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“What God Hath Joined Together”: In Pursuit of Healing for Shattered Marriages

Infidelity is woven throughout the fabric of our culture. From television shows to the pages of our daily newspapers, infidelity is all too common—and is being glamorized to our youth.

For example, it’s a well-established political fact that the Kennedy clan—starting with family patriarch Joseph Patrick Kennedy and his long-suffering wife, Rose, on down through sons Bobby, John (JFK), and Edward (Ted)—has been plagued by this usually secret behavior pattern. Marilyn Monroe¹ and others² have openly admitted to liaisons with the former president and his brother Bobby. “Womanizing was a family tradition,” says Kennedy biographer and Northwestern University professor Garry Wills. “The family game of ‘chasing’ is part of the self that was built up by all three imitators [sons] of their magnetic father. Passing women around and boasting of it was a Kennedy achievement.”³

Our national conscience is being seared to the point where we’re not even shocked when we hear such things. For example, when this book first went to press, an author was making the rounds on national TV talk shows talking about his latest book, *How to Cheat on Your Wife and Not Get Caught*. Sound like a hoax? No, he was serious, promising in his promotional materials to teach readers “how to lie successfully,” “how to have

the edge over a clever or suspicious wife,” “how to avoid feeling guilty,” and “how to outfox your wife’s detective.”⁴ Even as I do the revisions on this edition of *Torn Asunder*, the Christian community is still struggling with the shocking revelations in 2006 of one of its premiere pastor/leaders, Rev. Ted Haggard.

What’s more, statistical studies back up the headlines. In the general population some reports suggest an astounding 50–65 percent of husbands and an equally shocking 45–55 percent of wives have had extramarital affairs by the time they are forty.⁵ Approximately 25 percent of all couples seeking marital therapy report infidelity as their primary concern, and after initiating therapy, an additional 30 percent eventually reveal an affair in the marriage.⁶ Forty percent of couples who divorce cite infidelity as the cause, making it the most frequently cited justification.⁷

Utilizing the General Social Survey of 1994, researchers report that about 90 percent of men and women who were unhappy in their marriage felt that there were conditions where an affair could be justified. Also, as suspected, younger generations appear to be even more tolerant in their attitude toward infidelity than do the older generations.⁸ Surprisingly, only a third of males give dissatisfaction with their marriage as a reason for their affair. It appears that most males engage in infidelity primarily to address sexual disappointment, while on the other hand, two-thirds of women involved in infidelity report being unhappy in their marriage prior to the affair.⁹

Statistics within the Christian community are more difficult to come by, due to the shame placed upon such behavior by those circles. But a study of pastors sponsored by Christianity Today found that 23 percent of the 300 pastors who responded admitted to some form of sexually inappropriate behavior with someone other than their wives while in the ministry; 12 percent admitted to extramarital intercourse; 18 percent confessed to other forms of sexual contact (such as passionate kissing or fondling); and only 4 percent said they were found out.¹⁰ Another study done on pastors for ten years across the decade of the ’90s found a similar rate of infidelity. However, an additional 14 percent of the pastors admitted that they had lied on the survey, thus suggesting that the rate might

be substantially higher than it first appears.¹¹ When coupled with the fact that this survey was collected at pastoral conferences across the country (where, it is thought, terminated, adulterous pastors no longer attend), the researchers suggested that the rate of infidelity among pastors might approach 40 percent.¹²

True, the percentages among Christians are lower than those among the general population, but there is probably a large degree of under-reporting, due to the stigma attached to such behavior. Regardless of the fact that the numbers may be too low to reflect reality, they are still far too high for Christian leaders. And the sad thing is that among their parishioners the incidence of infidelity is probably close to the general population's. And that's far too high for those who carry the name of Christ.

BEN AND LYNN'S PAIN

It has been well said that people and the Word of God are the only two things worth investing one's time in. And it's people's stories that I'll be sharing—with names and certain circumstances changed, of course—in this book. As you and I walk alongside the various people we meet in these pages, we will share their pain and try to learn something about this most devastating of marital events, the extramarital affair.

As we get started, I want to share the story of Ben and Lynn. It epitomizes so many aspects of this painful subject that it will get us off on the right foot. Later in the book we'll take a more in-depth look at their story.

