

FM: Growing a Strong Marriage Creates a Healthy Family 10: “HOW TO AFFAIR PROOF YOUR MARRIAGE”

“Marriage should be honored by all, and husbands and wives must be faithful to each other. God will judge those who are immoral and those who commit adultery.”
Heb. 13:4

Having just concluded a couple weeks dealing with meeting our spouse’s needs; I would like to spend the next couple weeks dealing with some of the storms that come to many marriages. Obviously, one of the greatest and most damaging of those storms is an affair. Breaking the marriage vows by an act of unfaithfulness such as having an emotional or physical relationship outside the marriage; is one of the most damaging known to human beings. Though tragic and regrettable; an affair is survivable. Today I want to spend some time analyzing the anatomy of an affair, and discovering ways to prevent your relationship from being victimized by an affair. I’ll try to answer 4 basic questions regarding How to Affair-Proof your Marriage.

1. THE PROBLEM (What Causes an Affair)

The Bible says in Proverbs 22:14 that: *“Adultery is a trap.”* This simply means, it’s easy to fall into. No matter how long (or short) we’ve been married, or how long (or short) we’ve been Christian; we all need to be constantly aware that the temptation to be unfaithful is ever-present. To assist in resisting this temptation, understanding some of the underlying causes of an affair might be a good place to start.

-Unmet **NEEDS**. We have been talking about needs for the past 2 weeks. When any basic need that God ordained for you to meet in your spouse falls unfulfilled; most of us will seek to have them met somewhere else, often with someone else.

-Unfulfilled **EXPECTATIONS**. Sometimes there is nothing really wrong with your life and marriage, but it somehow turned out differently than you expected. Unfulfilled expectations often lead to an attitude of “I have a right”.

As a result you will start to excuse your behavior. When you feel cheated you can almost bet that Satan will make sure somebody comes into your path that also feels cheated. You start giving sympathy to each other, and you are on your way. Unfulfilled expectations need to be talked about, honestly, sometimes with a counselor, to keep them from opening you to this savage temptation.

-Underdeveloped **SELF-ESTEEM**. Now, I hope I have made it clear that expecting your spouse to give you self-esteem is unhealthy. But as we discovered in looking at needs, wives need affection and attention, and husbands need admiration, partly because those things build self-esteem. If you as a wife fail to admire your husband, someone at work soon will! If you as a husband fail to be appropriately affectionate with your wife, someone else soon will. If each of you has your esteem firmly built on the sure foundation of Jesus Christ, then the affection and admiration you share will build and enhance and foster that healthy self-esteem.

-Unresolved **CONFLICT**. Unresolved conflict is a constant source of stress in any relationship. In a relationship where conflict exists one of two choices is usually made: you work it out, or you withdraw and avoid it. When you and your spouse are ignoring or avoiding conflict, someone will come along who really understands. I've said this before, but we husbands and wives, should never be talking to someone of the opposite sex about our marriage problems unless in a professional relationship with a counselor. It may seem innocent, even helpful, but it is dangerous.

-Uncontrolled **THOUGHTS**. We are being fed a constant diet of immorality and perverted unfaithfulness from our culture. So we must do everything in our power to keep our thoughts pure! Most affairs don't begin in the bedroom, they begin in our minds.

Most affairs, (like most sin) are the result of wrong thinking! “I deserve this, I need this, this isn’t so bad, who’s it hurting, everybody’s doing it, we’ll never get caught.”

Those are all wrong thoughts. Paul reminds us: “...*compel every human thought to surrender in obedience to Christ...*” 2 Cor. 10:5

-Unprotected **LIFESTYLE**. Living a lifestyle where you’re surrounded by people who don’t understand the Christian/Biblical lifestyle will not likely inspire you to want to maintain those Christian/Biblical standards. Expending all your energy on your job, or a hobby that leaves you nothing left to share with your spouse, or even allowing fatigue to continue endlessly will eventually break down your defenses and leave you vulnerable. If you don’t want to get stung, stay away from the bees!

-Unreliable **COMMITMENT**. I’m talking about just plain and simple, not keeping your vows. Your marriage vows are more than just a commitment between 2 people; they are also a covenant with God. Be men and women of integrity and fulfill your vows. Expect them to be challenged, (that better or worse part is real...) But when they get challenged, “re-up” your commitment! How often have you renewed your driver’s license? How often have you renewed your commitment to your spouse? We ought to do it at least that often. The second question I want to answer is:

2. THE PROCESS OF IMMORALITY (How an Affair Develops)

The process of immorality is explained in James 1:14-15 (LB) Listen:

“Temptation is the pull of a person’s own evil thoughts and wishes. These evil thoughts lead to evil actions.” James 1:14-15

