divorce.

But the passing sweetness of an outside romance comes at a price that few anticipate ahead of time: a certain stickiness that attracts a swarm of bees that sting you and your loved ones over and over again. The shattered trust, the sobbing fights, and the roller-coaster emotions one must tolerate to get to the other side of marital repair may seem too much to bear.

It's easier to cut and run. Or, so it seems.

The problem is, you can't escape the fallout, long term. Oh, you might put on heavier gear to insulate yourself—a cloak to protect your heart, a mask to shield your eyes, and ear muffs to drown out the cries of the injured. But the thickening of your self-protections will have a strange effect on the essence of who you are.

And that is what I am here to warn you about.

You see, as tempting as it is to jump the fence and keep on going, there

are worse things than taking a few years to face into the storm, make amends, and grow into a more principled, kinder, more healing person. Uncomfortable? Yes. Beneficial? Absolutely. The greener grass is an illusion and the rewards for preserving an intact family are legion.

You see, choosing to run away creates two *worse* problems:

1. It adds a painful exclamation point to your rejection of your spouse (and indirectly, your children) that will further damage their self-esteems. Long term.
2. And, the adaptations you'll need to make in order to justify your decision to abandon your marriage will change the very fabric of who you are. And these changes will complicate your life in ways you likely can't foresee right now.

After observing the heartbreak that tends to come from affairs, for everyone involved, I wanted to do whatever I could to convince straying spouses to reflect more deeply about the increasing damage they will heap upon themselves and others the farther they travel down their wayward paths.

I also wanted to instill hope in a betrayer that all is not lost. That, should they choose to reconsider their perilous direction, *repair is possible*—of their own psyche, character and self-respect—as well of the hearts of their injured spouses and families.

By writing in a frank manner (and I mean really frank as in *unpleasant*, *maddening*, and *painful*), I am hoping to sufficiently get the attention of persons who are caught up in affairs so they wake up and turn around before it is too late. I want to challenge them like a coach giving a tough pep-talk before a big game. I don't expect them to like it. In fact I figure they will want to throw this book across the room. But if they persist with my piercing truths, I am hoping they will turn around and thank me later on.

I believe that most persons who become tripped up in affairs are not inherently bad. They are just mixed up, carried away by their emotions, and fooled by the idealism that accompanies most extra-marital relationships. Such folks deserve the chance to understand why they were vulnerable to that amorist at the office, neighborhood or church in the first place. And they need guidance on why and how to change their dangerous direction—before it is too late, and the ruinous effects are permanent.

So if you are one of the many who've become embroiled in a romance with an outside lover, I urge you to read this book with an open mind. Much is at stake. Please know that despite my rough rhetoric, I am on your side. I want you to succeed! And that won't happen if I merely hold your hand and say, "There, there. Don't sweat it. Everything's going to be OK" when you are facing down the giants of character annihilation and familial destruction.

While this e-book may offer some degree of help for persons trapped in a cycle of compulsive sexual acting out (organizing one's life around viewing pornography, visiting prostitutes, serial one-night stands, etc.), if this is your situation, I highly recommend that you seek in-depth counseling and group therapy with the help of a Certified Sex Addictions Therapist (CSAT).¹

And, while "garden variety" affairs (if there is such a thing) have an addictive quality to them, this book is most useful to those who are emotionally, romantically, and/or physically involved with someone outside their marriages yet searching for solid reasons to disentangle themselves and reconsider their escapist direction.

My goals are to:

- Pull you out of denial.
- Reason with your mind and appeal to your conscience.
- Help you accept personal responsibility for the choices you've made so far.

·Motivate you to make informed decisions about the direction you want to go.

·Awaken healthy guilt without heaping you with condemnation.

·Instill *hope* that you can have a do-over in life despite your missteps so far.

I believe it is possible for you to do a successful about-face and find healing for yourself and your family, as outlined in my other, more positive book, *How to Help Your Spouse Heal from Your Affair: A Compact Manual for the Unfaithful*—a suitable book for the motivated and remorseful.

But for the undecided, confused, or deeply involved who see no way out, I wrote this book to shake them out of their affair-stupor enough for them to see a clear path forward in a healthier direction. My hope is to provide a life-line of sensibility in the midst of your mind-bending emotions. *Who Will You Become?* offers scientific facts, true stories and spiritual principles to reinforce what you likely knew was the right thing to do, before you were unexpectedly captured by an emotional or physical affair. You need foresight to peer ahead to where each path—continuing the affair or returning exclusively to your spouse— will lead.

For those of you who are curiously receptive but not ready yet to engage in a full court press to save your marriage, then I pray that the reality-based truths in this book will put a fire under you to *reconsider* the escape route you are currently on.

As I've often seen in my practice of helping couples recover from the trauma of infidelity, when the unfaithful person has a genuine change of heart and backs it up with action, the hurt spouse will often give the straying person a second chance to rekindle the marriage and an opportunity for a "do-over."

PLEASE do your best to reflect on the wisdom gained from my 33 years as an infidelity specialist. My goal is to challenge the myths of our culture, expose the hazards of where your wayward road is heading, and

to offer you a much better way to find the life, light, and love that you were searching for all along.

Some of the proverbs I quote in this book use male pronouns. Where “man” or “he” is used, in context, the reference often implies “mankind” or “human-beings.” I hope you will view these verses as general principles, true for any gender. The same holds true when I sometimes find it too awkward to write he/she in a sentence.

If you are one of the rare atheists who read this piece, I trust you are secure enough in your beliefs that you won’t be put off by my biblical references (only 5% of this e-book). They are time-tested adages of old that many people have embraced for centuries. Please don’t let that stop you from appreciating the wisdom behind them or the other moral principles contained in these pages.

For the rest of you, I hope you will find the periodic quotes from the Jewish and Christian scriptures inspiring, no matter your faith persuasion.

~Linda J. MacDonald

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I am indebted to the editing expertise of Sheri Carlson, who has coached adults and taught writing skills to teenagers her entire career.

Earl and Sandy Wilson have offered me much support over the years both in asking me to present workshops at their Betrayal Redeemed conferences and in using my materials.

Karen Crawford also deserves my appreciation. Karen has collaborated with me on projects and invited me to teach workshops for a ministry known as "Restoring Hearts," which has enabled me to reach more betrayed spouses than I would have had the privilege of meeting.

CHAPTER 1

The Dilemma

Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do.
~Proverbs 4:23

So, you are either thinking about, in the beginning stages of, or smack dab in the middle of an exciting affair. Or, perhaps you have taken a short break from your new lover and feel the irresistible urge to flee back into his or her arms.

You wonder, “What should I do? What will solve my complicated dilemma?”

I encourage you to engage your mind and not just your emotions in this critical, watershed moment of your life. You, your family, and your heirs deserve it. I encourage you to ask yourself, “What will be the ultimate result of my actions? What kind of person will I become, both emotionally and spiritually, if I continue on this forbidden romantic quest? What will be the long-range consequences of the choices I am making as a result of my actions?”

If the path you are embarking upon has the potential to destroy your

marriage, family, and sensible conscience, then it deserves scrutiny. Even though you are presently “thinking” with your emotions, I encourage you to take a careful look at what you are doing or about to do to yourself and others.

Most people who become involved with someone outside of their marriages are high on love and low on the ability to be rational. As the saying goes, “When the hormones go up, the IQ goes down.” Your ability to be objective is severely lacking due to your dizzying emotions and the unseen forces fueling your flight from reality. If you realized that much of your current elation is more due to hormones activated in the brain than due your good sense, would you reconsider?

Since your behaviors and choices in the moment will likely determine the quality of life you and your loved ones will experience for the rest of your lives, you would do well to examine these matters from the perspective of an outsider—a professional counselor who has specialized in the treatment of infidelity for over 33 years.

This book is my attempt to bring some time-tested reality to your predicament. The writing style I’ve chosen is challenging and conversational. It is intended to be provocative in order to give you pause and perhaps reconsider your current mindset. I am desperate to spare you from taking the wrong path at this “fork-in-the-road” moment before you stumble over the cliff of no return.

More is at stake than you can recognize right now. Your reputation. Your integrity. Your emotional and spiritual health. Your legacy. Your character. How you feel about yourself. The mental and emotional well-being of your spouse and children. Even the impact on society as a whole. All are on the precipice of a calamity that you still have a window of opportunity to prevent. Yes, there is something worse than cheating on your partner.

While sacrificing your marriage and family on the altars of fresh love and your own personal happiness seems like a tempting solution to your

current discontent, I am hoping to spare you a catastrophe beyond what you can imagine right now.

This book will take you about 90 minutes to read. Consider it a long session of a therapist's inexpensive advice that could save you and your loved ones many years of sorrow beyond what they have already knowingly or unknowingly suffered by your physical or emotional betrayal.

It's not too late.

When your spouse and children learn of your unfaithfulness, yes they will be hurt. But such transgressions are often repairable if you catch yourself soon enough, with a good dose of genuine contrition and remorse. And even if they are unable to accept your attempts at repair, if you make sincere and humble efforts to make amends, you will have reduced the damage by a boatload. It is the perception of total rejection by an unfaithful partner that leaves so many scars.

On the other hand, if you *follow up* your romantic temptation or betrayal by leaving your spouse and breaking up your family, you will inflict incalculable harm on your loved ones and your relationship with them. And, unbeknownst to you, abandoning your spouse for another love-interest will *alter the very fabric of who you are*.

CHAPTER 2

The Challenge

Do not rebuke a mocker, or he will hate you;
rebuke a wise man and he will love you.
~Proverbs 9:8

Are you in the throes of indecision? Are you debating whether to leave your spouse for some other, more exciting person?

Due to the gravity of the options you face and the lives that hang in the balance, I am going to speak the truth as crisply as possible. Unlike the film industry, I will not present a glorified view of affairs, because I've seen too many real-life scenarios to the contrary.

Films such as "Casablanca", "The English Patient" and "The Bridges of Madison County," often evoke feelings of sympathy for the unfaithful and make affairs seem beautiful and romantic.

When the tabloids splash news about famous people who have affairs, they sell like hotcakes. Yet all this attention turns celebrities into people of influence who seem to normalize unfaithfulness. You may have found comfort in this. After all, people you admire have done what you are

doing.

Remember when Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie fell in love in real life while working on the set of *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*? Could you feel the chemistry between them? Was it no surprise they ended up together, with Brad—the sexiest man on the screen—leaving attractive, All-American Jennifer Anniston for one of the sexiest women in film? Even if you sympathized with Jennifer, did you find your heart tugged to “understand” the attraction between the new couple? And were you impressed with the way they adopted all those children and were doing such good deeds overseas? Didn’t that make them not look so “bad?”

Rather than what Hollywood portrays on screen and glorifies in the gossip columns, I am going to tell you the unvarnished truth in an effort to spare you and your loved ones more heartache than you can currently imagine.

People in the midst of a blossoming outside romance find themselves floating with their feet several inches off the ground. Like many others before you, you may not have recognized the fact that logical, sensible you is somewhere in the clouds. After all, your new and thrilling relationship has lifted your spirits from whatever disappointments were dragging you down. Or, it may have helped you avoid from some sort of pain, grief, or unfinished business creeping up from your past. And the thought of going back to your old way of life with your original marriage partner may feel like either a trip to Blahs-Ville or a death sentence. Ironically your new outside romance is the real death sentence—only you are too close to the situation to recognize it just yet.

CHAPTER 3

The Facts

But a man [or woman] who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself. Blows and disgrace are his lot and his shame will never be wiped away.

~ Proverbs 6:32, 33 (NIV)

This proverb indicates that the person who unswervingly gets sexually involved with someone outside of his or her marriage DESTROYS him/herself. You may wonder how something that feels so good could possibly be so injurious. Or, perhaps you have fooled yourself into thinking that the negative repercussions will only be temporary. What you don't know is that your emotions have sidelined your brain so that you are unable to fully comprehend the horrific sorrows you will inflict on others as well as yourself, if you continue on this path.

Your chances:

As Dr. Holly Hein points out in her book, *Sexual Detours*, statistically, 90% of affairs break up before ever making it to the altar. Of the few that do lead to marriage, less than 25% of *those* marriages last. ²

Let me say it another way. Only 10% of affairs proceed to marriage. Of the few that do, over 75% fail – significantly worse than the already dismal rate of 50% for first time marriages. ³

That means your current entanglement has a 3% chance of making it in the long haul. ⁴

Add to that the fact that affair-birthed marriages are fraught with distrust and emotional wounds that nobody talks about socially. I just see and hear about the heartaches in the confidentiality of my counseling office – more than you can even imagine. Deceit and illicit love are rough foundations on which to build a long-term relationship and a terrible bridge to a supposedly better life. Hence, I was not surprised when Brad and Angelina's marriage didn't survive.⁵

The biology of Infatuation

Unbeknownst to you, this person who makes you feel so elated isn't the primary source of your euphoria. These powerful feelings are actually generated by chemicals in your brain.

Scientists have found that romantic highs are fueled by mood-lifting neurotransmitters such as dopamine, norepinephrine and the bonding hormone, oxytocin. Your current euphoria is also magnified by a lesser known hormone called phenylethylamine (aka: PEA). This neuro-amine, also found in trace amounts in chocolate, is released during fresh infatuation and resembles the chemical make-up of morphine.⁶

These neuro-chemicals have distorted your sense of reality by saturating the reward center of your brain. And due to the additional hit from sneaking around, they are magnified to a level not possible in a public relationship.

Some social scientists refer to this artificial condition as “limerence” —identified by Dorothy Tennov, PhD as “an involuntary interpersonal state that involves an acute longing for emotional reciprocation,

obsessive-compulsive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and emotional dependence on another person.” ⁷

As author Joe Beam summarizes,

The person in limerence sees no flaw or negative characteristics in the object of his obsession. In his mind, she nears perfection.

He believes that what he feels for her is unique—that he or she has never felt this way for anyone else before and could never feel this way for anyone else in the future.

S/he thinks about the object of their love constantly, even when it affects his/her productivity at work.

The person changes in ways he believes the other person wants him to change. Some people lose weight, change the way they dress, choose different hairstyles, or start new hobbies or activities that never interested them before the affair.

S/he rewrites the history of the marriage in order to justify his involvement with the outside person. He actually believes the new version of things and may say that he never loved his spouse to begin with.

The involved person perceives anyone who intervenes as the enemy. Therefore the marriage partner, church, friends and even God become the enemy if they do not approve. ⁸

Psychiatrist, David Sack, has observed that:

[I]f a spouse leaves marriage and/or children for another person because of limerence, when that limerence eventually fades, s/he often blames the LO [Love Object] for being the cause of losing those things. Whatever flaws the LO has—we are all flawed—becomes exacerbated in the person’s mind. In short, people who violate their beliefs and values by leaving a marriage and/or children for an LO will at some point regret that decision. In most cases they do not have a long-term relationship with the LO. It ends. Badly. ⁹

Right now, you may be arguing that what you have found is true love, and not merely limerence or a biochemical illusion. Instead, you may think your eyes are finally open and you feel more alive than ever before. Yet you do not realize that your eyes are seeing through tainted lenses and your mind is in a hormone-driven fog. What seems like mental clarity and finding the love of your life is really an artifice created by the chemicals in your brain. This sneaky cocktail of neurochemicals feel so good that they create a false contrast with your real-life marriage and mask whatever other deep issues and stressors you may be seeking solace from. Only you likely don't know it yet.

Let's explore what a successful businessman I'll call "Tommy" was hiding from. He was the "golden child" growing up. The entire family relied upon him. His mother looked to him to find stability, as his father was a workaholic and emotionally absent. His siblings were a mess. He was the only "good" kid of the bunch. And good he was. He took on the role of the "family hero" who had to grow up fast, skipping some normal childhood developmental stages. Tommy was never allowed to feel his own feelings. He needed to take care of everyone else's.

His accomplishments compensated for the family shame around the behavior of his most rebellious sibling. His brother smoked, tried drugs and caroused with girls. When Tommy saw the disgrace this brought his parents, he vowed to do the opposite. He was going to make them proud.

Tommy was good at everything he put his mind to do. Sports? He excelled. Debate Team? He was the best debater on the squad. Good grades? He was a 4.0 student nearly every quarter through high school. Only when he began dating the cutest girl in his youth group, did his grades drop to a 3.6.

Once he was away at college, his mother lost her "prop" in him that insulated her from the emotional pain she'd felt for years with an emotionally absent spouse. She could take it no more and filed for divorce.