The "Perfect Match"

Ben grew up in a warm, affectionate family, with lots of hugs and nurturing from Mom and lots of special times with Dad, smiling and sharing hobbies. Ben had Dad's aptitude for drama and theater. It was natural for him to follow in Dad's footsteps, and numerous individuals began to talk about his abilities superseding those of his well-known father, who had done quite a bit of community theater in their area. Dad had founded a Christian radio ministry and was not threatened by that talk—he always encouraged Ben to pursue his interests. Mom and Dad were supportive emotionally and financially all along the way.

Lynn, on the other hand, lost her father to illness at the age of six. Mom and the two girls bonded together in their little family and continued on. There wasn't a lot of time to feel sorry for yourself—Mom worked long, hard hours, and the two girls did all the household chores including cooking. They did all right, though no one had time to relax, be frivolous, or have fun. Everybody became very efficient, and the place ran like a well-oiled machine.

Ben and Lynn met in college and became quick friends and dates. Ben loved Lynn and the smooth way things always ran when she was in charge. He had a tendency to be spontaneous; his mom said that was true of all good actors. Intuitively, he knew Lynn would be good for him with her organized ways.

Lynn found in Ben that warm, gregarious masculinity that she had been missing most of her life. He provided the fun and security, and she provided the efficiency and productivity. Together they seemed a natural. Graduate school for Ben (in broadcasting like his father) followed marriage, and three children came along. Lynn handled it all in stride. Ben moved into his father's organization as a producer/director and was doing extremely well.

It seemed there was no end to what needed to be done at home, and they were all constantly on the run. The kids were constantly traveling to and from games, lessons, and school. Going to a private school meant the kids' best friends didn't live in the neighborhood, and that meant additional driving. Changing clothes, putting on makeup, grabbing lunch—all were done in the car on an everyday basis.

Ben and Lynn would joke about it occasionally and lament with other couples caught in the seemingly endless round of activity. But nothing ever changed. As he lay in bed watching the late news one night, Ben glanced down the hall at Lynn carrying the folded clothes to each of the kids' bedrooms. She was a great mother, but somewhere along the line, Ben felt as if they had gotten off track. But how could he complain? He knew Lynn was exhausted after each day.

Their marriage looked good, even perfect. But Ben's doubts and sense of emptiness didn't disappear. At first he tried to put such thoughts

aside. When that didn't work, he tried to talk with Lynn, but there never seemed to be time. She was always in high gear, cooking, cleaning, and helping with homework.

“Success” at Work

Gradually, Ben became more and more involved in his new position, and his concerns about their busyness and lack of communication waned. The new position was demanding, but Ben rose to the occasion and won the admiration of his colleagues both inside and outside the studio.

Several members of the broadcast team were openly complimentary of Ben's efforts, and he found himself thriving on their recognition. His assistant producer, Whitney, especially seemed to admire his work. She was warm and fun-loving but also extremely efficient and productive. When it was one hour until air time, she could really make things happen.

Ben naturally admired that combination of talents in Whitney. She was married but had no children. She brought humor to an otherwise rather serious process. Most of the team took themselves seriously, but she was humble. Though capable, she didn't seem to be overly enthralled with herself.

They started catching meals together in groups after broadcasts. Once only the two of them and another woman could make it, and they all had fun. They talked and laughed about some of their families' recent experiences, and it was refreshing for Ben.

As he drove home, he thought about how long it had been since he had spent that kind of time with Lynn. He vowed to change that and asked her to set aside time for a date that weekend or the next. But after several last-minute cancellations for orthodontist appointments and school conferences, he gave up trying to break into Lynn's jam-packed schedule.

Things Heat Up

Soon Ben and Whitney were eating together after the broadcast more often than not. After shutting down the studio, she would stop by his office briefly to say thanks for his capable leadership. In addition, they often saw each other socially with a variety of other couples. At times, Ben felt

a little uncomfortable with her obvious admiration, but her marriage appeared secure and he dismissed his concerns.

That is, until one night after the broadcast when she stopped by to say her usual thanks. He couldn't believe the sudden rush of emotion he felt. He wanted her to linger longer, but she left quickly. On the way home he felt confused. He wished he could talk about it with Lynn, but he knew that was out of the question. *That's all Lynn needs—to hear her husband is falling for another woman.* So he put it out of his head.

To keep himself from falling for Whitney, Ben tried to put some distance between them. Apparently he was successful, because after a taping several months later, Whitney stopped by and asked if she could talk to him. He knew he should have said no, but the hurt in her voice appealed to his sense of fairness. He knew he needed to tell her why he was avoiding her.

As she sat down, Ben didn't even wait for her to bring up the subject. He blurted out that he thought he was falling in love with her and therefore needed to stay away. She shared mutual feelings of affection for him. Over the next several months it became a full-blown love relationship.