Affairs don’t happen over night. People don’t just instantly fall into immorality, especially committed Christians. Even the proverbial ‘one-night-stand’ doesn’t usually just happen. There was a series of events that likely prepared you and made you vulnerable to that experience. People don’t lead moral upright lives one day, and the next, commit adultery. There is a process and here it is: (how affairs develop)

-Accepting **SINFUL THOUGHTS** in your mind is where most affairs usually start. *“as a man thinks in his heart, so is he...”* When you start to have inappropriate thoughts, whether they be fantasy thoughts, rationalization thoughts, justification thoughts, tempting thoughts, don't try to fight them off, typically what we resist, persists. Instead, take that thought and refocus it in an appropriate way toward your spouse. Plant it, invest it, take that energy, that desire and find some way to turn it appropriately toward your spouse! Put a filter in your mind, because the thought life is where Satan often starts on us. Fortunately, the mind is also the easiest place to stop an affair too. But many of us are reluctant to get serious about it at this stage, which inevitably leads to step two:

-Non-Physical **EMOTIONAL** Involvement. Here is where I see an interesting difference develop between a Christian and an unbeliever. Usually this stage doesn't last long for someone without a Christian or Biblical backbone; they move rather quickly to stage three. But for some reason, and this is maybe an oversimplification, many Christians think that because of their 'faith' they can handle what I call “An emotional Affair”. Sometimes we Christians are really good justifiers! Just because your relationship doesn't end up in bed, doesn't mean it is safe or smart, or right! This doesn't mean that persons can't have friends of the opposite sex, it just means, that when circumstances are right even these seemingly innocent relationships can become dangerous. Step 3

-**PHYSICAL** Involvement. This is where the line gets crossed. Talking, touching, kissing, hugging, are all prelude events that lead to the inevitable physical intimacy. These are wrong, and very difficult to turn around! It will take lots of strength and God's power to come back. Four

-**RATIONALIZATION** of the Affair. I'm amazed at some of the typical excuses I've heard and read. “I'm only human, just one more time, if my husband/wife only met

my needs I wouldn't have to do this. He/she needs me... it won't happen again." And this "doosie": "God will forgive us." When I hear this I want to say; "What kind of fool do you think God is?" The audacity to presume upon the grace of God to justify what God has clearly named; sin! The Bible says, God forgives us when we repent, and repent means change!! Question number three:

3. THE PATHWAY BACK TO PURITY (How to stop an Affair)

Once you have gone over the line, and you have made the decision to turn your life around, here are the steps:

-Acknowledge the **SIN**. If you have a friend who has fallen in this area you might suggest they read Ps. 51. Here is part of that great prayer of repentance following his affair with Bathsheba:

"Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt, purify me from my sin. For I recognized my shameful deeds – they haunt me day and night. Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight." Ps. 51: 1-4

David committed adultery with Bathsheba, but he also sinned against God. The first step in any redemption is honestly admitting your mistake.

-End the Relationship **IMMEDIATELY**. This is obvious, but not easy. There can be no gradual withdrawal from a sinful relationship.

-Do whatever it takes to **AVOID** all contact. 1 Cor. 10:13 says that with every temptation God will make a way for you to escape. There is always a way to escape, if you want to escape! Practice hanging up, no more contact, no more lunches, change jobs if you must, change churches if you need to, move to a different city, DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO END IT!!! WHATEVER!

Become **ACCOUNTABLE**. The only way to begin the process of reestablishing a relationship that has been broken is through absolute accountability, and in the case of an affair this usually means two things: time and money.

If you want your spouse to trust you again, you must willingly, even painstakingly become accountable to him/her. She/he must know where every dime is spent and you must be accessible to him/her at all times. Seem harsh? Ask the offended party! #4

4. THE PREVENTATIVE STEPS (How to avoid an Affair)

All I've said has to do with the past, now I want to spend our remaining minutes uncovering how to prevent an affair from happening. There are seven steps:

-MAKE a commitment to GOD'S Standard of Morality. Psalm 119:9 asks: *"How can a young person keep his way pure? By living according to God's Word."* Be willing to do what the Bible says. You have to decide whether you will live according to God's standard, or our world's standard, or some hybrid standard of your own heart's devising! What is God's standard? *"Close your heart to every love but mine. Hold no one on your arm but me."* Song of Solomon 8:6. God's standard is one man, one woman, for life!

-MAINTAIN your Marriage. Over the past weeks we've discussed a number of different ways to maintain your marriage that might be summarized thusly: "If you don't provide a magnet at home for your mate, Satan will provide a magnet somewhere else. I love Proverbs 5:15, and 18:

"Drink from your own well, my son, be faithful and true to your wife. Let her charms and breasts satisfy you. Let her love alone fill you with delight."

-MANAGE your Mind. How many times have I mentioned this morning that most affairs happen first in our minds? Resisting temptation is difficult, but replacing or refocusing our minds on positive, loving, Godly thoughts is easier. Change the channel, leave the company of dirty joke tellers, walk away, don't fantasize about what might be.