When his parents' marriage fell apart, he felt like he had failed. For years Tommy wondered if he could have done something to save their relationship. After the divorce, his father was devastated and stopped taking care of himself. He increased his drinking and began to hang out in taverns, looking for friendship and connection. He died of a heart attack a few years later, just shortly before a now-married Tommy became intrigued with a vivacious secretary at work.

As Tommy spent increasing time with her, he learned how unhappy she was in her own marriage. He offered his usual wisdom and support, like he did for his mom growing up, and she began to melt. This gave him a revived sense of purpose. Their conversations grew deeper and soon they were spending unprofessional, exclusive time together that no one else knew about. The sparks began to fly and soon they were kissing and hugging and looking for secluded getaways.

Can you see it? Rather than deal with the sorrow of his lost childhood and the recent death of his father by seeking comfort from his wife, a friend, pastor or therapist, he shoved his sorrows down, like he had always done. After all, he needed to be the strong one to comfort his siblings and to relieve his mother of any guilt she still carried. So his sadness went unaddressed.

Do you see any connection between his vulnerability to a budding affair and Tommy's growing up years? The pressure to perform. To not feel his own feelings. The sorrow and shame he carried for the entire family. He was in what Emily Brown calls a "Split-Self Affair."¹⁰ In such situations, a person seldom reflects deeply enough to face his/her own inner struggles. The focus is so much on others, that a person's genuine, real self gets buried. And the hyper-responsible self maintains a brave front to the point of self-denial.

And then, at a pivotal time in life, some attractive, outside person comes along, and his hero facade "snaps." He is tired of taking care of everyone else, and sees this other person as his chance to finally have

what he wants. No more being valiant or doing the right thing.

The problem with Tommy relying on the “solution” of fresh love, is that it tends to be a temporary Band-Aid at best. The chemicals lighting up the pleasure centers of his brain were fooling him. Like a drug, the infatuation felt so good and offered a lift to his weary, false self who was dying to come off the pedestal and be authentic for a change.

A much better solution for Tommy would have been to learn how to feel and deal with his own emotions better. He needed permission to grieve the normal childhood he never had, and emotionally process the lack of a healthy relationship with his parents. He needed to face the deprivation he experienced from his efforts to nurture his mother, rather than the other way around.

Tommy also needed to come to terms with the ways he felt ripped-off over the death of his emotionally distant dad. Tommy was running from unhealed, complex grief over this broken, painful relationship. Now, since his passing, all unspoken hopes for resolution and closeness with the father who was “never there” for him were dashed.

Tommy’s real need was to heal and resolve his early wounds. Yet, because he was used to avoiding his own emotional pain, he didn’t recognize all that was going on inside of him. His drug of choice to treat his silent sorrow was an exciting forbidden relationship.

Other folks might have chosen prescription drugs, alcohol, pornography, workaholism, or over-eating for the same reasons. Instead, Tommy chose the biggest “No-No” of them all: an affair.

Do you identify with Tommy’s struggles? Are you seeking fresh romance instead of looking at the underlying causes of your inner feelings of discontent? Have you been projecting a false-front as the “good” guy or gal to cover up deep feelings of insecurity or hide from the wounds of growing up in a dysfunctional family? Have you experienced a significant loss that you’re hesitant to face, so a daring, romantic fling promises to uplift your sagging spirits?

You may wonder why extra-marital relationships in particular, are so powerful. And why do they create more of a “high” than regular infatuation or married love?

Barriers intensify romantic feelings

“Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious.”

~Proverbs 9:17

If you are honest, you most likely had some of these fluttering feelings when you were dating your current spouse, or you wouldn't have married him or her. But those feelings are long gone and can't even compare to how wonderful you feel with your newfound love.

Again, there is a reason for that. Adversity, mystery, and barriers heighten romantic craving. As Pat Love explains in her seminars, the more “forbidden” the relationship, the more intense the effect these hormones have on the brain. When you engage in a web of secrecy, intrigue, stolen moments and breaking-all-the-rules, these barriers fan your emotions *to a peak not possible in normal, everyday life with a spouse*. What you are experiencing is the result of stolen goods. It is simply not realistic to compare a secret, outside romance with a legal, seasoned marriage.^{11 12 13}

Please bear in mind that this intensity won't last—particularly once the blockades are gone. Someday your feet will come back to the ground and suave, clever, wonderful you – the “you” that you think your new love has helped you discover and that you blame your current spouse for squashing—will in time fade back into ordinary you. And, after your hormones die down, your lover will become a flawed person, just like your current spouse is, who will most likely irritate you in one way or another. Just like any imperfect person.

Then, the carnage you left in your wake will ascend from the dust to

haunt you for the rest of your life.

Is this what you really want?

CHAPTER 4

A Few Reality Checks

You may be sure, your sins will find you out.
~Numbers 32:23

Try as we might, we cannot escape the discovery and consequences for wrong choices and behaviors. Sometimes our elated emotions give us a false feeling of invulnerability. They fool us into believing we can get away with an affair and possibly the break-up of our families without being burned or without anyone else suffering lasting consequences.

Yet, scripture is very clear that we will “reap what we sow” (Galatians 5:17)—a similar concept to the eastern philosophy of Karma—what goes around, comes around. We cannot hide from God or the natural and logical consequences of our behaviors – spiritually, emotionally, and relationally.

The only way to overcome the malignant power of illicit sexual or emotional lust is to allow God to surgically remove the cancer of infidelity in your life. You do not have to allow it to metastasize and eat away the

fiber of your character. Now is the time to reconsider the direction you are heading, while the lesion is small enough to remove.

Even if you have already crossed more lines than you ever intended, it is not too late to pull back from the brink of further harm. You are in a pivotal place. Are you going to cave-in to your immediate urges? Or, are you going to take the courageous road of submitting your disorienting emotions to the skillful knife of truth?

The stakes are high. I encourage you to take a long, hard look before you leap into a sustained pit of indulgence that will corrode your character, devastate your spouse, and tarnish the legacy you hand your children and grandchildren FOREVER.

Fooled by a Temporary Solution

Perhaps you view your fresh romance as a tantalizing escape clause from your bothersome situation and an opportunity to create a new life for yourself. Whether you are in an unhappy job situation, feeling hopeless about your finances, or overwhelmed by an array of stressors, there's nothing like the thrill of fresh love to pull you out of the drudgery of a dull or stressful time in life. You likely feel invigorated when you see your new sweetheart at his or her best, either dressed for work, shining in various social situations, or lounging sexily during a hot get-away.

Like many enamored folks have discovered, relating to this new lover seems easy. No messy house to contend with. No history of hurts between you from years of living real life together. No "buttons" to push. No difficult dynamics that are part and parcel of long-term, committed relationships. No stressful obligations of paying bills and yard work piling up. No lost sleep from crying babies, no wiping dirty noses or screaming kids or fussy grand-kids to distract you from your magnetic gaze. No aggravating financial disagreements to tarnish your mood. An affair is like being on an emotional and sensual vacation—Disneyland,

adult-style.

Your new emotional bond brings a sense of euphoria that has become your drug of choice with which to medicate yourself. Maybe you have been depressed or filled with grief, and this outside romance has snapped you out of it. Or, perhaps you have been sitting on a cauldron of anger that has catapulted you into your lover's arms. Many people in your situation are disillusioned with life, friends, a spouse, God, or the lack of a meaningful career. Others are simply disturbed by a gnawing feeling of emptiness they don't know how else to fill.

Some people have allowed success at work to blind them to their own faults. And a lover associated with a person's career can create an exaggerated sense of connection, joining colleagues or underlings who feed an inflated ego by their adulation. The contrast between an adoring co-worker or employee and an ordinary spouse at home can be quite stark. Especially at a susceptible time in one's life.

Like Tommy, some folks have experienced the death of a family member with whom there were many unresolved issues. I can't tell you how many people I've counseled who sought comfort in the arms of an outside person in the wake of a family death. Especially if the loss was of a parent from whom the person never received adequate approval. Such grief can seem so unfinished, so final that an affair often becomes the comfort-food to soothe one's aching soul and provide the affirmation that was missing in the lost parental relationship.

Another possibility is that you suffer from anxiety due to a build-up of unsettled issues from the past. One of the biggest predictors of infidelity is a person who avoids conflict at all costs.¹⁴ Perhaps running away can seem more appealing than facing some tough issues head-on. It feels too difficult to stand up for yourself or initiate uncomfortable but necessary conversations.

Or, you may have simply felt bored and were looking for novelty in your life. After all, you may think, "Variety's the very spice of life."¹⁵ Yet,

according to the research, novelty-seekers are particularly vulnerable to affairs.¹⁶

Perhaps, you are trying to compensate for some sort of longstanding shame from your past. This is why you like how you look in the eyes of your paramour so much, idealized and nearly perfect. What a relief from the ways you (or your picky spouse) were beating you up!

Whatever the reason, you have found a convenient avenue of escape, rather than a way to identify and resolve the hurts, trauma, shame, self-loathing or irritants brewing beneath the surface. Yet, this visit to dreamland will only be temporary. What goes up must come down. Once you sober up, the unsettled issues you sought to avoid will still be there waiting for you, in one form or another. After all, you can't run away from yourself.

A Few Reality Checks About Affair-born Relationships

Think about the matter of *trust*. Here you are, involved with a person who is unethical enough to be involved with you, a married person. What does that tell you about your sweetheart's scruples? Have you examined this person's track record? If this is a first offense (as far as you know), how do you know there will not be a second? Is your paramour married and thus willing to betray his/her own spouse on top of trashing yours? Will you be able to trust this person down the road once your emotions simmer down (and they will)?

And, what about you? You aren't exactly a paragon of trust-worthiness yourself. How much lying and deceiving have you engaged in already to develop and maintain this new relationship? Who are you hiding all this from? How many stolen phone calls, private texts, sneaky meet-ups and lies have you utilized to get here?

Do you think your new partner will have any trouble trusting your fidelity to him or her down the road, since you were willing to deceive

and betray your current spouse? Will s/he feel insecure every time you arrive home late from work or social events?

I've seen a number of affair-birthing marriages dissolve under the weight of distrust, unfinished personal issues, or the stress of unhappy injured children competing for attention. Sometimes an insecure lover-turned-spouse hounds the new partner with suspicious interrogations as to the other's whereabouts. (Much like your current spouse may do if s/he strongly suspects or discovers your outside entanglement.)

Do you want the patterns of lying and deceiving that you juggled during your affair to become permanent habits? If you continue on your current path, they likely will. Even if you run off with your new prince/princess to a faraway place to avoid the public fall-out of a post-affair divorce, you will have to evade certain questions by your new friends and co-workers if you wish to keep the embarrassing origins of your romance hidden. I assume you don't relish the idea of having to continue living a life of hiding or deceit.

Also consider the matter of *respect*. Do you look up to this other person for his or her ability to maintain healthy boundaries and self-control? Do you believe your lover exhibits sound moral character? Ask yourself, "Will we still respect each other after the titillation of forbidden love dies down?"

Mutual trust and respect are important foundations in a relationship. What kind of underpinnings are you creating with this new person? Think about it. In this new relationship, *both* of you have strayed beyond the bounds of marriage. Or, if your heartthrob isn't currently married, s/he was willing to help you violate your marriage vows without concern for your unknowingly betrayed spouse. Research has shown that once a person has ventured beyond the lines of fidelity, emotionally or physically, it becomes easier to be unfaithful again. What makes you think one of you won't see cheating as a viable option down the road, when the going gets a little difficult (and it will)?

And what about the *guilt*? Perhaps you keep telling yourself the old worldly adage, “It couldn’t be wrong if it feels so right.” Well, as long as your brain is under the spell of those pesky hormones, you will be rather adept at lulling your conscience to sleep. But once the passion dies down to normal and you are grappling with the mundane realities of everyday life, unless you’ve seared your conscience completely, that old guilt will creep back with a vengeance.

Drip. Drip. Drip. In your dreams. In your relationships. Every holiday, wedding or child’s birthday will bring you face-to-face with what you did and who all you harmed by your short-sighted behaviors. You will long for the good old days of feeling like an honorable person. But if you stay on your wayward path, those feelings of moral decency will become a distant memory.

Are you starting to get the picture?

You are entering a zone that you may never recover from. The reality that eludes you right now will eventually catch up with you. And, Reality in these situations, with a capital “R”, is not going to be very kind. Not only will your family members suffer and the scorched legacy you hand your children reverberate for generations, *you are in the process of turning into a person you will not recognize down the road.*

I can’t tell you how many adult children of parental infidelity and abandonment sit and cry in my office over the personality change they saw in their now-disconnected parent. Some have told me they don’t even recognize the unfaithful parent due to the lack of empathy and defensiveness of their once-close parent. Lost is the feeling of being “daddy’s little girl” or “mommy’s treasure.” All the prickly dynamics and the loss of a secure home-base still plague them into adulthood.

You may think you are only abandoning your spouse and that the children will be OK as long as you maintain contact with them.

But there are a few variables that might get in the way of that.

1. Your children love both parents. If you leave, you are asking them to accept the harm you brought to their mother or father. They will cringe over the disloyalty they feel inside whenever they spend time with you, the offending parent, let alone over your new partner whom they may perceive to have “caused” the break-up of their family.
2. Your new live-in partner or spouse may not appreciate competing with your kids for your attention. While the kids may be hurt, they still need your love. And you will want and need theirs. Yet, no step-parent will ever feel the same degree of warm affection and allegiance toward your children that you and your ex-spouse do. Ever.
3. In fact I have known of many insecure new stepparents who refused to make room, physically or emotionally, for someone else’s children or adult children. Either they were threatened by the parental bond the new spouse had with his/her kids, or they were simply selfish and unwilling to share. I cannot tell you the depth of disharmony I’ve seen when this happens. It’s grievous. No parent should have to choose between a new spouse and their own children.
4. But, let’s assume your new honey promises to not interfere with your relationship with your kids and grand-kids. I guarantee that he or she will still feel more devoted to his/her biological children than he or she will ever feel toward yours. It is only natural.
5. First marriages usually end due to issues between the couple. Yet second marriages usually end due to issues over the kids.^{17 18} Even if you feel like you have finally found the perfect person, you likely have different ideas about parenting. Each of you have protective, rose-colored glasses regarding your own children that the other

person will never have. grand-kids are far more challenging and complex than original nuclear families. And this is magnified immensely if betrayal was involved, actual or perceived, in the dissolution of the prior families.

6. You will experience more financial pressure than if you had stayed with your current spouse. Besides the usual costs of dividing assets and covering expensive legal fees, there is the typical drop in income that parents experience post-divorce. And, when you remarry, you will need to divide your reduced resources between two sets of kids, adult kids, and later spouses and grandchildren. Your finances will definitely be strained. This, too, can stress your new relationship in ways you may not have bargained for.
7. If you are the parent with the most financial resources, you may think that your children's continued attention is due to your loving, generous nature. Actually, the parent with the most money tends to invite a veneer of loyalty due to the superficial "benefits" of staying in your good graces. Do you really want your kids to "love" you because you offer the most "goodies" compared to your less fortunate, demolished betrayed spouse? You may never know if your kids' motivation to stay connected is because of who you are or because they're scared of losing out financially. Are these the kinds of values you want to instill in them?

CHAPTER 5

Think Legacy, Not Immediacy

P *eo*ple who accept correction are on the pathway to life,
but those who ignore it will lead others astray.
~Proverbs 10:17

Because you are smitten in fantasy land, you may be clueless about the impact that will ensue if you decide to give up your family to pursue your affair. The wounds will reverberate for generations.

Bonnie Eaker Weil, Ph.D. refers to adultery as a “multigenerational plague.”¹⁹

According to her research, an unusually high percentage of people who choose to have affairs had a *parent* who also gave him/herself permission to have an affair. Her research supports estimates up to 90% of people who engage in affairs had a parent or parent-in-law who was unfaithful; other clinicians have somewhat lower estimates. According to Dr. Weil, and observed in my own clinical practice, even if you did not *know* that one (or both) of your parents had an affair, the inner attitudes that fuel unfaithfulness have likely been passed down to you. I have counseled

hundreds of people who've had affairs and many of them either knew or later discovered that at least one of their parents had been unfaithful in one way or another. In other cases, the tendency toward infidelity may have skipped a generation, and was passed down from a grandparent.

If one of your parents (or grandparents) had an affair (or two) you may want to think twice before passing along the same inclination on to your children or grandchildren. Your current decision to pursue (or accidentally fall into) an outside romance may have been unconsciously influenced from familial mind-sets and/or behaviors. Patterns such as disrespect for the opposite sex, entitlement, self-absorption, self-indulgence, unresolved shame, pornography use, triangulation, and so on can sometimes run in families prone to unfaithfulness.