After about eight or nine months, Ben began thinking about getting out of the affair. He was concerned with Whitney's spontaneous comments around other people—they were starting to raise eyebrows. She was becoming increasingly careless about how she acted around him, and he could sense that she really didn't care who found out about their relationship. He tried to talk to her about it, but their time together always was so short and intense that he couldn't seem to get the point across.

So far, no one knew, even though Lynn had quizzed him about Whitney's behavior. The pressure was building, and he was having to increase his deceptions. Where was he? When would he be back? Why this expense? He hated lying to Lynn, but by now it had become a way of life. Whitney was worth it to Ben, or so he thought.

When she started talking about their leaving their mates and getting married, he was frightened. He couldn't do that to his reputation, his kids, his wife, his parents, his career. That *was* too much to give up for Whitney, no matter how much he loved her. Whitney started actually making plans

to leave her husband, and Ben realized that their relationship meant even more to her than it did to him. He was feeling increasingly trapped but still couldn't bring himself to end it.

Now Whitney was talking dates—an actual departure time and how they would plan their wedding. Ben became more nervous and upset. Still nobody knew about the affair. He had had some close calls but had always managed to weasel out of them. But to give it up or to go away—neither seemed necessary. *Why can't Whitney just leave it like it is?* he mused, bothered by her insistence on escalating the intensity.

Such questions generated anger and accusations from Whitney. She claimed that he really didn't love her and was backing out. He sensed a threat of blackmail. With his high profile in the radio ministry, she'd have leverage against him. She demanded more and more of his time. His anxiety was sky-high.

At home Lynn's sexual overtures turned him off. All he wanted was to be left alone. But when he was with Whitney, it was special. It sort of made up for all the pain at home.

Finally, after one of his agonizing mental back-and-forth sessions, Ben decided once and for all that maintaining the deception wasn't worth it. He knew he had to break it off.

After their next broadcast, Whitney, probably sensing his turmoil, pressed him for an actual runaway time. Even though he had prepared to end the affair, when she mentioned the actual departure, it appealed to him. *What an escape! No more having to maintain the facade.* Ben heard himself saying yes to all her plans, but in his head he knew he had to go home and tell Lynn the truth. It was now or never.

The Revelation

Lynn went berserk, as he expected. She immediately called Ben's boss, the executive producer. Until the producer and his wife arrived, Lynn stayed in the bedroom alone, sobbing.

Lynn heard the doorbell, and she came out as they walked in. It was like a torrent from a broken dam. She swore at Ben repeatedly, called him every name she could think of, asked questions about the affair, but

started swearing at him again before he had a chance to answer. The torrent of swearing, name-calling, crying, and raging finally began to subside after a couple of hours.

The producer's wife was shocked and overwhelmed. The producer himself was concerned about the ministry since Ben was so highly identified as the son of the founder and Whitney was known in the industry as working with him. He asked a lot of detailed questions that reflected his own sense of betrayal and his feeling stupid for having the wool pulled over his eyes.

Lynn learned some facts from listening to Ben talk to the producer. When Ben cried from time to time, she found herself alternating between pitying Ben and getting even angrier at him—*What a hypocrite he is*, she kept repeating to herself.

When she heard that Ben and Whitney had been planning to leave town that weekend together, she ran to the phone in the bedroom and called Whitney's husband. She wanted to kill both of them and even told Ben he ought to leave with Whitney and get out of her life. At first she screamed at him to leave the house, then she changed her mind.

Finally the producer and his wife were ready to go—but before leaving, the producer summarily fired Ben right on the spot, telling him to have his desk cleaned out before the next round of tapings. There was no appeal, no consulting with the board of directors, no suggestion of therapy to help Ben recover from his shattered moral condition and be restored to his ministry or even to his wife. Ben was so ashamed at that point that he just agreed to disappear quietly. He didn't know of any other option.

Two weeks later, they pulled out of town, Ben driving the U-Haul and Lynn in the van with a trailer and two of the kids. A 1,500-mile trip lay ahead. They were moving in with his parents in Florida. They had nowhere else to go.

A New Beginning

The questions from his parents ruined their arrival. Money was scarce, so Lynn jumped at the chance to take a long-term substitute teaching position. It was her first outside job in ten years. A humiliating departure, a

cross-country move, a job dismissal for Ben, a new career for Lynn, new schools for the kids, financial uncertainty, and the loss of their friends, home, and all that was secure—all in just three weeks!