-MONITER your Media Intake. No secrets here huh? If you want to maintain a holistic relationship with God and your spouse, there is some stuff on TV, Radio, and in the movies you probably shouldn't watch anymore. What you put into your mind is likely

to come out in your actions. I'm no prude, and I watch plenty of junk I shouldn't, but we all have to work hard in this area. Did you realize that over half of all shows in prime time feature adultery as one of their themes? Did you know that in 1998, 85% of the time you saw 2 people being sexually intimate on TV they were not married, or married to someone who's not their spouse? And 94% of the time on the Soaps! It probably hasn't gotten better since 1998...

-MINIMIZE the opportunities to be tempted. Jesus once said that if your hand causes you to sin, do what with it? (Cut it off) And if your eye causes you to sin do what with it? (Pluck it out). As I look around today, we either have a whole bunch of really holy people, or we don't take Jesus very seriously, or... Jesus meant something else beside the literal interpretation of this verse. You know its number 3. Jesus meant that whatever causes you to sin, remove it from you, or probably more accurately, remove yourself from it! If you have a drinking problem, stay out of the bar. If you have a problem with pornography, find a video store that doesn't rent that kind of movie. If you have a problem with fantasy or romance novels, read a different kind of book. If you must travel alone, stay in a cheap motel where they don't offer those movies or channels.

-MAINTAIN proper relationships with the Opposite Sex. Paul writes in Eph. 5:3 *"But among you (Christians) there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality."* He also says that as a Christian we are not only to avoid evil, but also *"avoid the appearance of evil"*! Be careful not to send mixed or misleading messages to people around you. We must live above reproach, not just to maintain our witness, but to maintain our marriages.

-MAGNIFY the Consequences and **MARGINALIZE** the benefits.

The Bible clearly states that *"sin is pleasurable, for a season, but it does not last."*

Here are a few more gems to consider: *“The man who commits adultery is an utter fool for he destroys his own soul.” “Adultery will cost a man all he has.” “This is God’s will that He wants you to be holy and completely free from immorality. The Lord will punish those who do wrong.”* Remember God doesn’t settle all accounts in 30 days! It may seem like you are getting away with it, but there will be a price to pay.

This message has been directed at married individuals who want to protect themselves from the terrible destruction of infidelity. I hope others here today who are not married have learned how you might be of help to family or friends struggling with this issue. But I want to end with a special word to two groups of people:

1) Those of you who have fallen in the past in this area. I want to say as strongly as I can, you can be forgiven. Unfortunately in our society, unfaithfulness, adultery is almost always used as immediate grounds for divorce. An affair does not have to be the end of your relationship. In fact, as strange as it may sound; if handled in God’s way, and with God’s strength, God might use your affair to get your attention, and even use your unfaithfulness to make your marriage more holy! Imagine...

2) You who are single here today. I want to challenge you to save yourself for marriage. In the hundreds of people I have counseled, I have heard many times how they wished they had waited for each other. I have yet to hear from any married couple who waited, how they wished they had had sex before they got married. Learn a lesson from this message. Keep yourself pure.

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1. THE _____ (What Causes Affairs)

- Unmet _____
- Unfulfilled _____
- Underdeveloped _____
- Unresolved _____
- Uncontrolled _____
- Unprotected _____
- Unreliable _____

2. THE _____ OF IMMORALITY (How an Affair Develops)

- Accepting _____
- Non-Physical _____ Involvement
- _____ Involvement
- _____ of the Affair

3. THE _____ BACK TO PURITY (How to stop an Affair)

- Acknowledge the _____
- End the Relationship _____
- Do whatever it takes to _____ all contact
- Become _____

4. THE _____ STEPS (How to avoid an Affair)

- _____ a commitment to GOD’S Standard of Morality
- _____ your Marriage
- _____ your Mind
- _____ your Media Intake
- _____ the opportunities to be tempted
- _____ proper relationships with the Opposite Sex
- _____ the Consequences and _____ the benefits

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Study Guide

1. Spend a bit of time sharing how “affairs” are portrayed in our modern media.
2. Think about the 7 ‘causes’ of an affair. Put a star beside the one that you feel might be the most problematic in your relationship. Share some steps you might take to strengthen that area in your relationship. Share some suggestions for others that they might take to strengthen that area in their relationship.
3. Discuss and maybe even define the differences between an emotional and a physical affair. How is the damage they cause different?
4. Do you believe that every affair should automatically lead to a divorce? Why? Why not? Discuss how your group has helped you become accountable to one another? Has that been helpful? How might that be expanded for others you know?
5. Talk some about Magnifying the consequences of an affair. Then discuss some of Minimizing the benefits of an affair. Maybe make two lists, and compare them.
6. Discuss in closing how you as an individual might use what you have learned about ‘affairs’ to help someone either contemplating one, or who is in one, or who has been victimized by one.