Just like the statistics on suicide, family members who choose the escape-hatch of an affair give those who follow *permission* to use a similar exodus. Perhaps you'd prefer to be the one to break the chain in your own family rather than the one to perpetuate it.

One classic public example of repeated infidelity across many generations is the Kennedy family of political fame. While there may be earlier history, Rose Kennedy's father was known to have had at least one affair. Then Rose married Joseph Kennedy Sr., who became an admitted philanderer with multiple affairs over the years. His negative example of influence over the forthcoming generations has become infamous.

At least four of Joseph Sr. and Rose's children, Joe Kennedy Jr, President John F. Kennedy, Senator Robert Kennedy, and Senator Teddy Kennedy, were known to have had multiple affairs. This was followed by unfaithful behaviors by Joseph Sr's grandchildren. For example, JFK's daughter had a well-known affair while she was married. Four of Senator Robert Kennedy's children were known to have engaged in affairs.

When Teddy Kennedy married Joan, she overheard JFK whisper to her new husband, "Marriage doesn't mean you have to be faithful." Where do you think he learned to believe that and find the nerve to pass this

advice along to his brother?

Particularly tragic were the many affairs by Robert Kennedy, Jr. While married to his first wife, Emily, he engaged an affair with Mary who became pregnant. Robert Jr. then divorced his first wife and married his mistress. Like many who are chosen over an original spouse, Mary never dreamed her husband would continue his unfaithful ways. When she discovered his most recent affair, she was so distraught that she developed an alcohol problem and later committed suicide over the nasty divorce and custody battles that ensued. This unfortunate list doesn't include all the kids who became addicted to drugs and were involved in other nefarious scandals.²⁰

Like with alcoholic families, sometimes an adult child or grandchild won't offend in the same way, but will marry someone with the family "weakness." This appears to have held true with Eunice, one of JFK's siblings. Her daughter, Maria Shriver, unfortunately married Arnold Schwarzenegger whose exploits made the tabloids.

Infidelity in families is contagious and destructive to future generations. Do you really want to start an avalanche of heartache among your heirs to come?

Whether this is a prior family-legacy issue or the first time anyone in your family line has ever chosen to violate the lines of fidelity, your current emotional state makes it easy to nurture the notion of leaving your current spouse for Ms. or Mr. Delightful.

You may insist, "Oh, my kids will get over it." No, they won't. I have mourned with many persons in my office—ages 7 to 70—who still agonize over the breach caused by the infidelities of a once-trusted parent. Even if your children don't say anything to you for fear of further rejection or hurt, consciously or unconsciously, they will harbor the hurts from familial infidelity and abandonment the rest of their lives.²¹

If unfaithfulness was a part of your family or extended family growing up, do you remember the toll it took on your emotional life? Did you

avoid telling your own faithless parent how much you were hurt by his/her actions as a child? How it cut you like a knife? How it caused tremendous loyalty conflicts within you regarding your mom and dad? How it damaged your respect for the betraying parent or grandparent? How it made you tentative about the opposite sex, love and marriage? Like most kids, were you too scared to tell your straying parent or grandparent the truth about your feelings?

If you genuinely love your children, you will not want to harm them emotionally nor damage your relationship with them. Nor will you wish to incline them to view infidelity as a legitimate escape-clause from the difficulties of life or an imperfect spouse.

If you keep going in your perilous direction, you will hand your children a shameful example of how to run away from problems rather than face them. Even if your children are grown, you will have instilled fear in them: Fear of intimacy. Fear of conflict. Fear of abandonment. Fear of facing and dealing with their problems. Every time they ask themselves, “What would my mom/dad do in this situation?” your devastating choices will pop up from the recesses of their minds. Your modeling is a far more powerful teacher than all the words of wisdom you will ever utter to them.

Choosing to break your wedding vows shows your children that your word can’t be trusted. Your kids will learn that you don’t honor even the most important promises. And if you abandon the family for another lover, how they will they be secure that you will stay committed to them?

On the other hand, even if you have begun an affair, you still have a chance to reverse much of the damage you’ve caused. If you do an about face, remove your prior justifications for the illicit relationship, seek to reconcile with your betrayed spouse (if possible), your children can learn important character-building lessons for the positive. By your example of genuine repentance, humility, and heartily seeking to amend your ways you can provide a valuable, empowering counter-model of

remorse and repair vs. excuse and escape.

Now, think about your spouse, the one you promised to have and to hold from this day forward ‘til death do you part. If you “follow your heart” and leave him/her for another lover, he or she will be *more* traumatized than if you suddenly died. Most spouses left behind in the aftermath of infidelity would have preferred widowhood to betrayal and abandonment. Your once cherished spouse will enter a living hell of emotional torment for many years to come and may never fully recover from the insult of your betrayal and rejection.

In my 33 years of working with couples and families, the worst legacy of infidelity tends to occur when it is followed by repeat unfaithfulness and/or divorce. It usually means that the underlying issues were never healthily addressed. And the ripple effect of brokenness reverberates for generations.

Yet, when formerly unfaithful folks choose to dig deep, accept personal responsibility, and walk the jagged path of repair, everyone benefits. Family members learn the value of commitment, how to work through conflict, and learn the value of mature love that is not dependent upon the emotional ebbs and flows of life.

For example, Tommy accepted the input of a wise mentor, and chose to do the hard work of recovery. While this took years, he is benefiting in so many rewarding ways today. His nuclear family is still intact. He came out of the fog, fell back in love with his wife, (and she with him), changed careers, and years later, his children are thriving. As adults, his kids have chosen healthy partners to marry. He and his wife are able to celebrate their children’s graduations, weddings, grandchildren, birthdays and other milestones with joy and all together, without the typical undercurrents of tension that accompany broken families at such events.

Right now you may be arguing with this book. Perhaps you even believe that your spouse deserves to be betrayed and left. Or, maybe you comfort

your conscience with the notion that he or she will quickly recover in a couple of years and will be better off without you. After all, you don't love your spouse like a husband or wife "should."

Such rationalizations are truly misguided. Intimate betrayal and abandonment are traumatic, life-altering events. If you have not carefully considered the impact your plans will have if you choose to leave your spouse for another, here are some things to keep in mind:

1. Infidelity is one of the most painful and traumatic experiences for married persons to go through in life. The deceit, lies, and betrayal rip a person's security out from under them and shatter their beliefs – in their spouses, in God, and in themselves.
1. When accompanied by abandonment, the sorrow goes off the charts. Most injured spouses agree that it would have been easier to live through a partner's death, with the comfort of some loving memories and social support, than to endure the shameful, stigmatized loss of being thrown away and/or replaced by another. Death may be sad and final but it usually isn't personal. Romantic rejection is.
1. Unfaithful-abandonment deeply shreds a person's core sense of worth as a man or woman. They wonder, "Am I that unattractive? Why was s/he more important than I?" "Was this a sign that I am inferior and unlovable?" Jilted spouses end up feeling devastated, worthless, and left with ruined dreams and tainted memories to haunt them the rest of their lives.

1. Unlike widows who treasure mementos of anniversary cards and photos, betrayed spouses typically remove couple and family photos that include the betrayer. They find such reminders painful and tinged with sorrow. They wonder, “Did s/he really love me back then? Was our marriage a total farce? Was he still in contact with the other person during that family vacation?” They feel robbed of the happy times they once treasured in their marital histories. Instead, couple or family pictures “mock” them. Most injured spouses either rip up these painful reminders or store them in an attic box for the kids, never to be viewed again.
1. Special events like births of grandchildren, birthdays, graduations, and weddings will create awkward moments and even painful reminders of all that was lost. Folks will be forced to face the obvious – there is no intact family to warmly celebrate these events together. All that remains will be the sad awareness of broken relationships with uncomfortable new alliances. I remember one wedding of a friend’s daughter where the palpable tension between the divorced grandparents created a major distraction for us guests. Everyone noticed the grandfather going out of his way to try to connect with his ex-wife whom he hadn’t seen in years. She spent the entire evening evading him, ducking in and out of situations to get as far away from him as she could. She’d rather avoid him than do the fake job of pretending that nothing was wrong and that his betrayal of her trust didn’t matter anymore. Obviously she was still hurting, many years later. And everyone present knew it.

1. Many betrayed spouses never remarry and are left feeling lonely, depressed, and financially devastated. Or they marry several more times, unable to get over their insecurities and distrust. I once met a journalist whose father left her mother for another woman. She reported to me that her mother was not doing well. She kept the blinds closed, rarely went anywhere, sank into an intractable depression and had become an alcoholic. When I asked the journalist, “How many years ago did this happen?” Her answer: “Twenty years.” That story haunted me the rest of the evening.

I will never forget walking with a girlfriend, Terry, who was still stinging from her husband’s affair, his decision to divorce her and break up their family against her wishes. As we neared the park, we ended up running into a respected woman in our community whom I’ll call “Elma” in her mid-70’s. I had only recently heard she had been previously married to a husband who left her and their four children to run off with another woman when Elma was a young mother in her early 30’s. Fortunately, she later met and married a terrific man of integrity, who helped raise her four kids into adulthood. They had what I thought was a truly redemptive life together.

Hoping to find encouragement for my bereft friend, we struck up a conversation with Elma, and at one point I asked her, “How did you manage to recover after your first husband left?” Instantly, tears bubbled in her eyes and she could hardly speak. Re-gathering her composure, she said, “While I am grateful for my second husband and how he provided a good life for me and my kids, I will always be sad over the loss of my first husband and father of my children.” As the tears spilled over her cheeks, we hardly knew what to say. We quickly changed the subject to surface chit chat and left.

Terry and I continued on our walk, speechless for a while. My friend

was not particularly comforted. She exclaimed, “Wow. She is STILL in pain over her husband’s betrayal and loss from 40 years ago!” I could tell this story shook her up. I, too, never forgot the encounter.

I knew a pastor, Brad, whose wife was an alcoholic and finally went in to a treatment facility. While there, she “fell in love” with one of the other patients. After she got out, she proceeded to divorce him and move in with her new lover. Brad was totally devastated.

A few years later, he met and married a kind woman who he referred to as his “soul-mate.” After being married only five years, she died of breast cancer. He was heart-broken. When I asked Brad which experience was more painful for him, losing a spouse to an affair or losing a beloved spouse to death, his reply was immediate: “Oh, losing my first wife to another man was FAR more painful for me than my loss of _____ to death.” And he meant no disrespect for his second wife. He loved her dearly. But he at least had the comfort of knowing that although he lost her, *he never lost her love.*

Do you want to inflict similar long-lasting pain on your spouse and children? How will you live with yourself, with that on your conscience? Hopefully your inflated infatuation hasn’t totally dulled your ability to empathize or care.

God warns in Malachi 2:15 “let no one deal treacherously and be faithless to the wife of his youth.” (TAB). Then the passage continues, “For I hate divorce!” says the Lord... “It is as cruel as putting on a victim’s blood stained coat...So guard yourself; always remain loyal to your wife.” (Malachi 2:16, TNLB).²²

Even though the prophet was addressing unfaithful male priests, I have no doubt these words of warning apply to wayward persons of both sexes.

Why does God “hate” unfaithfulness and divorce? Because these paired acts (infidelity and abandonment) are as heartless as bludgeoning a spouse to near-death and then casually wearing his/her bloodied coat

(once shared assets?) around without compunction. If you personally know anyone who was spurned in this way, you intellectually know why God speaks of this two-fold act with such graphic language.

Are you still unmoved? If so, it might indicate you have already fallen into a narcissistic sink-hole you may never climb out of. And, if you don't scratch and crawl your way back out now, you'll likely drag a lot of people down with you in the process.

Despite your growing self-centeredness, you may convince yourself that you ARE a loving person. After all, you have discovered how warm, tender, and thoughtful you are since this new prince or princess has entered your life. Besides, you still have strong, caring feelings for your children. Certainly this, too, is evidence of your ability to love.

Well, anyone can perceive him or herself as a loving person in a baggage-free relationship. That's easy. The real test of love is how lovingly you treat your real spouse and children, despite their imperfections.

And, just because you have warm, fuzzy feelings for your kids does not mean you are *treating them* in a loving manner. Good feelings are no substitute for loving behaviors. Most children of cheating parents suffer greatly in the long haul.²³

Ask yourself: "Is this affair going to help or harm my children?" The obvious answer is, "harm."²⁴ A scarier question to answer is: "Am I even concerned I will injure my children through this affair?" If your answer is "no," this is evidence that a new level of selfishness has taken root and coarsened your heart. However, the most out-of-touch answer of all is: "I believe that my affair and pending divorce will have no lasting, negative impact on my kids." Or, similarly, "I am not responsible for their negative reactions." These lines of thinking mean your self-deception is deep.

As much as you may not want to face it, breaking your marriage vows, destroying your children's emotional security, and splitting them in half

is a rather cruel act, even if they are young adults. In spite of what some of your divorced friends may tell you about the supposed “resiliency” of children, your kids are going to suffer terribly – some in obvious ways during the immediate crisis – but the worst of the damage won’t show up until later. Sometimes, much later.

Longitudinal studies of children of divorce have shown that kids are much more affected by divorce than previously thought.²⁵ They have been shown to have higher drop-out rates, crime rates, divorce rates, drug involvement, and more insecurities about love and marriage than those who grow up in original, two-parent homes.

What is really sad is that in your euphoric state you likely lack the ability to perceive your children’s present and future pain. Your emotional drug of choice (the affair) has numbed you from the injury you are inflicting on the ones who love you. And, the ways you are becoming insensitive to your children are outside your level of awareness. A frightening place to be.

You may try to convince yourself that you are justified in what you are doing. That your current spouse has treated you badly, so you deserve this new love. Or that you are more mature now and would not have married your current spouse if you knew then what you “know” now.

You may fool yourself into believing that once the furor dies down, the kids will be OK, and that your children will happily join you and your lover in never-never land, bouncing from house to house.

Or, just as bad, you don’t expect them to be happy, and you are racing full speed ahead anyway.

Not only do your children and spouse stand to be horribly damaged, YOU stand to lose much as well. You are about to sacrifice your integrity, your conscience, your values, legacy, reputation, and your self-respect on the altar of a feel-good, illicit romance. No one will ever think the same way about you again. You will have lost more than you can ever regain in a lifetime.

CHAPTER 6

Who You Are Becoming

The integrity of the upright guides them, but
the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.
~Proverbs 11:3

Duplicity is a fancy word for “duping” other people. Living a deceitful, double life. And getting really good at it.

Amidst this alluring relationship, your brain has fooled you. The neurochemicals lighting up the pleasure centers of your brain have clouded your judgment. They’ve tricked you into viewing your newfound love-interest as the opportunity of a lifetime, too-juicy-to-pass-up; an appealing escape hatch rather than a road that will transform your existence into a very bad dream. Oh, you may not experience dead rabbits boiling on your stove or murderous wenches rising up out of bathtubs.

²⁶ No, it will be more insidious than that.

Why do I say more insidious? Because you are embarking on a path that is *about to change the very fabric of who you are*. You will not be the same person you have aspired to be. And you will be too blind to notice. I

have observed this phenomenon time after time. As much as Hollywood or Desperate Housewives may try to hide this fact, in the real world there are negative consequences from engaging in affairs.

Betrayed spouses and children often report to me with consternation how much their unfaithful partners/parents changed during and in the follow-up of an affair. Several liken the change to the horror film, “Invasion of the Body Snatchers.” The person may LOOK like their spouse or parent on the outside, but their formerly loving spouse/parent is gone and has been replaced by an alien, devoid of the warm human emotion and the connection they used to know.

Others describe the sensation of suddenly feeling “invisible” to the straying person. As if they – the spouse or children – don’t count. They describe the disorienting feeling that they no longer bear any significance or influence with this stranger who appears to be under the spell of an outside, impenetrable force.

Unfaithful persons are usually so self-absorbed, they are clueless about the impact their behaviors and words have upon their spouses. For example, one woman told me before her separation: “Soon after Randy announced his affair to me and I was still reeling, he said to me ‘Dorothy (the other woman) and I are going out house-hunting. But I’ll be home in time for dinner.’” Really? She described his casual, out-of-touch comment as “surreal” to her.

Sin changes you. From the inside, out.

“Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned?”

~Proverbs 6:27 (NIV)

No matter how good this sexual or emotional lover makes you feel, your character is eroding and you are becoming a more self-consumed person. You are caring less about others and devoting yourself to an emotional

high that is a direct threat to the well-being of your heart, your character, and legacy.

Hebrews 3:13 warns us to be careful lest our hearts become “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (NASB). Sin fools us. The deeper we go into its cave, the less light we have, and the more our eyes adjust to the darkness. We rationalize, justify, and excuse until pretty soon, we think that what we are doing is OK.