Lynn hadn’t even had time to think about it. The surprise of Ben’s revelation left her exhausted, bewildered, and barely functioning. No one at the new location knew about the affair, but both of them worried that their secret would follow them.

Things started to look up. A bus-driving job shuttling the hordes of tourists to and from the theme parks in central Florida opened up for Ben—hardly a respectable position for someone with a master’s degree and national media experience, but at least it was something to keep the wolf from the door and to keep him busy and not depressed, he hoped. He also got involved in a discipleship/accountability program with one of the pastors at their new church. Together Ben and Lynn started seeing a counselor in central Florida.

In their initial session, the marriage therapist asked them to review the story. That started the anger and obsession all over again. Lynn couldn’t stop herself, so Ben left the room until she got control. When Ben came in for his time alone, however, she panicked. The whole thing had been such a secret before that she couldn’t stand any more secrets or “secret sessions,” even though it was with a counselor.

When the counselor suggested to Lynn that she didn’t absolutely need her husband in order to survive as a person, she agreed. After all, she had grown up in a single-parent home and had made it just fine.

But when it was suggested by the counselor that the infidelity was really a joint problem and not just Ben’s problem, the roof came off with more name calling and a lot of justifications about her behavior as a wife, his lousy deception, and so on and so on.

The balance of the sessions was spent helping Lynn see that only as she “owned” her part in the affair would she have any influence upon the reconciliation. At that point, she wasn’t sure she even wanted reconciliation. She felt attached to no one except the children.

Lynn needed to slow down and focus on how she had distanced herself in the marriage. That distancing had encouraged Ben to get involved

with another woman. Gradually, she recognized that she was mothering her children in the same way her widowed mother had. Lynn did everything; she acted as though she were a single mom, even though she was married to Ben.

Ben had thus been left to fend for himself emotionally. For Lynn, there was always something to do and plenty of little ones to hug. Somewhere along the way, Ben had “died,” stepping out of their lives little by little. When her suspicions grew and the accusations started, she went into denial about her emotional distancing and just started doing more. She figured that if she just kept chasing from one thing to another, she wouldn’t feel the pain. She didn’t have time to enjoy the reasons she chose Ben in the first place—the sweet, fun-loving spirit that she had seen so little of as a child.

Teaching allowed Lynn to live in another world for most of the day. However, coming home from work to the children, in-laws, two bedrooms, and two baths quickly brought back the harsh reality. The time between 4:00 and 10:00 PM seemed to rekindle all Lynn’s anger and anguish daily.

But several things began to happen. Lynn couldn’t stay up washing the dishes because it wasn’t her home. Second, she went to bed all stirred up—which forced her to talk to Ben. Third, they had to keep their voices low, so as not to disturb the children or his parents. That made listening easier for Ben. They had many nights of little sleep and lots of tears, but the forced intimate communication began to leave its healing mark on their relationship.

It also helped Lynn to see why Ben’s parents had been so happy to have her marry their only son. From their point of view, Lynn’s efficiency and organization was just what Ben needed to be free to pursue his career. Lynn would take care of everything, so Ben could be successful.

At first, she resented that insight. She also resented her mother-in-law’s daily practice of hugging Ben. *How can she do that when her son has created all of this havoc and heartache?* she mused bitterly. As she observed Ben’s family more closely, she began to put together the clues to what Ben was missing in their marriage. Even with all his parents’ faults, at least

Ben received emotional and physical nurturance from them, which was more than he got, she sadly conceded, from their relationship.

Meanwhile Ben had a lot of time to think while driving the tour bus, and he got in some valuable reading while waiting for his passengers to reboard. He gained numerous insights as to why he had had the affair and was gradually learning to verbalize his needs to Lynn more effectively.

Steps Forward and Backward

About that time, Ben's former radio ministry asked a couple from the board of directors who were to be in their area on business to meet with Ben and Lynn and bring a report back. At first Ben and Lynn were encouraged; at least someone remembered them back home and seemed to care. That particular couple had been very supportive back home; the wife had even volunteered to Lynn that her husband had had a "one-night stand" early in their marriage—and they had survived it, so she and Ben could too.

When they got together with the visiting couple, however, it was obvious that the other couple had never worked through their own affair. They very legalistically and judgmentally presented a long list of things that the "evil infidel," Ben, should be doing, and they completely ignored the marriage setting.

That visit set Ben and Lynn's progress back several steps. It is generally true that if another couple who hasn't processed their own affair tries to step in, it generally hurts more than helps. As you'll see throughout this book, full and proper processing of any infidelity is absolutely crucial.

For Ben the meeting stirred up unresolved issues of the affair, bringing back memories of the environment where the affair took place. He wanted to go back home and defend himself, and he was frustrated that everyone seemed to be overlooking all of his achievements and contributions to focus on his "indiscretion." He knew they were talking about him as the initiator of the affair and that Lynn was seen as the hero for not leaving him in the wake of the revelation. He was being made out as the bad guy.

Needless to say, Ben had to work through that anger and all of the

stages of his own grieving process. He realized that though he couldn't make it different in the eyes of people back home, he could work to make the marriage better for Lynn and himself, regardless of what others thought.

Digging for Answers

It was shortly after that that the counselor asked Ben to pursue his family's history of affairs and asked Lynn to focus on the males who had abandoned her through death (Dad), through her marriage (her big brother had gotten mad and distanced himself from her), and now through an affair (Ben). Such history was critical to the attitude about men she conveyed to her daughters. In addition, each received a reading assignment: for Lynn, *Back from Betrayal: Surviving His Affairs*; for Ben, *Sex in the Forbidden Zone: When Men in Power—Therapists, Doctors, Clergy, Teachers, and Others—Betray Women's Trust*.¹³

When Ben went in search of his family history, his father was surprisingly candid. He related his own temptations with infidelity, which helped explain why Dad had counseled his son, after the revelation of Ben's affair, just to go on as though nothing had happened. It was the "water under the bridge" approach: it's done, you can't change it, so don't address the issues. That conversation was revolutionary for Ben—he began to understand the influences that had been at work in him.

Finally, Ben and his family moved to their own apartment. That provided Ben with a sense of identity and represented measurable progress that they were getting back on track. Lynn breathed a sigh of relief because she did not have to live with her mother-in-law anymore. In addition, her job was turning out to be a positive experience.

Now, seven months into recovery, both Ben and Lynn were feeling as if they were going to make it. It was now safe for Ben to start grieving his losses (a process we'll examine in subsequent chapters), a process that provoked a lot of sadness in Ben. Lynn was able to comfort him when he was hurting, and she even found herself encouraging him that it was all going to work out for good.

During this time they returned to their old college campus. What a

nostalgic review of happier times! It was a reassuring reminder that they were on the right track. Their therapist began leading them through the trust-building and intimacy-creating exercises that we will expand upon in chapters 10 and 11. It was not easy for them, since they had had so much practice distancing themselves from one another, but they slowly began to get in touch with each other.

Lynn had difficulty seeing a loving touch as anything but a prelude to sex. Ben learned to be gentle and patient with her, and things improved. Ben explained that he was especially vulnerable to compliments from other women, and Lynn realized that she had hardly ever stated her admiration of him verbally. All those years with hardly any verbal affirmation had taken their toll on Ben.

After a full year of marriage therapy, Lynn is still teaching and Ben is getting itchy to get back into radio. They are not finished with their recovery, but they are progressing. They are together because they want to be, not because they had no other options. They are simply enjoying each other, not waiting to see who will last the longest this time around. They are together in total honesty; they know there is nothing left to hide.

Recently they chose to tell some close friends what they had learned over the past year about their affair and their relationship. It was a scary moment for Ben and Lynn, but the couple's affirmation made their risk worthwhile. It is probably just a matter of time before other couples in the midst of processing their own affairs will begin to seek out Ben and Lynn's assistance. Then they will be able to pass along the healing they have received.

SOME WORDS OF ORIENTATION

Cast of Characters

Affairs can go both ways. This is an important point that we should get straight at the outset of this book. *Husbands can cheat on wives, and wives can be unfaithful to husbands.* Though that may seem somewhat obvious, it's important to make that clear at the beginning.

There are three key identifiers that we'll use throughout these pages to refer to the cast of characters.

Infidel: This is the mate who strays and gets involved in an illicit relationship outside the commitments of marriage.

Spouse: This is the mate who is cheated upon, the one who does not stray.

Partner: This is the person with whom the infidel gets involved.

For reasons of clarity and consistency in this book, I've chosen to refer to the infidel as "he" and to the spouse as "she." Accordingly, the partner will most often be referred to as "she." (This book does not address the scenario where the male gets involved in a homosexual affair, although many similarities do hold for that pattern.) By choosing a convention of referring to infidels in the masculine and spouses in the feminine, I'm not saying that only men cheat on their wives—in this day of role reversals and sexual freedom, there's plenty of the reverse happening. (Young wives today are actually having affairs at a faster rate than same-aged men.)