Your actions may not feel like a moral lapse to you. It probably feels like an accident – something you weren’t looking for but “just happened.” As if this mysterious, meant-to-be love-connection took over and you couldn’t help yourselves. You and your pretend-mate may feel like hapless victims of fate. In fact, you may believe, like Walter White when he tosses his morals to the side in the cable television series, *Breaking Bad*, that you are finally “awake.”

While these flames of love may feel innocent, the heat from your little dalliance is causing sclerosis of your heart. As you bask in the delights of secret connections with your lover, your heart is shutting down toward the ones who really matter: God, your spouse, your children, and your closest decent friends.

Ask yourself: Are you currently feeling closer to or further away from God? Are you growing more trusting of others, or more cynical? How much emotional energy are you putting into your lover compared to your spouse, children or adult children and grandchildren? Are you feeling closer to your friends, or is a mysterious distance creeping into your relationships? Are you open or guarded? Are you growing in your integrity or are you honing your skills at hiding and lying? Ask yourself if you are becoming more thoughtful or increasingly self-serving.

And that is only the beginning. Ironically, based upon my experience and observation, the person you will slowly morph into will be the kind of person you’ve always disdained. Your character and morals will bend, and the way you relate to others will bring lasting psychological harm to

persons you once loved.

I say once loved, because those who betray and leave their spouses in the wake of finding a more promising lover usually become more self-absorbed and less caring. Unless you do an about-face, you will turn into a stranger to your children, skilled at deception, practiced at violating boundaries, and accustomed to justifying your behaviors in the name of personal fulfillment. This “love at any price” will cost you and your loved ones plenty. More than you can even imagine right now.

Over the years, if you keep heading down this path, you will turn off your conscience to the point you will hardly notice the subtle twisting of your values and the increasing self-absorption of your ways. That’s because your world-view will have to change in order to accommodate the immoral lifestyle you wish to justify.

We all know about the frog in the pot experiment. If you put a frog in boiling water, it will immediately feel the danger and leap out. But if the frog is placed in cool water and gradually heated up, it will adjust to the increasing warmth, one imperceptible step at a time. And finally, when the water reaches the boiling point, the adaptable frog will fail to jump out and end up being cooked to death.

In much the same way, if you don’t get out of your extramarital interest now, your normal good sense that would have detected the jeopardy of engaging in a hot affair, will adjust to the many compromises along the way.

Here is how it goes: It all starts out seemingly innocent. A warm friendship. A comfortable relationship with a colleague at work. Or a neighbor who needs help. Over time, the relationship slides into flirtation and sharing confidences. All this feels so good. Soon you start telling yourself little lies to make the gradual crossing of boundaries “OK.” Besides, you decide that what your spouse doesn’t know won’t hurt him/her.

Then the touching starts. First a hand on the shoulder. Then on

the knee. Then the side-hugs turn into front-hugs. Then the secret restaurant meetings become car or motel visits. The flames of passion take over and you are a goner.

All the while, the slippery slope of rationalizations usher you into the next stage and the next stage until your former values no longer rouse your dulling conscience. You decide that the friendship-turned-affair is not such a terrible thing that you once thought it was. In fact, you find a million reasons to make your extramarital involvement understandable, justified, and perhaps a necessary step of personal enlightenment. After all, you are a good, kind, and loving person who just happened to marry a wrong, boring or cantankerous person. You may even convince yourself that you have been in denial all these years and have finally found someone who brings out your best.

If you fail to jump out of the boiling water, so to speak, your formerly good conscience will die a slow death. You are heading for a life full of either regret or a calloused conscience.

One friend of mine told me that near the end of his father's life, after multiple affairs and divorces, his dad told him sadly and with regret, "Your mother (his first wife) was the best thing that ever happened to me. I should have never left."

A former client of mine lamented with tears, "After my dad left our family for the other woman, he became a different person. He expected us to be happy he'd found this lover. He forced us to spend time with "them" as a couple, which I absolutely hated. It was as if my feelings didn't matter to him. Over time, he grew more and more distant. Then he stopped trying. When I saw him years later, I barely recognized him. He had an empty look in his eyes, as if he no longer remembered that I was his daughter."

I've worked with hundreds of folks over the years, some who learned the hard way – that there is no perfect person out there who will help them live in a perpetual state of euphoria. These folks ended up with

lasting regret. Yet, I've known of others who lost their bearings and became a shell of who they once were because they solidified the poor choices they had made. And these rationalizers remained out of touch with the carnage they had left behind.

There truly is a third option besides Regret or Rationalizing. That of Reversing course.

The Sad Part.

*“Blessed is the man who always fears the Lord ²⁷, but he who **hardens his heart** falls into trouble.”*

~Proverbs 28:14 (NIV)

When a couple comes in for counseling and one partner demonstrates a hardened heart toward the other spouse, I can predict with 95% accuracy that the hardhearted one is either involved in a hidden, outside romance, or nursing some salacious secret. No matter how much effort I and the naïve spouse put into trying to improve the marriage, this unseen third force will sabotage any progress.

I only have hope for them as a couple if the straying spouse is willing to admit to the affair or addiction, breaks-off all contact with the lover or substance, and with all humility reaches out for help.

Please do not kid yourself into thinking that your spouse is responsible for your hardness of heart. Your smitten emotions, compromised actions, and unresolved conflicts have likely caused your change of heart. Once you attach yourself to someone or something else, it is only natural for you to detach from your spouse with increasing disdain.

Why is that? Most people cannot maintain equal love for two different lovers at the same time, unless they are extremely good at compartmentalizing. Your attachment to your new paramour will cause you to become increasingly callous toward anyone who threatens your bond – which usually means your spouse and God. You will lose the tenderness

and concern you once had toward your marriage partner and your faith in God will dwindle as you question your prior spiritual beliefs. Often the first sign of deterioration is when a partner begins to judge other Christians as “hypocrites” or avoids attending church because “I can no longer live the lie of being a Christian.”

Sin hardens our hearts, no matter how much we try to avoid this effect. And when our hearts harden, we injure the people around us. Like a blindfolded person wielding a knife, we may lash out at anyone who threatens our newfound source of comfort. We don’t want to admit something is “wrong” if it feels so right.

Some moral standards are nearly universal: adultery and murder and stealing are highly disapproved of in most cultures. When it comes to affairs, according to Gallup, 92% of Americans believe that adultery is wrong.²⁸ Worldwide, according to the Pew Research Center, 78% of people believe that extramarital affairs are morally unacceptable.²⁹

If so many people believe affairs are wrong, then why do so many of them engage in affairs?

Our culture has gravitated away from the notion of principled truth and replaced it with moral relativism. What’s true for you is “your truth” and what’s true for me is “my truth.” This contradictory belief is held onto, even if one person’s truth doesn’t line up with the other person’s truth. The mindset in the world today is that truth is relative to the person or situation, not some outside standard.

It’s human nature to make personal moral decisions based upon our immediate feelings rather than on what is generally accepted as “right.” Western society has generally left the moorings of Judaeo-Christian faith and replaced scripture with the mood, song, or experience of the moment. A short-sighted, immature way to live.

The common saying, “just follow your heart” is dangerous advice to someone embroiled in an affair. Just because something makes you FEEL good in the moment, doesn’t mean it IS good – for yourself or for the

rest of the family. Please keep in mind, as I've said before, if you are involved with someone else, emotional or otherwise, you currently lack the ability to be objective right now. Your emotions are upside down, your brain is backwards, and your sizzling genitals are distracting you from your good sense.

I realize some of you may be married to a person who has treated you with extreme disrespect, neglect, or mental or physical abuse. Others may be married to or living with someone who has a chemical or gambling addiction. Or one who has worn you out due to mental illness or depression. Or betrayed you in some significant way in the past. And, after trying hard to seek help for your partner or marriage, no genuine change or repair has occurred.

While the Three Big "A's" that Dr. Laura and others point out – **Adultery**, **Addiction** and **Abuse** – may be grounds for divorce, they are NOT grounds for unfaithfulness.

As the saying goes, "Two wrongs don't make a right." No matter how you've been treated, you are still responsible for your own personal choices and integrity. Better to be able to look back and know you did everything possible to salvage your relationship before deciding to leave, than to choose a destructive way of escape that reflects so poorly on you and undermines your values.

Plus, the Three Big A's don't make divorce inevitable. People who fail sometimes choose to get help, amend their ways and manage to re-earn the trust of a gracious spouse.

I knew a man, "Eric," who was in an abusive marriage for close to 40 years. His wife treated him like a dog and embezzled money from his company. Yet, rather than have the courage to say, "Enough is enough," he only found the strength to leave when an admiring younger woman seduced him into an affair. When Eric approached his wife about the specter of divorce, she was actually quite agreeable. After all, she was not happy in the marriage either.

However, once she found out he was involved with another woman, all hell broke loose. Rather than the congenial divorce he anticipated, her abusive ways escalated and she became laser-focused on his affair. Now the divorce wasn't about finding peace. It was about war. And she made every effort to destroy his life's work, reputation and relationship with his adult children. She called Eric's numerous business associates, saying he was in a mental hospital. She did her best to poison their adult children against him even more than she had when they were growing up. His youthful affair-partner-turned-wife left him a few years later and took him for what little money he still had. His kids never saw through their mother's abusive ways until he was near the end of his life. This gentle but passive man tragically died a poor, lonely, and broken person.

All that to say, better to take the difficult step of divorce than to engage in an affair as your means of exiting an abusive or toxic relationship.

CHAPTER 7

The Danger of Cognitive Dissonance

F *or in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin.*
~Psalm 36:2

If you continue heading in this compromising direction, you will gradually construct a new worldview about your situation. The process of giving yourself permission to engage in behavior you previously held as wrong, is based on the well-established theory of “cognitive dissonance.” ³⁰

In a nutshell, the premise goes like this: A person can only tolerate the tension of holding onto two contradictory (dissonant) views for a limited period of time. When a person’s ethics are at odds with a particular behavior that brings pleasure or reward, internal distress begins to build. Walking the tight rope of clashing values can only last so long. Eventually, the individual realizes a decision must be made in order to end the turmoil. The person must either embrace his/her previously held standards and stop the contrary yet enjoyable behavior

or else change his/her beliefs so that they no longer view the wrong behavior as “bad.”

Many of us are prone to allowing our emotions to hold more sway than our intellectual convictions. Thus, in order to continue the “feel good” behavior, we often adopt a more accommodating belief system. We *redefine truth* in order to quash the torment of cognitive dissonance so we can live with ourselves and enjoy the pleasure without guilt.

Dr. Glass notes, “Some people resolve the inner conflict between values and behavior by ending the affair. Some eliminate the struggle by finding flaws in the marriage that justify their involvement. Others are driven to disregard their own principles because their psychological needs are too consuming for a single relationship to satisfy.”³¹

It is amazing to me how human beings can fool themselves, when they have motives for doing so. People who engage in affairs, often have an emotional “need” to explain their “feelings” to themselves and others in some sort of rational way. “I only fell for so-and-so because...” All are excuses to defend the inappropriate behavior and an effort to quiet a formerly active conscience.

Such justifiers are “seeing” through a distorted lens, developing a twisted narrative that casts the current spouse in an increasingly negative light and the amorist in a positive one.

If you continue your undercover relationship(s), eventually you will modify your prior belief system to accommodate your behaviors. In doing so, you will have woven together a story you can live with – stitched together with threads of myths and partial truths.

Sin will be rationalized. Exceptions to the rule justified. Conscience seared. God will be re-created in your own image. And then you’ll mistakenly think, “Ah, all’s right with the world.”

However, in the real world, when universal morals are violated,³² havoc still reigns. The fruit of your hurtful behaviors will eventually begin to show. Yet, because you have refashioned your reality, you will

have found a way to insulate yourself from facing the results of your harmful choices.

Instead, everyone *else* will suffer from your transformation, and you will be clueless at the time as to how you are harming them. You will insensitively persist in your new, rationalized beliefs, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. As the kids' hearts and family-life are shattered, you, the faithless parent, will find a way to explain it away.

For example, when the damage begins to surface, you may reason, "Certainly this had nothing to do with the *affair*." And, when the distrust that was sown during your wayward season begins to crop up in other relationships, you will most likely continue to blame everyone and everything else but yourself, oblivious to the negative impact that your actions have had on others.

In the beginning, all the sneaking around brings a thrill and an amazing adrenaline rush. Then, as the lies pile up, you will become a master at information and damage control, like most folks in your shoes. You will become suspicious, guarded, and even a little paranoid about what others know or are saying. This worry will become a preoccupation that you will blame others for.

You will swear the few who know about your involvement to secrecy. Or skillfully evade questions in order to sound technically correct ("No, I did not have sexual *relations* with that woman..."). On the other hand, you may flip the issue around and pummel your spouse with the third degree: "What's your problem? You just don't trust me!" "Who have you talked to?" "How dare you look at my phone!" "You're such a jealous person!" And other tactics. Why? Because you have a lot to hide and are looking for someone else to blame.

If you are like many wayward spouses, you will tend to angrily hold your spouse responsible when the "bad press" leaks out (and it will). Your spouse will become your scapegoat for whatever else goes wrong in your life. Whereas once upon a time you viewed unfaithful persons as

responsible for their own choices and behaviors, you will excuse yourself, refusing to see that you and you alone have destroyed your previously good name and character.

By the time it is all out in the open, you will have disconnected the wires to your conscience and stopped caring about what others think of you. At least outwardly. But inwardly, it will gnaw away at you outside of your conscious awareness. In the meantime, you will become brazen about your behavior in ways that may even surprise yourself.

This new detachment will enable you to say and do things that baffle your family members beyond belief.

For example, here are a few actual quotes of comments by straying partners to their spouses: “Why can’t you be happy for me?” “Why can’t you accept my need for another lover?” “Why all the fuss and suspicion?” “You’re getting in the way of my happiness.” “Boy, your anger and jealousy just show me how selfish you really are!” “You’re just being vindictive!” “No wonder I fell in love with _____ (the other person)!”

Do you see the defensiveness? The blame-shifting? Continually-unfaithful persons tend to skew reality in similar ways.

Even if you did not say any of the above statements to your partner, have you thought them? Have you tried to turn the blame on your spouse? Have you blown up when your partner was suspicious or questioned you? Are you building a case against your spouse so you can justify your “need” to leave? Are you having private conversations inside your head or with sympathetic others (especially your paramour) to create a narrative that makes your spouse look bad and you appear vindicated? Are you blocking out the good memories of your marriage and only focusing on (or inventing) bad ones so you will feel less guilt about your relationship with the new Romeo or Juliet?

Infidelity expert, Dr. Shirley Glass identifies the common phenomenon of “rewriting of the marital history” ³³ among the unfaithful.

She notes that “Until involved [unfaithful] partners are fully committed to the marriage, they may claim that they were never in love with their spouse or paint a dismal picture of the entire marriage.” ³⁴

When a betraying spouse verbalizes such private negative musings out loud to the spouse, he or she manages to dismantle years of a previously shared marital story in a matter of minutes. Dozens of weeping spouses have fallen apart in my office as they recounted their unfaithful spouses’ searing declarations of “I never loved you” or, “I’m not sure I ever loved you” or, “I love you but I’m not in-love with you.”

After years of exchanging “I love you’s,” this sudden turn-about is a rather mind-bending, devastating experience for wounded partners. Happy memories? Gone! Mutually enjoyable experiences? Never happened. Shared love? It was a fake job the whole time.

Another sign of this downward spiral is being out of touch with the impact your affair will have on your children.

For example, you might stoop to introducing your children to the affairee before your divorce is final, fully expecting the children to like and accept your new lover. You may naively think to yourself, “Surely my children will find my new partner as endearing as I do.”

You may even force your shell-shocked children to spend time with you as a new “couple” before or barely after the divorce is final, completely unaware of how creepy this feels to them. No quality alone time with bio-parent. No comfort of being with the real Mom and Dad. Just having this foreign configuration forced upon them – the duo that destroyed their family as they knew it.

Or, as I’ve known some to do, you might arrange for one of your children to meet or work for your secret lover without their knowing. You may hope that your kid becomes fond of the other man or woman so that after your divorce is final and this relationship becomes public, your son or daughter will already like and approve of your new partner.

Yet, as I mentioned before, because the children are deathly afraid of

further loss, they may outwardly go along with your charade despite their confused emotions. And you will mistakenly think everything is just fine. I cannot count how many traumatized children and adult children I've met with over the years who recount such stories about their straying parents, with tears streaming down their faces. Yet they never told their parents for fear of further loss, thinking, "After all, Dad left Mom. What will keep Dad from rejecting me? I'd better keep my mouth shut."