Thus in the pages that follow, you can feel free to replace my male infidel with a female one in your mind, if it better applies to your situation.

About Sin and Guilt

As you read this book, you may get the idea that I don't think it's appropriate to call infidelity sin or to call adultery just what it is: adultery.

Nothing could be further from the truth! God has condemned this behavior, and I assume that readers agree it is wrong. However, what is most needed upon the revelation of an affair is compassion and understanding, not condemnation. That the infidel has betrayed the spouse is obvious; how to repair and rebuild the marriage is not.

Regarding Divorce

This book is not a treatise about God's will regarding divorce and remarriage. That is a long and involved subject, and not one I wish to elaborate on here. My approach here is:

1. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), and so does every person who has been through it.
2. God's goal for cases of infidelity is forgiveness and reconciliation.

3. However, due to the spouse’s own background, history of abandonment or abuse, fear of processing the tough issues, and so on, infidelity might make a marriage irreconcilable. Thus, even though all possible efforts to avoid divorce should be made, adultery is a biblical ground for divorce (Matthew 19:1–12). It is important to understand that many people will simply run from their problems and choose this option. But the purpose of this book is to show them another way.
4. Divorce is never a healthy way to resolve problems in the marriage. It might appear to be the best escape to one who is suffering, but it never is. The victims of adultery should make the effort to work through the recovery process outlined in this book, even if a divorce does occur. Processing the unfinished business (unresolved issues) of a finished marriage is crucial. Failure to do so generates high risk for future marital and relational failure.

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

This book is intended, in one sense, for all married people. We all know that infidelity can be a danger for all of us, given our fallen human nature. But primarily it’s written for those who have been touched by infidelity already—whether their marriage is currently in trouble or has been split by it in the past. It’s for those who are now divorced or separated, to help them understand what happened in their marriage. And it’s for those who, as professional counselors or close friends, want to help those stricken by this most lethal of marital problems.

Ideally this book will address the needs of those couples who, following the revelation of the affair, want help in putting their shattered marriage back together. I decided to write this book for those of you who have no one to help you in the recovery process. This subject is so sensitive and complex that most couples will need (or desperately want) some outside assistance. As one couple declared, “We never would have made it without counseling! I’m almost sure we would have given up or not known the path to follow.” Unfortunately, trained counselors are not always available, so I have tried to be very specific and direct and to lay out the material in a clear, self-help fashion. It has been organized according to the

optimum process of recovery.

For those of you who are fortunate enough to be in a good therapy program, this book will assist you as a guidebook. You will find it reassuring and helpful as a way to check your progress.

For those of you who have not yet told anyone about your secret affair—whether it was in the past or is currently in progress—this book will provide you with the courage to disclose the affair and to get on with recovery. You'll find that to not confess will only lead to further destruction of your life and reputation.

It Ain't Easy

As any couple in this process knows, picking up the pieces of your marriage is not easy, quick, predictable, rational, or linear; people involved in infidelity rarely act rationally. Affairs do strange things to people. A sense of normalcy is lost. New boundaries have to be established.

If you happen to come across this book after some time has passed in your reconciliation process, you might be somewhat discouraged by the distance you have yet to go. If that's your feeling, view this as a marker along the road. You may indeed have some distance to go, but don't be discouraged because this is no easy journey. Several of the couples I've counseled through affair recovery affirm the idea that if the topic is still painful for one or both of you to talk about, then you have probably not talked about it enough. There are plenty of places to jump in. Make the bad experience bear good results by reading this material together.

Most of the time, the processes described in this book will appear clear, easy, and straightforward. In other places, your feelings will say that nothing could be further from the truth. Repairing the damage done to the marriage is exceedingly messy and doesn't always follow a simple path. But don't be deterred. Stay with it. If you do, you will make it through this terrible storm.

To those of you who have recently discovered your spouse's affair, now is *not* the time to decide whether to reconcile your marriage. You're experiencing too much anger and hurt. You will eventually go through much of what I describe here, whether the marriage stays together or not. So get

started on processing; you can decide whether you are going to stay later.

This book addresses many volatile subjects. It deals with fragile and unstable components of both parties’ psyches and their relationship. There is plenty of ammunition here with which you may either hurt your mate or help him/her (and yourself) heal. The choice of how to use it is up to you.

To Spouses Who Are “Alone”

If you want to put your marriage back together but your mate doesn’t, or your infidel remarried after you divorced years ago, you will find help and relief here. There are ways to encourage a stubborn spouse or infidel to budge, which we’ll discuss in chapters 7 and 10. For those who are already divorced, this book will offer a way for you to work through your pain, a way to do “retroactive therapy” in your own heart.

Perhaps in your situation the infidel has returned to the marriage and stopped seeing the partner but refuses to process the affair. In this case, the infidel often pretends that the problem is solved because the marriage has stayed intact. But if nothing is altered, the marriage will undoubtedly maintain the same patterns that fueled the affair in the first place. If that’s your situation, you will receive encouragement and direction from this material.

A couple of suggestions are in order for those of you who are going it alone.

1. Don’t use this book as a weapon or read it solely with the hopes of getting your spouse to read it. *You* apply it to your relationship. Your changed attitude will be message enough for him/her to notice that something significant is happening. If you have the opportunity to speak of the changes you are making, do so; but only speak for yourself—what you are doing, what you have learned, how you are feeling about what’s going on inside of you and in the marriage. Leave your spouse out of it. He might not be ready yet. An appropriate statement might be, “I’m reading a great book about affair recovery that is changing my entire perception about

what happened in our relationship. I knew I was part of the cause, but I never fully understood how I contributed to what happened.” If he’s interested, he’ll let you know, especially after seeing real change in your life.

2. If your spouse has left the marriage permanently (for example, you are divorced, and he has remarried) but you think there has never been closure to the affair and its resulting damage, I would encourage you to read this material and pursue a discussion in a face-to-face meeting with your ex, in the presence of an appropriate third party.

To Those Who Offer Support to Friends

Whether you are a licensed professional, a pastor, or simply a friend attempting to support a couple working through their reconciliation, the following suggestions are offered:

1. *Watch out for your own stuff.* Most of us have beliefs, feelings, and experiences that prejudice us when we deal with other peoples’ relationships—that’s what I mean by “stuff.” Never will your marriage be more vulnerable than when you are trying to assist a couple in their recovery from infidelity. You will find yourself working through the same issues with your own spouse. As I prepared this book, I was affected that way and counted it as healthy. We could all use stronger marriages.
2. *The survival of your friend’s marital relationship is not dependent upon you.* In most cases, the couple you are working with chose to marry each other before you were in the picture. You didn’t bring them together, and you can’t keep them together. You must set the couple free to pursue their own course. At times you will want to take control of their recovery process, but you must refrain for their sake.
3. *They must never be able to draw you into their relationship* (a process technically called triangulation). If that happens, each will individually attempt to align you with his or her side. Remember, the infidelity was an inappropriate triangulation, and so is an attempt to overly involve yourself.

4. *Keep the two of them talking to each other.* Don't maintain secrets that one party shares with you hoping to align you with his or her side. Remember, infidelity was the worst secret that could afflict a marriage, and more secrecy doesn't help. At times your neutrality may appear brutal, especially since you're probably closer to one party than the other (e.g., your high school friend who got married). You will feel the urge to intervene and provide protection, but you need to resist it.
5. *If you are feeling more exhausted in the struggle than they are, you are inappropriately involved.* That is not to say that some of your time with them won't be exhausting, but you need to gauge your degree of involvement. You shouldn't work at it harder than they do.
6. *Keep in mind that the material in this book is the practical “how to,” to assist in the forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration of the marriage.* It should never be viewed as a replacement for what God can do. As you seek to support your friends or counselees, be prayerful and stay close to God's Word. Forgiveness and reconciliation are always miracles. Only God can heal!

To Adult Children of Parental Affairs

Some of you reading this material are looking for clues to what happened in your own parents' marriage, which was split or shaken by infidelity. Children rarely address their parents' marital affairs until they are married themselves. Since you certainly want your marital relationship to be different from your parents' experience, keep reading. This is surely an appropriate time for you to get involved in this material.

You might find your perceptions to be quite different from those of your parents. I encourage you to talk with them after (and even while) reading this book. They are probably more willing to talk about their experience at this juncture than they were when you were young.

Be open to hearing both sides of the story. If the affair resulted in an end to your parents' marriage, this might be the first opportunity to bring closure to the wounds of long ago. Sit down with them individually and listen. Ask them questions in order to draw out their feelings about it and hear what lessons they've learned. Don't let the “secret”

be buried alive, only to crop up later. You are doing the right thing to explore it. Affairs do run in family trees, and they tend to continue unless the cycle is interrupted.