If you fool yourself into believing that your children or adult children will want to embrace your home-wrecking paramour, you are gravely mistaken. I often hear words like, "clueless" "insensitive" "out of touch" "in la-la land" and "cruel" to describe the state of mind of the unfaithful parent by their dazed children. Only, most kids are afraid to be that honest with a straying parent. And you will be none the wiser.

Perhaps you will be one of the rare ones who manage to trick your children and personal friends by hiding the affair. When your spouse is suspicious, you may flatly deny the nature of what is or was going on behind the scenes. You might successfully dismiss your spouse's questions and shut them down by accusing him or her of being jealous, possessive and/or mentally deranged. "How could you think that of me???" you cleverly ask, despite your secret liaisons, e-mails, texts and phone calls with you-know-who.

Then magically (as planned), after the divorce... poof! A new "friend" comes on the scene seemingly out of nowhere. It appears to blossom into a new, beautiful romance and you move in together or get married. You figure what they don't know won't hurt them. After all, you tell yourself, the origins of your relationship are none of their business.

Yet, in actuality, it WAS their business. Your actions helped blow their family apart, stab your original spouse in the back and leave him/her for dead. Whether they know about the affair or not, your spouse and children have been deeply injured by your moral decline and change of heart. They depended on you to love and protect them, and now you've

removed their familial foundation and sense of emotional safety.

You may think you and your lover got away with it. But, most likely your loved ones will intuitively know something is not quite right. They may even suspect you were fooling around before the marriage ended. After all, an established marriage seldom breaks up without one of the partners having someone waiting in the wings. This becomes obvious to most observers when a new romantic interest mysteriously materializes soon after the separation or divorce.

You will have to live with the fact you chose the coward's way out, rather than the way of integrity. And nothing will ever be the same. You may think no one knows, but you do. And so does God. The truth will eventually come out, either later in this life or on the brink of the next.

At the moment, your titillation is making you feel deceptively invincible and your elated feelings have cleverly convinced you that you can pull this off without a problem. But you are building a house of cards that will eventually collapse all around you.

If you break up your family, your children may take out their rage on your ex-spouse with sassy and disrespectful behavior. Or, they may start hanging around friends of dubious reputation. They may outwardly reject the prior values you raised them with, or inwardly reject themselves. They might begin showing signs of depression or even stress-related illness in their own bodies. They may experiment with drugs, indulge in pornography or cut themselves as a distraction from their emotional pain. But they will be too terrified of rejection by you to share their true feelings. They will only send up coded smoke signals to indicate their distress.

Yet when their grades plummet or they begin to act out, you may search for some way to blame your ex-spouse, rather than look to the true source of their pain – your deceitful actions.

Recent research shows that children and adult children of divorce struggle more with intimacy issues than those from intact families. And,

the greatest predictor of divorce is coming from a divorced home.³⁵ By the time you are finished with your own divorce, you will not wish one on anyone, particularly your children.

I will never forget a beautiful woman, whom I will call “Amy”, who came to me for help after she completed an in-patient program for alcohol addiction. She worked on staying sober and dealing with feelings she had ignored for a very long time.

As she poured out her woes regarding her passive husband and how neglected she felt, I found myself sympathizing with her pain and predicament, forgetting that the most perilous time for a marriage is immediately after a partner gets out of treatment.

While I prefer to help people repair their marriages when in distress, my heart so went out to her, that I supported her through and after her decision to divorce her reportedly unresponsive husband.

A few months later, she mentioned she had just met a really wonderful guy named “Patrick.” She went on and on about how great he was and how much more attentive and engaged he was with her, compared to her emotionally remote ex-husband. She also shared how he had led her to the Lord, which added credence to the goodness of this new relationship.

I was thrilled for her, yet, later puzzled that when they became engaged to be married, she complained to me that “no one is happy for me.” Her kids reluctantly attended the wedding, but not before throwing some terrible fits. Other family members were less than enthused, despite how happy she appeared.

A few years later, Amy asked to come see me again. The moment that she sat down, she burst into tears, covered her face and began to rock back and forth. I waited for several minutes before she could regain her composure enough to tell me the true story that she’d managed to hide from me while we were meeting.

It turned out that she had met her second husband while she was in treatment. He led the small group she was in at the center, and his desire

to help her evolved into more than that. They became romantically involved and continued meeting after she “graduated” from treatment. He too had a family, but convinced her that she was his one true love. They each worked hard to keep their relationship a secret, divorced their spouses, and later pretended they had “just met” a few months later.

I must say I was shocked. I had no idea this was going on during the time she was seeing me for counseling. I felt foolish for not asking harder questions at the time. Suddenly her children and relatives’ prior lack of support for her new marriage made sense to me. They somehow “knew” that something wasn’t right about this new couple.

Then, she shared more. Because she had become a Christian, she began attending church. She felt huge pangs of sorrow upon seeing other husbands with their arms around their original wives, with their children in tow. The sight of happy nuclear families shot daggers into her heart.

And, to complicate matters, her new husband became very possessive and intrusive. She couldn’t find any privacy for being with her children who needed alone time with her. Everything she did was under microscopic scrutiny by him. He was easily jealous when she had innocent conversations with others, especially when any man was present. Amy felt smothered and could hardly stand being around him anymore.

Yet her greatest source of grief was over how their relationship began. When she spit out the words, “I committed ADULTERY!” she rocked and sobbed, saying “I want my family back! I want them back!” over and over again.

Stunned at these new revelations, I didn’t know what to say. At the time, I wasn’t so sure that a second divorce was the answer.

Yet for Amy, the fact that the relationship began as an affair at a vulnerable time in her life, filled her with incalculable regret. She felt terrible for tearing her family apart prematurely after treatment. And once the fervor of new love had died down, she realized she had

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overlooked the “red flags” of being with an overly possessive and controlling lover and she wanted a do over in the worst way. She could not live with her terrible mistakes. By the time Amy left her “adulterous second marriage” the ruins were all over the road, so to speak, for everyone involved.

CHAPTER 8

How Did I Ever Get Here?

He who walks in integrity, walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out.
~ Proverbs 10:9 (NASB)

Based on the insights from the preceding chapters, can you see your potential future should you continue this perilous journey? Do you want to lose your scruples to the point that you are blind to the torment you are putting your loved ones through? When your children suffer and your spouse's esteem is shattered, are you aware that you stand a good chance of growing increasingly defensive in order to avoid facing the harm you've caused? If so, look out...

As in most cases of those who instigate a post-affair divorce, life will become all about you. All that will matter to you is yourself and your temporary emotions and your new lover – with little concern about everyone else. Do you shudder at such a thought? That is a good sign. Unfortunately, I've witnessed these trends in many unfaithful persons who abandon their spouses and children for greener pastures.

Perhaps, like them, you see yourself as an unfortunate victim trapped in an impossible situation. You may have convinced yourself that this is a matter of either your spouse's destruction or your own. You are simply trying to survive. You **MUST** have this new person in your life or you will emotionally wither and die. You tell yourself, "If anyone really cared about me, they would understand *and let me have my way.*"

You may think I am exaggerating. But trust me. I am not.

Let's take another look at how a decent, loving human being can turn into the kind of person who would coldly harm his/her spouse and children's lives and turn away from God. I've had a number of formerly unfaithful spouses validate the following progression:

THE EVOLUTION:

1. You fell in love, got married and over time the illusions of endless evenings of fascinating, intimate conversations over candlelight dinners topped off with hours of steamy sex with your spouse are gone. Your dreams have been replaced with the tough realities of real life, relating to someone who is imperfect and different than you, difficult to please, or full of hang-ups you can't begin to relate to.
2. In time, your hidden disappointments start camping out in the cellar of your mind, storing left over data from each conflict that goes unresolved. Over the years you've built quite a storehouse, and the "guests" of discontent, pain, and self-pity are beginning to crowd their quarters in your subconscious mind.
3. Then along comes some sort of trigger event. Perhaps a death in the family. Or, a job loss. Or, a bitter dispute with your boss. Or, betrayal by a friend. Or, an old, unresolved grief pops up. Or, an intense issue with your spouse that causes you to "snap". Or,

burnout. Or, the birth of a colicky child. Or, a general feeling of disillusionment with life. Or, you've reached the top and wonder, "Is that all there is?" Whatever the cause, your unhappiness stirs the angry "guests" of resentment hiding below the surface. The "guests" begin pounding the floor for some sort of relief.

4. And suddenly, there it is. Relief comes in the form of a welcome friendship with a person of the opposite sex. You find this person invigorating. Refreshing. Attractive. Fun. Unlike your dull, ordinary spouse.
5. You find yourself looking forward to any interaction you can find to have with this person who seems to care about you. He/she is so understanding and focused on you. Unlike your seemingly small-minded partner who takes you for granted.
6. You like yourself better with this person who reflects a shinier, more wonderful "you" back to yourself. You like how you look in this other person's eyes. Much better than who you see in the mirror your spouse provides.
7. You play with the notion of a romantic fling, but dismiss it as out of the question, given your current circumstances. But, you wonder what it would be like....
8. So you keep flirting, toying with the idea, gobbling up the flattering attention this person provides. It seems so innocent. Just a little harmless fun.
9. In time, one of you makes a move. A certain glance. A touch. A connection.
10. The sparks ignite your mind to race, your heart to pound, and soon you are engulfed in the flames of desire.
11. You pray, "God—help me! I am sinking into a sea of confusing emotions and I feel too disoriented to find my way out."
12. You do not realize that you are under the influence of hormone driven drugs. Dopamine and phenylethylamine have begun to flood

your brain. The average range these hormones can keep up this rate of release is 1 ½ to maybe 2-3 years max. But you don't know that yet. It FEELS more real than anything you've experienced in a long time. And you think it could last forever.

13. Your conscience comes under the influence of these mesmerizing feelings and you convince yourself that if this feels so good, it couldn't be wrong. You wonder if you need to pray harder. "God, forgive me for what I am about to do...."
14. Your exhilarating emotions and palpitating heart begin to shut off whatever feelings of love you had for your spouse.
15. Your longing for forbidden fruit must be "explained" in some way to yourself. You spend hours puzzling over how you got yourself into this horrid trap and how you can extricate yourself from it with the least amount of damage possible.
16. So, you debate. Should I... [get involved, consummate our love, divorce my spouse – whatever stage you are at]... or shouldn't I? What you are forgetting is whenever a person questions what he *knows* to be true (such as one of God's clear commands); he opens himself up to deception.
17. You don't recognize that your ability to reason and think logically has been severely compromised. Those pesky hormones are weaving a spell over you that is more persuasive and powerful than all your reasoning powers, previous value system and religious beliefs combined. These bio-drugs have even convinced you that you are currently in your right mind. That this relationship is the answer to whatever lousy, boring, miserable existence you had prior to discovering your soul-mate.
18. So, against your waning better judgment, you continue to spend hours on the telephone, emailing, texting and in clandestine encounters with this newfound love. You have finally found your true other half!

19. You are in over your head, only you don't know it because your current state of ecstasy has you bamboozled. You feel more alive, more empowered, more attractive, more loving, and more lovable than you've ever felt in your entire life.
20. Therefore, you reason, since you feel these good feelings so intensely, it must be true love. All prior moralizing is suddenly in question in the light of this new reality.
21. You convince yourself that you have awakened from a very bad dream and what you are experiencing now is real life—as it ought to be lived. But how do you explain this mysterious, oh-so-wonderful state of being? You **MUST** find an explanation, in order to live with yourself and hush that nagging conscience of yours. The lying, the hiding, the illicit indulgences both energize and torment you at the same time.
22. You think hard. Perhaps you were never really that happy with your spouse. How could you be so in love with this new person if your current marriage was really meeting your needs? And, you insist, you are *entitled* to having all your needs met. You conclude that must be it. Your new lover isn't the issue. Your poor choices aren't the issue. Your dizzying emotions aren't the issue. The reason you are floating so high is that you were held down with a ball and chain. The real issue is your *spouse*. Your marriage was dull, dead, or worse, and that's why you were so ripe for this new relationship.
23. This new love is merely a *symptom* of a very troubled marriage (and if you are in counseling, your misguided therapist affirms this notion). So, it's not your fault after all. You become an expert at blame-shifting. Fooling yourself and anyone you confide in. Ahhh. That feels better. Now you are starting to find some relief from the tension over your dilemma. You begin to relax just a little. You figure God must be letting up on you, too, when actually your conscience is becoming crusted over as your justifications take root.

24. The “love potion” flowing so freely between you and the new Mr. or Ms. Right, acts as an invisible poison, contaminating your marital interactions, alienating your affection, and tearing away at the bonds that once connected you. Your secrets have created a dull haze over the emotional climate of your marriage. Yet, you use this lack of luster to reinforce your growing belief that your spouse is not good for your health.
25. You are amazed you hadn’t seen it so clearly before. Since your feelings have clicked off toward your spouse, their negative traits glare at you with the intrusion of a policeman’s spotlight. You are able to recall with ease all the annoying things your spouse ever did or the good things they never did. The lack of chemistry, their irritating habits, the inconsideration, the lack of affection. You reflect on their personality hang-ups that have gotten under your skin so many times. What you had to put up with! You seethe. No wonder you were so miserable!
26. As you build your case, selectively remembering and even exaggerating the worst times in your relationship, you begin to feel more and more justified in your affair. Over and over you rehearse all the instances where you’ve been deprived and/or mistreated. You recall with crystal clarity the ways you were ripped off. Cheated of the joys of an all-fulfilling marriage. Poor, unfortunate you.
27. Your selective memory reconstructs the story of your marital history the way it ought to have been written. How could you have been so blind before? It was this way all along, and you were such a fool not to recognize it. Suddenly, everything starts to fall into place.
28. One by one, your rationalizations build a story that makes complete sense to you in your altered state. You don’t recognize the way your emotions are helping you distort reality and hopelessly adjust the lens through which you see the world. These new views are not

- content to remain on the surface. They seep into your soul and transform your very character.
29. You argue in your own mind with God. You tell Him your woes and solicit His sympathy. After all, He knows your “heart.” He sees your pain. Certainly He couldn’t blame you.
 30. In fact, you aren’t so sure He is there, as He seems rather silent at the moment. “God, where are you?”
 31. Empathy for your family gets crushed beneath the weighty monster of self-pity. Poor trapped, miserable you. Soon, self-pity becomes one of your dominant emotions, linking arms with your intense longing for your new sweetheart.
 32. You conclude, “I have given up so much for everyone else all my life. I’ve never put my own needs first. Now it’s MY turn!”
 33. Don’t think about the fact you are breaking five of the big TEN (Don’t lie, Don’t covet, Don’t steal, Don’t commit adultery, Don’t have any other gods before me). “After all, God is a loving God. He wants me to be happy. Right?” And so your self-talk continues with more soothing words...
 34. “God will forgive me. After all, He’s a God of GRACE. All those rules were for the OLD Testament days.” You keep telling yourself this. Over and over again.
 35. “No wonder I was so inhibited. I was hanging around a bunch of judgmental people. I don’t want to be like them. I want to be more enlightened. More loving. More accepting. More compassionate. Of course, I can’t look at my complete *lack of* compassion for my spouse and children or others close to me or under my tutelage. That would not fit my image of myself.”
 36. “I like this. I can’t believe how judgmental I used to be. I used to be so unloving toward people who were in my position. Now I can see what it’s like to be in their shoes. They were really just in need of true love. They aren’t bad people. Just like me. I am not a bad

person.”

37. “I’m entitled to this new love-interest in my life. I deserve to get out of this oppressive marriage. I need to let go of worrying about what others will think of me if I get divorced (and take off with my lover). I’m tired of trying to measure up to everyone else’s expectations. I need to get free of performance pressure. Perhaps that is what this is all about. I have lived my life trying to please others and denied my true self. Well, no more.” In time, your thoughts become hardened.
38. “Spouse? What spouse? He/she is a non-person to me. I am all that matters. I. I. I. ME. ME. ME. MY emotions. MY needs. What? My spouse is in a lot of pain? He/she is crushed? Devastated? Shattered? I don’t understand. I’M the one who is hurting. It’s MY turn to take care of ME!!! I can’t be bothered with concerns for him/her if I am going to make sure I meet MY needs.”
39. “My KIDS? What about the kids? Oh, they’ll be OK. It’s no big deal. They will want me to be happy in the long run. I would harm them more staying in an unhappy marriage. Things have really deteriorated. We would just fight all the time and that would be worse. [Don’t make me look at how my betrayal accelerated the deterioration of our marriage, crushed my spouse to the core, and caused his/her irrational reactions. It’s not my fault my mate can’t handle it.]”
40. “My spouse is disturbed by my anger? But I feel suffocated! He/she is trying to save our marriage against my will. I’ve GOT to be angry so he/she will let go! I’ve GOT to blame my spouse so I don’t have to look at myself. I cannot bear to feel one more ounce of grief or guilt over my actions, so I must project my own guilt upon my spouse to protect myself.”
41. “You think I am being insensitive? Coldhearted? But what about ME??? I am all that matters. My lover and I have created a whole

- new world and we are happy. How dare you try to ruin my new life!”
42. “My children are sobbing at night and having nightmares?” you ask in disbelief. “Their grades have dropped and they are having fits? Honestly. It’s just another ploy by my guilt-tripping spouse! Once I get on with this new life, my kids will come around. I will show them what a good parent I am. Just watch. I’ll make it up to them. You’ll see.”
43. “How come everyone is so upset? Can’t they see that I am in love? What’s all the commotion about? Just let me have my way.”
44. “I hate you! You are trying to interfere with my happiness. All of you. Just get out of my life!”
45. “Of course I don’t think divorce is a good thing. No, it was NOT caused by the affair. Will you please get that through your head? There wasn’t any other option. Staying trapped in this miserable marriage would have ruined my life. God understands. And if He doesn’t, that’s too bad. I wouldn’t want to serve that kind of a god anyway.”
46. “Ah...now that I am away from that burdensome ex-spouse of mine, I need to keep my guard up so I don’t have to feel any guilt over what I’ve done. I must keep finding fault with him/her so I don’t have to look at myself.”
47. “I must keep up this game of pretend. Pretending that what I did was the best choice I had at the time. Pretending that the kids weren’t impacted. Pretending that my new life with Mr. or Ms. Wonderful was really worth it. Pretending my new spouse is trustworthy. Pretending that everything will be OK.”
48. “What? You say one of my kids is struggling with drugs? He was picked up by the police last night? What’s this world coming to! My spouse is such a lousy parent. Too strict [or too lax]. No wonder the kid has become rebellious. I should have fought for total custody.”
49. “You think *I* caused this problem? That I have shattered this child’s

life? That the turmoil over the divorce has driven him to bad friends to find acceptance and to poor behaviors to numb his pain? It's my spouse's fault! Not mine!"

50. "I CAN'T HEAR YOU. YOU ARE NOT MAKING SENSE. Don't look at me. Everyone else is to blame. I am not responsible for my kids' choices."
51. "My daughter is pregnant and wants to marry the bum? But she's only 17. I think she should have an abortion. I'll talk to her about it. Of course I think abortion isn't a good thing. But it's her only option. Having a child at this age would ruin her life. She needs to find a way out [just like I did]. I know God will understand."
52. "My son is divorcing his wife? But they have two childr...oops. I can't go there."
53. "My daughter is terrified of commitment? She's living with another dependent boyfriend? She's paying all the bills? Sensitive, starving artist type, huh. At least he's not abusive like the last one."
54. "Why do I have these bad dreams? I am tense all the time. I thought I shoved down that crazy-making guilt a long time ago. My doctor says my ills are stress related. I wonder..."
55. "My second (or third) spouse has sure let me down. I thought he/she was my soul-mate. I can't understand what happened. The passion has diminished and I feel like he/she doesn't try very hard to meet my needs. I feel so unhappy. Besides, all this constant criticism and monitoring my whereabouts is driving me crazy."
56. "That person at work sure makes me feel good. At least she laughs at my jokes. Her smile warms my heart. And she seem so attentive. Maybe I ought to confide in her..."

So, do you get the picture? If you persist on this hazardous journey, you will likely become an insensitive, rationalizing, untrustworthy human

being that you no longer recognize.

Oh, you may appear charming and outwardly intact, but you will insidiously drain the life-blood out of those who are or were the closest to you. And you won't even be spiritually or emotionally savvy enough to recognize it. You will conveniently believe it is everyone else's fault when trouble raises its ugly head.

And, just to add insult to injury, your discredited reputation will never go away. Never. It will follow you to your grave, unless you stop this side-show and beg for a do-over. Right now, your reputation may be low on your list of concerns, given your current elated emotions. Yet someday it will come back to haunt you in a very significant way.

You can't run away from time-tested truths.

“But the man who commits adultery is an utter fool, for he destroys his own soul. Wounds and constant disgrace are his lot. His shame will never be erased.”

~Proverbs 6:32, 33 (TNLT)

Friends might fake a smile upon encountering you, even years after you've decimated your loved ones, but inwardly they'll cringe, “I can't believe what this person did to their family. Gees, I'd never stoop to that. Of course, I would never say anything. I don't want him/her to think I'm judgmental. I'll simply go along with the little charade, laugh at his/her jokes and act like everything is just fine and keep my utter disrespect for him/her to myself.” And they will walk away, sad they can no longer look up to you as they once did.

Ask yourself: “Is this the person I want to become?”

CHAPTER 9

Accepting the Challenge

“**P**ride leads to disgrace,
but with humility comes wisdom.”
~Proverbs 11:2

If you have gotten this far tolerating my challenges, perhaps you haven't buried your former good sense yet. Somewhere in the corner of your mind there's a responsive conscience lurking. The fact you haven't tossed this book in the trash might mean you are still open enough to feel appropriate regret for your wayward actions and not ready to throw all caution to the wind for the sake of a temporary solution.

If that is so, take heart. All is not lost. It will take a lot of hard work, but you can stop careening down this harmful path before it's too late.

To avoid the worst scenarios, you must get a grip. You need to stop blaming everyone else for your current situation and take a good long hard look at yourself. You can utilize this crisis as a wake-up call, and turn it into an opportunity to grow and accept responsibility for your choices. If you are willing to face others, yourself, God, and the truth about the mess you've gotten yourself into, there is hope.

You can halt and even reverse the terrible damage you've already caused. While it won't be easy, it will be worth it.

"Fools make fun of guilt, but the godly acknowledge it and seek reconciliation." ~Proverbs 14:9

Your situation IS redeemable. And, you can actually become a more compassionate person with stronger character and better boundaries than you had before. You can salvage your children's future, repair your spouse's unraveling self-worth, and recapture the better qualities of yourself before it's too late. Honest. I've seen it done. But only by a few brave persons who accept the challenge to stop shooting-up their love-potion, take a U-turn and follow the steps presented in the chapters to come.

Are you going to accept the challenge? Will you trust the people around you who've been waving their arms to warn you of the frightening cliff ahead? Will you trust the God you've been defying and stop feeding those short-sighted desires that are propelling you in the direction you are heading right now?

The well-being of yourself, your spouse, your children and your children's children are hanging in the balance. Are you willing to listen to the voice of reason, or have you already become too embroiled to care?

You alone can determine who you will become. Selfish or selfless? An adolescent or a mature adult? A taker or a giver? One who runs from difficulty or one who grows from it? A demolisher of lives or a nurturer? A rationalizer or a clear thinker?

CHAPTER 10

Facing God, Facing Yourself

The Lord hears his people when they call to him for help.
He rescues them from all their troubles.
~Psalm 34:17

If you have some sort of belief in God, I encourage you to be completely honest with Him. No trying to please Him or sound hyper-spiritual. This is the time to open up to Him with gut-level, bare-naked honesty.

You may initially need to rant and rave and have fits—upset that He wants to take your newfound toy away. Perhaps you want to blame Him for depriving you of joy. You may be angry. Feel abandoned. Resent your spouse more than ever.

Just be honest. Tell Him how you really feel. Admit that you believed He was trying to withhold “true love” from your life. This is one way to open the lines of communication with your Maker.

As you say your feelings out loud to God, perhaps you will begin to see how upside down your thinking has become. The One who loves you most and has the power to heal your heart is the very One you’ve been fighting against the hardest. Is that insanity, or what?

*“Many sorrows come to the wicked, **but unfailing love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.**”*

~Psalm 32:10 [emphasis mine]

As you break the silence with the Lord, pay attention to what you learn. In time, this process will offer you one of the most important gifts possible: that of realizing what a fool you’ve been and how utterly good He is.

That’s a very good place to be. When we are humbled to the ground we finally start to make sense and we can see that God’s ways are meant for our good. He’s not trying to deprive you. He created you and knows what is best for you.

Perhaps your inflated ego has blinded you. You actually thought you could pull this off and get away with it in one way or another, otherwise you wouldn’t have tried. Now you have the opportunity to drop your defenses and learn what real loving is about.

You will also need to set some extended time aside to pray, reflect and plug into God as the real Source of love. It is in the light of His presence that you will find the courage to face the true nature of your deeds and gain the necessary insights to see them for what they are: deceit, betrayal, and lust. As it has been said, sunlight is the best disinfectant.

As you humble yourself before God, confess your wrongs to Him. Be completely honest, even if it is embarrassing. Call a spade a spade. Let His conviction break your heart with the pain by which you have broken the hearts of your loved ones. Weep over your missteps. Honest sorrow is cleansing and healing for your soul.

Label each of your actions out loud to God for what they are: Physical or emotional Adultery. Sin. Selfishness. Disloyalty. Treachery. Lying. Deceitful. Faithless. Lustful. Unethical. Destructive. Coveting someone else’s partner—someone who does not rightfully belong to you. Stealing another person’s mate (or potential mate). Cheating your spouse of love and fidelity. Breaking your marriage vows. Threatening your family’s

security. Betraying your spouse. Shattering your mate's trust. Crushing his/her heart.

I know these are not pleasant to admit. In fact, upon reviewing the aforementioned sins, you may be digging in your heels as your justifications come screaming to your defense. "But, but, but..." Hang in there. Brutal honesty with yourself is going to be your greatest ally in the recovery process. Don't let your former, seemingly logical reasons get in the way. They are not your friends. They are your enemies and must be treated as such.

You might even consider going to Confession, whether you are Catholic or not. Or perhaps find a trusted mentor or pastor to confess your wrongful behaviors to. Scripture tells us in James 5:16, "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed." Yes. You can be healed of this blight on your soul.

If you followed these initial steps, congratulations. I trust you have learned what people have known for centuries: Confession is good for the soul and can begin to lift our burden of shame.

CHAPTER 11

Another Look at the Pain

“**I** f you prize wisdom, she will exalt you. Embrace her and she will honor you.”
~Proverbs 4:8

The Pain in Your Spouse: Your spouse may have suspected something was wrong, but that in no way prepares him or her for the harsh blow the truth of your waywardness will wield. Brace yourself for a whirlwind of emotions to come exploding from your spouse. The rage, the silence, the mood swings, the yelling, the irrational tirades, the sobbing, the harsh accusations, the slammed doors, the storming out of the house, or any number of other unpredictable reactions are to be expected. These are the cries of a human heart that has been severely broken. Don't try to calm the person down. Don't try to defend yourself. Don't throw accusations back toward your partner. Just suck it up and take it.

Why? Because betrayed spouses *have the right* to express their pain and betrayers *deserve* to see it. You need to bear witness to the damage your actions have caused in living color – on your partner's face, voice,

physical convulsions and obsessions—in order to further wake you up from your blurry dream-state. It is actually good for you to see the impact your unfaithfulness has had on your once-beloved spouse. And when you are forced to face the depth of your spouse's injuries, it helps jolt you back into reality, expand your remorse, and strengthen your resolve never to do something this terrible again.

There is no way to predict how your particular spouse will react. But just keep telling yourself that your choice to break the marital covenant is a crime of the heart in the first degree and now your spouse is entitled to respond just about any way they choose, apart from violence or murder. After all, he or she was in essence the victim of a traumatic assault on his/her marriage and value as a human being. There is hardly anything more painful in human experience than betrayal by an endeared spouse. Only when accompanied by abandonment is the insult worse.

For some spouses, the news of your betrayal will be more terrible than receiving news of your death. Not only has the innocent trust in you and your marriage died, but the pain of rejection and disloyalty will torment your spouse for a very long time. Every happy family or couple event that occurred while you were involved with the lover will seem sullied to your spouse. He or she will agonize for hours over each memory, photograph, or reminder that you were living a double life during that time. This is your opportunity to grieve with your partner, if he or she allows it.

If you have detached from your spouse, perhaps his/her reactions will seem overblown. Rather than pull back, use your dismissive attitude as a gauge. If you are unmoved or put-off by your spouse's pain, this tells you how far down the road of heartlessness you have traveled. Rather than suppose your spouse is over-reacting, use your lack of compassion as a sign that you are morally worse off than you thought.

This is the time for you to be patient, loving and kind, even when you don't feel like it. Make an effort to be a good listener, understanding and empathetic. That's what adults do. They love with their actions,

whether or not their feelings line up at the moment.

This does not mean you will not have the chance to deal with whatever troubles were present in your marriage before you decided to unilaterally derail it. That will come later. Now is the time to face the damage and focus on the person you pledged to love for better or for worse, in sickness and in health. You are dealing with a person who is profusely bleeding from the heart ... from a wound inflicted by YOU. Once you and your spouse are out of intensive care and the hemorrhaging has stopped, you can attend to other matters that preceded the betrayal. But for now, attend to the crisis at hand with tender loving care.

The tumultuous emotions during the first few weeks and sometimes months after a disclosure such as this are normal. Expect lots of wild mood swings and emotions. Plan to ride this out without making any drastic decisions for a while.

And, whatever you do, stop all the lying. Your spouse will not recover from the injuries sustained if you keep ripping out the stitches by further lies. Each untruth creates another setback on the road to recovery. And many spouses are so traumatized by the deceit, that even one more lie can topple your chances of repair.

You must realize that you have taken liberties that did not belong to you. You did what you wanted without your spouse's permission. You have broken your vow to "keep yourself unto your spouse as long as you both shall live." You have violated your partner's exclusive rights to you as a spouse. Now, it is his/her turn to respond.

Within reason, your spouse gets to do as he or she sees fit. If your spouse demands that you leave, then leave. If your spouse wants to cry and sob, then she gets to cry and sob as much as necessary. If she wants to be held, then hold her with tenderness. If your spouse wants to be left alone, then honor that request. Yet, use your best judgment. Often injured spouses are actually hoping you won't be put off by their words which reveal their pain but hide the fact they are longing for you to hug

them anyway.

If your betrayed partner pelts you with questions, keep in mind, your mate has that right. If he/she calls you a few horrible names, you probably deserve it. [However, if this is a continuation of a prior pattern of verbal abuse, then that obviously that needs to be addressed, most likely with the help of a professional.]

Chalk it up as part of your penance. During your waywardness, you were able to hide from the dastardly nature of your wrongs. Now you get to see the true colors of your betrayal reflected back to you. The reality of what you have done may hit you in a whole new way. Good. You need to see this in living color in order to fully awaken.

It is not unusual for a betrayed spouse to become suicidal. The pain feels so intolerable, that often the hurt person wishes he or she was dead. The first few days and weeks are often the touchiest. If your spouse is threatening suicide, you need to enlist the immediate help of a mental health professional to assess how acute the danger is. Sometimes these are just wishes for the pain to stop, without a plan or means to act on them. Other times, the person may be in danger of carrying them out. All threats must be taken seriously. Don't hesitate to enlist help. Call the National Crisis Line (800)273-8255 or 911 if necessary.

You or your spouse might benefit from a visit to the doctor or a psychiatrist to see if a mild anti-depressant or other medication would be useful for 6 months or more.

Your Pain: Your decision to fess up and let go of your illicit romance will involve “withdrawals.” You may feel deep, almost intolerable grief over your own loss. Just keep reminding yourself that you shouldn't have become involved with this person to begin with. While your grief feels real remember it is the result of ill-gotten gains. Your affair partner does not belong to you, nor do you belong you to him/her. What you had was **STOLEN** goods, and the goods must be surrendered to the proper

“authorities” [i.e. the legitimate spouse].

You may also begin to feel suicidal yourself or wish you were dead. You may have convinced yourself that this ideal lover was as necessary to your existence as water and air. Perhaps your imagination fooled you into believing the affair was the only way out of a seemingly intolerable situation. Or, the only panacea for your restless soul.

If you are the one struggling with suicidal thoughts, you likely are still embroiled in unrealistic fantasies about the other person or can't imagine how to repair the damage with your legitimate spouse. If life seems “unbearable” please don't do anything rash. These are not uncommon thoughts in the early phase of recovery. Just the same as I recommended before. Seek professional help and don't hesitate to call the Crisis Line listed above or 911.