Adult children of parental affairs are at particular risk to repeat the pattern. The most important motivator of any affair is the deep desire to be nurtured and loved unconditionally. That includes many components, such as touch, attitude, playfulness, romance, sex, and appreciation. Some adult children of parental affairs have huge agendas, or needs, that could never be met by any spouse—and they bring them, like baggage, into the marriage. If that description fits you and you are married, don't put off working on this issue any longer.

To Those Who Are Thinking of Having an Affair

That heading is probably a shocker to a lot of Christians. Even to acknowledge that people would consciously think about having an affair seems somehow to validate having one. Not so. In our culture, almost everyone has thoughts about affairs. If one is not thinking of straying, he or she is fearing that the spouse will have one. It's time to stop denying the prevalence of affairs in the Christian community. We need to come out of the closet and address this problem in the light of day.

If you are

- thinking of having an affair with someone you know at work or in your social or church circle
- hoping that your spouse will suffer an auto accident, cancer, or other turn of fate, so that you can have a “legitimate” affair
- hoping your spouse will have an affair so that you can be free to be on your own
- wishing the children were gone so that you could get out of the marriage without hurting them
- thinking other “pre-infidelity” thoughts

—then you desperately need the material in this book. By entertaining such thoughts, you are simply hoping that your spouse will magically “get

the message” of your dissatisfaction with the relationship. Feeling that you can’t get the message across to your spouse any other way, you are thinking of having an affair to get free of the marriage. Such thinking is a ticking time bomb in your life, and you need to defuse it at once or suffer the consequences.

Do you feel ashamed, overwhelmed, unheard, and uncared for? You might possibly feel trapped, exhausted, numb, and in despair over the fact that you are aging, for example. Maybe you are disappointed and angry at your spouse’s failure to meet your needs. You feel isolated—nothing seems to get through to your mate. In general, you feel “dead” and wonder if you have any passion left. Everything is a duty, a drag, and there are few “bright lights” in your life. Even though others would be surprised, even shocked, at your appraisal of your marriage, you assume it’s true in theirs as well.

My encouragement is to stay in touch with your emotions. Affairs never solve the problems that cause them. They can’t; by their very nature, affairs are artificial worlds in the midst of reality. In your head you know that, but you find much emotional satisfaction in fantasizing about a perfect relationship outside the bonds of marriage.

Could I suggest a better way to find satisfaction? Read this material. Let it soak down into your soul, your emotions, your heart. It’s been tested in real life and represents many, many peoples’ experience.

As you’re reading, talk about the material with someone close—your spouse or a best friend. Hopefully, it will provoke interaction between you and your spouse that will lead to significant change and enhanced emotional benefit to both of you.

LOOKING AHEAD

In the next two chapters we’ll start to sort out the chaos that surrounds any marriage where infidelity has crept in. Not all affairs are alike, and finding out which of the four types has struck your relationship is the first important step toward recovery.

Notes

1. David Kramer, "The Kennedy Complex: Why They Womanize," *McCall's*, August 1991, 44.
2. "Woman Says She Was JFK's Mob Liaison," *Chicago Tribune*, October 7, 1991, sec. 1.
3. Kramer, "The Kennedy Complex," 45.
4. "How to Cheat on Your Wife—And Not Get Caught!" *Radio-TV Interview Report*, September 15, 1991, 34.
5. Grant L. Martin, "Relationship, Romance, and Sexual Addiction in Extramarital Affairs," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 8, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 5.
6. Paul R. Peluso, ed., *Infidelity: A Practitioner's Guide to Working with Couples in Crisis* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 2.
7. *Ibid.*, 101.
8. *Ibid.*, 2.
9. *Ibid.*, 3.
10. Raymond T. Brock and Horace C. Lukens Jr., "Affair Prevention in the Ministry," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 8, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 44.
11. D. J. P. Huson, "Predictors of Infidelity among Pastors" (Master's Thesis, Biola University, 1998).
12. Dave Carder and D. J. P. Huson, "Emerging Trends in Pastoral Infidelity" (paper presented at Moody Bible Institute's annual Pastor's Conference, Chicago, Illinois, May, 1999).
13. Jennifer P. Schneider, *Back from Betrayal: Surviving His Affairs* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988). Peter Rutter, *Sex in the Forbidden Zone: When Men in Power—Therapists, Doctors, Clergy, Teachers, and Others—Betray Women's Trust* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1989). For other helpful sources, see appendix D.