Now that your hand has been played, it may feel like your life is over. You may feel even more trapped than you did before. Give it some time. Now that things are out in the open, with no further contact, the pull toward the affairee will gradually lose its strength and your mental dissonance will have a chance to subside. So, take heart and be patient. Time away from the Other Person will allow you to sober up.

Usually persons in your shoes feel some sense of relief over being found out. A measure of guilt has been lifted. The lies have stopped. The hiding is over and your throbbing conscience can finally breathe again.

I've previously discussed the roller-coaster part of recovery, but as a reminder, you need to expect a lot of ups and downs. Keep in mind that the ways you grow in the midst of the tumult will give you a whole new high water mark in your ability to tolerate conflict – a skill you were most likely lacking before you stepped out of the marriage. And, if you keep investing in your marital relationship, those loving feelings that seemed lost for good are liable to grow again. But never to the degree of an illicit romance, which is more akin to the effect of drugs on the brain than genuine, lasting love. It is important that you give up the short-

sighted craving for an intense emotional high if you wish to develop into a healthier person.

A helpful exercise would be for you to write down a list of all the good qualities of your spouse – what you appreciate and admire about him or her. Recall fond memories of special times together. Try to remember why you chose to marry your partner in the first place (and not the re-written version you came up with later to justify your affair.) You likely married your mate for a host of positive reasons that you may have suppressed once you attached yourself to someone else. Or, forgotten in the doldrums of years together. Find a good place to put the list, such as in your phone or journal, to read and add to often.

It takes time to re-program your brain from the degree of emotional distortion you've subjected it to, as well as the myriad of mistruths you've told yourself. But over time, recovery is possible. Just don't give up. Feelings are fickle, and can be reclaimed when you, "accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch onto the affirmative and don't mess with Mr. in-between." ³⁶

CHAPTER 12

The Nine Steps to Freedom

“**P**eople who cover over their sins will not prosper.
But if they confess and forsake them, they will receive
mercy.”

~Proverbs 28:13

While I cover ways to rebuild your partner’s trust more in-depth in my other book, *How to Help Your Spouse Heal from Your Affair: A Compact Manual for the Unfaithful*,³⁷ the following steps to recovery should prove helpful for you personally if you want to pull out of the downward spiral you’re on. These steps are similar to the ones recommended by various recovery programs throughout the country.

Just like an addict, once you come down, all the troubles you were seeking to mask by your magnificent high will still be there, waiting for you to address in a more healthy way. As I said before, there is no way around these matters but through. You sought to abort an important process of personal growth by circumventing reality. But, Reality with a capital R is still there, waiting for you to face it and grow into the wise person it was inviting you to become before you got off the path.

Reflect on questions like: “What was I thinking? Avoiding? Rationalizing?” Examine how you got here. “What stressors were fueling my desire for a mood-lifting experience?” And, “What attitudes from my upbringing influenced my susceptibility to an affair?”

For example, was your family casual about sex and dirty jokes? Did you father keep a stash of Playboy magazines under his bed? Were you the golden child who could do no wrong (and thus you had to keep up a phony front and learned sneaky ways to rebel)? Or, were you the child who was constantly criticized or blamed so you learned how to lie to try to keep out of trouble? Was one of your parents abusive or addicted? This likely robbed you of the secure childhood you needed. As you can imagine, these factors are not excuses for bad adult behavior, but they can help you understand yourself better and give you a peek into your own issues, rather than continue to blame your partner for your unfinished business.

Once you have survived the initial withdrawals from feeding your sensual appetite, you will need to take a deeper and more thorough look at what you’ve done.

STEP ONE: Examine the factors mentioned in this book that may have contributed to your vulnerability to an affair at this time in your life. Here are just a few to identify:

- A family history of infidelity
- Viewing pornography (according to research, those who view pornography are 300% more likely to have an affair, than those who don’t watch porn.)³⁸
- Casual attitudes about sex in the family
- A lack of good boundaries or discipline growing up
- Parental neglect or criticism
- Ungrieved childhood losses
- Role-reversal with a parent (needing to be a confidante to a hurting parent)

WHO WILL YOU BECOME?

- Other family dysfunctions (growing up in an alcoholic home, parental abuse – sexual, verbal or physical, parental divorce, chronic illness in the family, etc.)
- A tendency to avoid conflict
- Being the “golden child,” “family hero,” or a significant effort to avoid parental disapproval (each of which can lead to the creation of a false-self)
- Over-controlling parents or a legalistic religious background (too little freedom)
- A laissez-faire upbringing (too much freedom)
- An exaggerated need for novelty
- Reaching the “top” and wondering, “Is that all there is?”
- A tendency toward narcissism (narcissism is severe self-absorption – usually from deep-seated insecurities and masked by superficial arrogance. You may fall somewhere on this spectrum, from mild to malignant, or may have fallen into a season of adolescent-like self-centeredness as a result of the affair)
- An entitlement mentality
- Life-changes or stressors such as: the birth of a child, loss of a job, recent promotion, empty nest, illness in the family, etc.
- Death of a parent, especially one with whom you had a lot of “unfinished business”
- Unprocessed resentments toward one’s spouse
- Disappointment with God or life

STEP TWO: After identifying the factors that may have set the stage for you to fall into an affair, find someone to process these matters with. Usually a professional counselor, pastor or wise mentor is ideal. This will include the need for you to confess your unfaithful behaviors to a human being you trust. It is imperative to explore all that you thought

and felt in the dark under the light of a level-headed person's scrutiny.

However, this does *not* mean your lover. *Nor* your spouse just yet (although that will become necessary later). I mean someone beyond your romantic life that you respect. Someone who won't just hold your hand and tell you what you want to hear. Someone you cannot manipulate. Someone who is what Dr. Shirley Glass calls "a friend of your marriage."³⁹ Someone who matters to you. This may be an adult sibling. A mentor. A sponsor. A pastor. Your best friend. Your spouse's father.

This person needs to be a caring, trustworthy, level-headed, self-controlled person with credibility for living an ethical life who would be willing and available to walk alongside you for the next few years. [You ask, "The next few years?" At least. Restoring corrupt character, twisted thinking, and distorted emotions takes time—depending on how sincerely remorseful and teachable you are.]

STEP THREE: You will need support from this trusted person in order to accomplish this next critical step: you need to cut off all contact with your lover. Total cut-off. COLD TURKEY. That means no phone calls. No e-mails. No Twittering. No Facebook notes. No visits. No "just being friends." No contact, period. Just like you would need to do with the fuel for any addiction. Zero. Zip. Nada.

Keeping a "break-up" simply between you and your lover never works. It's just one more "secret" between the two of you that adds to the intrigue driving you together.

The reason you need this outside trusted friend, is that it is likely too early in the romance for you to have become disenchanted with your lover yet. This person is still like a drug to you. You cannot see the forest through the trees. You need the help of an objective person who has your best interests and those of your family in mind.

Once you have cut-off your hormone supplier, you give the fog a

chance to lift and for the spell to be broken. You must stop shooting up the drug of illicit love for your mind to clear. No sneak phone calls or texts. No gathering information through mutual friends. No continuing to work together. No “ifs” “ands” or “buts.”

This is the most difficult step, but the most important one if you are going to have any chance to recover from the state of temporary insanity you are in. If you stop feeding the outside relationship, your messed up emotions will die down and clarity will begin to rise.

STEP FOUR (which may have already occurred to some degree, as most folks caught up in an affair usually don’t seek help unless they are “caught”): Tell the truth to your spouse. The whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God. The only way to re-establish your credibility and begin to restore broken trust, is to come completely clean.

It may be your only chance to salvage what you have broken. If you dribble out the truth over a period of time, you damage your budding trustworthiness. If your spouse discovers more details from another source, your capacity for honesty will be in question. If your spouse has to “drag it out of you,” you humiliate him or her and damage their confidence in your ability to be forthright.

Offer all the essential facts about specific violations. Answer any questions they have, without evasion. No excuses. No blaming your partner. No slanting the truth to avoid repercussions. Face the music, even if it hurts both of you to do so.

As you reveal the truth, be sure to NOT include your rationalizations – unless you are also prepared to share how *false* these reasonings were. Any improper blame, including the excuses you used to justify your actions, will only injure your partner more. And don’t brag about your exploits, fond thoughts or salacious details about your affair partner in any way. An important part of recovery is gaining emotional awareness

of self and others, avoiding any form of cruelty toward your spouse. Your spouse will be tormented enough about any imagined comparisons with the lover(s) without you adding to it.

And do NOT utter any positive attributes about your partner-in-crime to your spouse. These were merely fantasy-generated, baggage-free images of your affair partner not yet seen in the light that only comes from extended, real-life marital interactions.

Most injured partners tell me that the *worst part* of the betrayal was all the lying and deceit that went along with it. Falsehood pulls the rug of trust out from under them and they feel completely disoriented. They wonder, “Who is this person I’ve been married to? I wonder if I *ever* knew the real him/her. Was I a fool to ever trust my spouse?”

The only way to remove the barriers between you is to tear them down with honesty. And the only weapon you have to pull yourself out of self-deception is the truth.

Be sure to choose a safe time and place to reveal your unfaithfulness to your spouse. One former client of mine was horrified to learn of her husband’s affair as they drove home from dropping off their son at college. A moving vehicle is not a safe place for such a revelation. She felt trapped and battled thoughts of jumping out of the car on the freeway. She also considered pushing him out! What she needed was the respect of being in a place where she could safely remove herself to begin processing her shocked emotions.

Some spouses may react with extreme rage and break a few things around the house, such as your wedding photo or cell phone. That is within the range of “normal” for initial disclosures. Just remind yourself that you have broken your marriage vows and violated their trust – matters that are far more damaging than a breaking a few “things.”

Other injured spouses will seek a lot of hugs and reassurances of your love. Some betrayed spouses may insist you move out. If yours does, remember you deserve this. Respect a wounded partner’s wishes for

space by finding a temporary place to stay. But choose no permanent place to stay for now.

Either way—from home or away—work like crazy to be the opposite of who you were during the affair. Instead of lying, tell the truth. Instead of being mean, be kind to your hurting spouse. Instead of feeling sorry for yourself, show true empathy for your partner. Apologize. Apologize. Apologize. Validate their pain. Confirm the wretchedness of what you’ve done to him/her. Remorsefully admit how wrong you were. Show compassion over their sorrow and the horrific pain they are in. Repeatedly. This is just the beginning of the repair that needs to occur. (For more ideas on how to do this, check out my list of suggestions in the Appendix on page

STEP FIVE: Find out what method of “closure” would be meaningful to your spouse. Perhaps a “good-bye” letter you write to your lover and let your spouse read before you send. Or, a brief phone call, with your spouse listening in on the other extension. Even if you feel nothing for your spouse at this point, if there is even the slightest chance you might get back together, it would be important to include him/her in this part of the process. Remember, secrecy is what got you into this mess. Transparency is essential to pull you out.

If it necessitates a job change, so be it. You must put as much distance between you and your lover for your spouse’s sake as well as your own. Your spouse is going to go through enough trauma after your disclosure without forcing him or her to live in a constant state of terror every time you go to work.

Spouses who have argued with me on this point have either failed to salvage their marriages or saw little progress in healing the relationship until they found a new job.

I had one client who had never been physically violent in her life, let alone with her spouse, until she found out about his affair with a co-

worker. Her hurt and anger showed up as a knee-jerk “kicking” him whenever she was triggered or learned something new about his affair. This actually continued as long as he kept working with the other woman, despite coming into therapy together on a regular basis. While I didn’t condone the kicking, he argued with me that he needed to continue working with “her” in order to save his job.

Every day he went to work, his wife was on pins and needles, scared the old sparks would fly again or that he’d be constantly comparing her with the other woman.

Finally, after a year of this, he managed to find another similar position with a different company 45 minutes away. Guess what? The kicking totally stopped. They are still married today, had another child, and are faring much better.

I worked with another injured couple where the husband who only had a couple of months left at his job before he could retire. They both agreed he should finish his life’s work, despite the fact the other woman was in the same office area as he was. He set his watch alarm to go off shortly after he got home. It reminded him to sit down with his wife and do a thorough review of his day. He openly disclosed every look, every word, every movement or encounter with the other woman. While his wife suffered during this time, it was short-term and something she agreed to for the big picture. The daily check-ins helped her survive this period and once he was fully retired, they continued their work toward healing as a couple.

STEP SIX: Prepare yourself for severe emotional reactions, both from your spouse and within yourself. You’ll need to hold on for the roller coaster ride of your life.

Until now, you’ve been able to protect yourself from the horror of what you’ve been doing, or beginning to do. Your warm fuzzy emotions have insulated you from the true nature and impact of your actions. All

the hiding, lying and secrecy have kept you from experiencing the true, legitimate and deserved consequences of your behavior. You couldn't see how bad it was because it felt so good and your deeds remained in the dark.

Now, with the lights on, you and your spouse are going to start feeling the pain like you've never felt before. And neither one of you is going to like it. But, like grief, the only way to reach the other side is by allowing yourselves to go *through* it (rather than around it).

One couple I worked with called the downward spiral that occurred whenever the spouse was triggered, "the dungeon." Everything appeared hopeless and bleak.

Get used to it. You are wise to accept the roller-coaster as normal. Think of it as an opportunity to expand your ability to tolerate uncomfortable feelings. If you've been a person who tends to avoid conflict, if you patiently hang in there, you will be stretched to grow in ways that are necessary for your personal development. Determine to become a person who deals effectively with conflict, rather than avoiding it, shutting down, or walking away.

While conflict is unpleasant, you will survive. The work you put into repairing the fallout from your infidelity will teach you how to better get to the other side of disagreements. However, since old patterns die hard, you may need the assistance of a professional.

STEP SEVEN: Seek to notice and soothe your spouse's Triggers (reminders of the affair that traumatize them). When you pass by a restaurant that you and your lover frequented, reach your hand over to hold your spouse's hand, and ask, "How are you doing?" When a movie comes on television that includes scenes of adultery, offer to change the channel. Anticipating potential triggers will mean a lot to your betrayed spouse. But when you act like nothing is wrong and ignore their mental torment, this only increases your partner's feelings of isolation and

feeds their doubts about your sincerity.

Reassure your spouse that you still find them attractive. That you love him/her and are grateful you've been given another chance. Never compare your partner with the lover and avoid speaking positively about the other man or woman. Instead, aim to replace your wounded spouse's fears with evidence of your love and commitment. Offer reassurance, kindness, tenderness, concern, and care – the opposite of what you showed during your season of betrayal.

STEP EIGHT: Make every effort to be non-defensive and offer lots of meaningful apologies. I can't say enough about the importance of you being contrite, humble, receptive, and truly sorrowful for the harm you've caused your spouse and family. Again, I recommend my book, *How to Help Your Spouse Heal from Your Affair*,⁴⁰ for specifics on effective ways to apologize in the wake of an affair. Start by doing this daily for the first few months. Only gradually taper off as your spouse indicates, yet remain ready to comfort him/her whenever a reminder of the affair pops up again. Plan to offer soothing support off and on for years to come, as needed. And, rather than resent your spouse's occasional triggers, try to view them as opportunities to heal his/her heart and keep you tender-hearted and humble.

STEP NINE: Discipline yourself to do daily "check-ins" with your injured spouse. Sincerely ask your partner how he/she is doing today. Many formerly straying spouses are so eager to get past their own guilt and the raw pain they see in eyes of their injured partners, they avoid talking about "it" (the affair). They fear that bringing "it" up again will stir the pot of anger and hurt all over again, when just the opposite is true.

This may surprise you, but based upon my conversations over the years with betrayed spouses, your spouse thinks about your indiscretions every minute of every day, especially the first few months. Over time

his/her throbbing thoughts reduce to once every hour. When you ignore the “elephant in the room,” your partner’s pain only becomes more unbearable.

When you check in, it shows that you care enough to share in his/her current level of torment. Frequent check-ins help your spouse not feel so alone in her pain and feel like you care. It takes a lot of bravery for you to risk finding out the status of your partner’s level of pain each day. Each time you ask, “How are you doing today?” your spouse will generally feel more loved, nurtured, and cared for, even if he or she initially looks angry or bursts into tears. A temporary rage-fest may ensue, but all you’ve done is tap into hurt that is already there. Soon enough, your partner’s tidal wave of emotion will settle down, soothed by the fact you cared enough to ask how he/she is doing.

Your remorse and empathy for your betrayed spouse’s daily battle to overcome the harm you’ve caused is the best salve for an injured heart and will become some of the most meaningful building blocks between you as you seek renewed trust.

CHAPTER 13

The Hope: Who You Can Become

“**A** *good name is more desirable than great riches;
to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.*”
~Proverbs 22:1

“Fools mock at making amends for sin, but goodwill is found among the upright.”
~ Proverbs 14:9

If you choose to join the ranks of the few good men and women who’ve been willing to take responsibility for their wrongs, weep over their hurtful behaviors, undo their rationalizations, and trust God despite their dizzying emotions, *you will not be disappointed.*

Should you accept this mission, you will learn the nature of true love, as you press into Him and entrust yourself to His tools—scripture, your mentor, and your spouse. Trusting the objective truths in God’s word is going to be essential in order for you to be cleansed of the lies and distortions that crept into your thinking. Remaining consistent and open with your support person will provide another rich reality check for you.

And, your spouse will function like a mirror, ever reflecting your true self back to you, lest you think you've progressed more than you have.

The ways you've damaged others will become crystal clear and the resulting insight will motivate you to grow. By painstakingly working through the wreckage where your affair-jet crashed, you will develop compassion for the wounded and a tender heart toward your shell-shocked spouse and children. The best path to emotional health is facing down your fears and failures, rather than running away.

Through humble contrition, you will learn to deal with your own issues, rather than mask your pain with blame and defensiveness. You will grow in your ability to accept personal responsibility for your choices, and your loved ones will start to feel nourished and protected, rather than pillaged and destroyed. You will no longer repeat the sins of your parents or our culture, nor abort the original journey God designed for your life. Instead you will learn how to embrace the joys and sorrows of life as a mature, principled and compassionate person.

You will become a student of yourself and begin to understand your own pains, needs, and defense mechanisms. As you learn how to tell yourself the truth, you will learn how to be more honest with your spouse and other loved ones. Rather than seething, behaving badly or shutting down, you'll find the courage to stay engaged during whatever disagreements arise in your relationships.

With agonizing but necessary effort, you will forge new communication skills with your understandably wary spouse. His/her feelings and sentiments will need to become your highest consideration. You will focus more on the impact that your words and actions have on your partner, and less on protecting your own pride, former justifications, or bruised ego. Instead, you will gain the skills of dropping your walls and listening with empathy – beyond that which you thought you were capable of. You will learn that Life is not all about you. That is part of the lesson.

It will be important for you to respect the time it takes for your spouse to recover from how your actions have traumatized him/her. This process will require much of you and will teach you what it means to behave lovingly despite the ups and downs of frivolous emotions.

You will come to like this new “you” very much; and the negative, shaming voices that used to torment you will die a slow death. The right kind of death.

In time, you will learn to trust God in a whole new way. You will learn that the goal of Life is not happiness, but to become a more caring and considerate individual, able to contribute to the lives of others, rather than one who pursues passing fancies at others’ expense. With practice and persistence, you will find yourself becoming the truly loving person you failed to grow into the first time around.

“My child, don’t lose sight of good planning and insight.

*Hang onto them for they will fill you with life and bring
you honor and respect.” ~Proverbs 3:21, 22*

Down the road, once your marriage has stabilized, you will be amazed at the ways you’ve grown in your capacity to press through conflict and learned the tough stuff that true love is made of. The renewed bond between you and your once-bedraggled spouse will bring comfort to both of you and your ministry to the discouraged and fainthearted will flourish like a well-tended garden. Despite your previous fears, you will have won fresh respect among those who knew about your failures. And, your restored, steadfast character will provide strength and hope for fellow-strugglers who look to you as an source of encouragement that they, too, can overcome a season of disgrace. You will be able to point your children to the One who can bring sight to the blind and set the mental and emotional captives free. You will have become a shining example of God’s amazing grace and His ability to deliver us from the

sins and hang-ups which so easily entangle us.

The legacy you hand your children and loved ones will be priceless. You will have taught them the meaning of steadfast commitment, genuine love, and the value of relying on God through the toughest of circumstances. You will have given them a template for what it means to lead a meaningful life by your example of endurance, humility, and restored character. They will gain the inspiration and moral courage to stand against the tide no matter what curves Life throws their way.

And concerning your spouse. The one you were convinced you had to leave for your very survival. After much hard work of rebuilding trust and the precious connections you lost (this will take years, by the way), you will find the love you were looking for so desperately. Not only with your spouse—but also with God and within yourself.

For you will have finally found what it means to become a truly loving person. You will have faced your own hidden pain, corrected your twisted thinking, healed on the inside and transformed your former disquiet into contentment. You will gain the precious jewels of self-respect, integrity, a teachable heart, and a settled spirit. You will become the thoughtful, kindhearted individual you were meant to be all along.

You will experience the reward of having a long-term intact family, celebrating birthdays, holidays, graduations and other exciting events (and sorrows) together with your life partner, instead of with some awkward, foreign configuration that makes everyone else uncomfortable. And by then, you will reap the long-term benefits of honoring committed, seasoned marital love. You will also regain your own self-respect in the process.

And, in becoming that person, you will find the love of your life. So, I ask you again: “What kind of a person do you wish to become?”

It’s up to you.

APPENDIX A

VALIDATING YOUR PARTNER'S PAIN

Many formerly betraying spouses tend to struggle to find ways to help their partners heal. We often try to “fix” or “encourage” or “reason with” using logic to try to pull our loved ones out of despair and trauma.

As you have probably discovered, these tactics are not particularly effective. Feelings are not always “logical” and nor do they respond to “reason” most of the time. They are deeply embedded in misbeliefs that were exacerbated by spousal betrayal. Your unfaithful actions likely reinforced your partner’s “worst fears,” such as:

- “This proves that I am not lovable”
- “S/he will always compare me to her / them”
- “I must have been a terrible wife for him to...”
- “I am a failure as a husband”
- “I must not be worthy of love and protection”
- “He must think I am ugly”
- “I am a total disappointment to her”
- “I am not very appealing to him. That feels awful to me”

- “I’m scared h/she will always be thinking about him/her when he’s in bed with me”

Some of the worst things you can say are:

- “It’s been three years, Why can’t you get over this?” or
- “I’ve said I’m sorry! What more do you want me to do?”
- “You should be over this by now”
- “I can’t undo what is done.”

Before your spouse can believe your sincerity, he or she needs to be convinced that you care and to some degree understand what you have put them through. Rather than try to “fix” or reason with your spouse with the “truth, you will make more progress if you work on validating your spouse’s feelings first.

When you validate his/her pain, you show that you “get” the emotional impact of your wayward actions. This helps spouses not feel “crazy” for how bad they feel. It gives your

partner the feeling that you understand him/her and are patient with their sorrow. If you can come alongside your spouse in his/her pain will help them to not feel so alone with it. If you can validate the depth of your mate’s hurts he/she will begin to trust that you care about his/her feelings and thus are less likely to repeat your hurtful behaviors again. This builds trust, something you desperately win back.

On the other hand, when you offer well-meaning logic and “reasons” your spouse should get over her pain, it communicates that you don’t care about the degree of agony he or she is in. This undermines trust.

Once you’ve done a good job of validating his pain and not trying to talk him out of it, then he will be more willing to hear and accept some meaningful apologies beyond “I’m sorry”.

SAMPLE VALIDATING PHRASES that INJURED SPOUSES NEED TO HEAR:

- I can see why you feel that way
- That must have been very painful
- That must be / have been a terrible feeling
- That must have felt horrible!
- I feel terrible for the damage I have caused you
- I did that to you!
- I don't blame you for feeling that way
- How hard!
- That must be/have been very difficult, unbearable
- What an awful thing to live with!
- You have/had every right to be angry with me.
- That is understandable
- Of course you feel/felt that way
- I can see how hurt you are

That must have made you feel: Abandoned by me

Devalued by me

Unimportant to me

Betrayed

Replaced by her in my heart

Like you don't matter to me

Invalidated

Shoved aside

Let down by me

Like you couldn't depend on me

Like I wasn't there for you

Like you didn't know if you could believe me again

My repeated lies and secrets shattered your trust in me. I deserved

that. But I hope to make it up to you.

I can see why you feel ...

In summary, many reparative phrases need to be preceded by:

- I don't blame you
- I can see why you...
- That's understandable
- No wonder you...
- Of course, you felt/feel _____
- I did _____ to you
- It's completely understandable that...

Ponder these concepts and phrases often, so that they begin to come out of your mouth naturally and easily.

APPENDIX B

HELPFUL PHRASES WHEN OFFERING A MEANINGFUL APOLOGY

When we have injured our partners by doing something that deeply wounded them and made them feel betrayed in some way, it is important to respond as soon as possible, humbly, without excuse and with sincere remorse. Sometimes all that a formerly straying spouse can think of is to say, “I’m sorry.” While that helps, it is important to expand your repertoire of apologetic phrases. Here are some samples that you might find helpful:

It was sooo wrong of me to do that to you!

I can see that what I did was very hurtful to you. I am sooo sorry.

I *wounded* you! (or) I *injured* you!

I am sooo sorry that I _____ to you.

I feel terrible about (behavior - my specific wrong actions) and that I hurt

you so badly.

I NEVER should have _____.

I was completely out of line.

I feel awful about all the lies I told you. No wonder you can’t trust me

yet.

I will be an open book. You can check my phone, know all my passwords, read my e-

mails anytime you want. I will give up whatever social media accounts I have, if that

helps you feel more secure. No more sneaking around in any way, shape or form.

This was not about you. I am the one who messed up.

I wish I had _____ instead.

I don't blame you for feeling (*betrayed, hurt, let down, wounded, injured, disappointed, unprotected, offended, etc.*) by what I did.

I was completely deceived.

That was *terrible* of me.

I'm soooo sad that I broke your trust.

You are more important to me than _____ will ever be.

You did not deserve _____ [*my hurtful actions*].

When I blamed you, it was out of my own guilt. I was the one who was in the wrong.

Instead of _____ I should have _____

When I ... (*laughed at you, betrayed you, was insensitive to you, went behind*

your back, insulted you, criticized you, made you feel rejected, etc.) ... I was

completely *wrong*. I feel just sick that I hurt you in that way.

I feel *awful* that I did that to you.

I deeply regret _____ I can see why that injured you horribly

That was sooo stupid of me! I hate that I did that to you. You mean so much

to me.

I should NEVER have _____.

I will NEVER do that again! You are too important to me.

APPENDIX B

I don't want to ever jeopardize our relationship like that ever again.

I'm sorry I didn't recognize it at the time.

I was so blind. How can I ever make it up to you?

You mean the world to me.

I hope someday you can forgive me [yet never pressure your spouse
for immediate
forgiveness].

Notes

PREFACE

- 1 See <https://iitap.com/?#> to find a certified sex addictions therapist.

CHAPTER 3

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- 3 While typical statistics for divorce in second marriages runs around 66% and for third marriages around 73%; However, the divorce rate is at least 75% for remarriages within 1 year of a divorce (often a sign a new partner was waiting in the wings). This matches the rate of divorce for remarried couples with complex blended family situations. <http://remarriagesuccess.com/second-marriage/preparing-for-marriage-e-dont-re-do-your-i-do-in-2nd-marriages-before-you-read-this/>
- 4 "Studies show that only 1-3% of affairs result in a lasting marriage." http://www.laniningenterprises.com/interesting_marriage_statistics
- 5 <https://www.yahoo.com/news/angelina-jolie-files-end-marriage-brad-pitt-attorney-145827823.html?ref=gs>
- 6 Hein, Holly. (2000). *Sexual Detours*, New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 42
- 7 Tennov, Dorothy. (1979) *Love and Limerence: The Experience of Being in Love*
- 8 A paraphrase of Joe Beam's points, <https://www.familysavvy.com/how-to-respond-to-a-cheating-spouse/>
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- 10 Brown, Emily R. (1999), *Affairs: A Guide to Working Through the Repercussions of Infidelity*, San Francisco: Josey-Bass Publishers, 13-16
- 11 Dr. Pat Love is the author of many books on sex and marriage; she refers to the concept of "barriers" heightening the intensity of sexual attraction, based on the research of Helen Fischer and others, in one of her workshops at a Smart Marriages conference.
- 12 Fisher, Helen, PhD. (1992) *Anatomy of Love*, New York: Random House. 163
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- 15 Cowper, William, English poet (1731–1800), in *The Task* (1785)—‘The Timepiece’ (Book II, lines 606–7)
- 16 Author, Juliana Breines, PhD. points out how a person’s “need for novelty” can contribute to a desire for outside trysts in this article: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-love-and-war/201403/how-likely-is-your-partner-cheat>
- 17 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-intelligent-divorce/201202/the-high-failure-rate-second-and-third-marriages>
- 18 https://www.selfgrowth.com/articles/Why_Second_Marriages_Are_More_Likely_To_Fail_The_Challenges_Of_Blending_Families.html

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- 20 Leonard, Tom. *Jaw-dropping Sex Diary that Proves Infidelity Really Does Run in the Kennedy Genes*. The DailyMail.com, September 10, 2013
- 21 Nogales, Ana; Bellotti, Laura. (2009). *Parents Who Cheat: How Children and Adults Are Affected When Their Parents Are Unfaithful*, Pompano Beach, FL: Health Communications Inc.
- 22 The New Living Translation, (2004)
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Wallerstein, Judith S; Blakeslee, Sandra. (2001). *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, New York: Hyperion.

CHAPTER 6

- 26 A reference to the 1987 thriller movie, *Fatal Attraction*.
- 27 The TNLT - “Blessed are those who have a tender conscience.”
- 28 <https://news.gallup.com/poll/121253/Extramarital-Affairs-Sanford-Morally-Taboo.aspx?version=print>
- 29 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/04/15/whats-morally-acceptable-it-depends-on-where-in-the-world-you-live/>

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on a Pivotal Theory in Social Psychology, Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.

- 31 Glass, Shirley Glass, Shirley and Staeheli, Jean Coppack. (2003). *Not "Just Friends,"* New York: The Free Press, 259
- 32 For example, according to Wikipedia and many other resources, adultery has been almost universally condemned for thousands of years by the major cultures and religions of the world. Only recently have the laws criminalizing and punishing the guilty been over-ruled or diminished in Westernized countries. Examples of small groups of primitive people where adultery is supposedly acceptable are only cited by a few anthropologists who seek these exceptions for personal reasons, in my view.
- 33 Glass, et al., *Not "Just Friends,"* 218
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CHAPTER 11

- 36 ³² "Ac-Cent-Tchu-Ate the Positive," lyrics by Johnny Mercer, music by Harold Arlen, 1944, Capital Records; received the Academy Award for Best Original Song.

CHAPTER 12

- 37 MacDonald, Linda J. (2010). *How to Help Your Spouse Heal From Your Affair: A Compact Manual for the Unfaithful*, Gig Harbor: Healing Counsel Press.
- 38 Social Science Quarterly, Volume 85, Number 1, March 2004 ©2004 by the Southwestern Social Science Association, 83
- 39 Glass, et al., *Not "Just Friends,"* 226
- 40 MacDonald, *How to Help Your Spouse Heal From Your Affair: A Compact Manual for the Unfaithful.*



About the Author

Linda J. MacDonald has been a Marriage and Family Therapist for over 30 years, specializing in helping couples and individuals recover from infidelity. She is a workshop leader, writer and playwright. Her book, *How to Help Your Spouse Heal from Your Affair: A Compact Manual for the Unfaithful* has sold over 110,000 copies since 2010. She is also known for writing a one-act play, *Broken Heart*, used at youth camps (especially Young Life), churches, street ministries and on television in Europe, with estimated audiences of 3 1/2 million world-wide.

Linda periodically leads a support group for betrayed/abandoned spouses, and enjoys teaching on such subjects as healthy forgiveness, meaningful apologies, recovering from infidelity as a couple or individual, healing from trauma, and detecting health or unhealth in dating relationships.

She received her master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy from Seattle Pacific University and has been in private practice since 1987 and has helped establish three different Christian counseling centers over

that time. Currently, she works at The Shepherd's Center for Counseling Services (aka. Shepherd's Center Counseling) with a team of quality therapists.

She's received several awards, including Best of Gig Harbor Marriage and Family Therapy Award, in 2014 & 2016. She's also listed in the 21st Edition of [Marquis Who's Who of American Women](#) and a recipient of the [Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award](#), 2019.

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Also by Linda J. MacDonald

Linda's first book has sold over 110,000 copies since 2010. She is working on another book, *Betrandoned: Healing Your Life from the Compound Wounds of Infidelity and Unwanted Divorce*. Look for it on Amazon in 2023.



How to Help Your Spouse Heal from Your Affair: A Compact Manual for the Unfaithful

Find out for yourself what the difference is between those who blow up their marriages in the aftermath of affairs and those who successfully manage to repair and rebuild them into better-than-ever relationships. Found on Amazon in paperback, Kindle, and audio formats.

