

TRUE BETRAYAL

Recovering from the Betrayal of Your Spouse's Sexual Sin

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“TRUE BETRAYAL”

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WHAT IS G4?

G4 groups provide a small group atmosphere where individuals invest a season of their life in overcoming a particular life-dominating struggle of sin or suffering. They provide a safe environment where members learn insights and skills that will allow them to more fully engage in biblical community.

G4 has 7 core values which guide each group:

Bible-Based & Gospel-Centered: Programs and information do not change people. God changes people through the power of the Gospel and the wisdom of His Word. The relational structure of G4 Groups is the vehicle God has ordained to transport the Gospel and Scripture into the lives of His beloved, enslaved, and hurting children.

Recognize the Difference Between Sin & Suffering: G4 Groups recognize that struggles of sin are different from struggles of suffering in terms of cause, dynamics, emotional impact, relational influence, and other ways. While every believer is simultaneously a saint, sinner, and sufferer, there are fundamental differences (practically and theologically) between a struggle an individual does (sin) and those that happen to the individual (suffering).

Built On Honesty & Transparency: The courage to be honest about our suffering or sin is often the essential expression of faith God calls for in overcoming a life-dominating struggle. G4 Groups create an environment that fosters honesty and transparency by incarnating the love of God and protecting confidentiality within the group.

Uphold Confidentiality: We all have a story to tell. G4 Groups are a safe place where group members can be open, honest, and transparent without fear that their issues will be shared outside of the group. G4 group members commit to hold in confidence things shared within the context of the group environment.

Avoid Struggle-Based Identity: We recognize that when an individual has struggled with one issue for an extended period of time that struggle begins to define them. G4 Groups are structured in content, duration, and philosophy to alert the participants to this temptation and guide them away from it. G4 Groups strive to teach and model what it means to live out of an identity as a dearly loved child of God.

Blend Discipleship, Accountability, & A Guided Process: G4 Groups are more than a Bible study on a given subject. They develop a practical theology of their subject during the group study and guide members through an intentional process during the personal study while the members hold each other accountable.

Transition Into Larger Small Group Ministry: The goal is for each G4 Group member to be in a general small group within a year. Group members may choose to be a general small group the whole time. If desired, at "graduation" the G4 Group leader would direct the participant to a small group with a leader who has completed personal study and counseling exercises for that area of struggle. It would be the participant's choice whether to disclose that was the reason for choosing that leader's small group.

The 9 Steps of G4

We do not believe there is a one-size-fits-all solution to the struggles of life. Neither do we believe there is any magic in these particular steps. However, we do believe that these steps capture the major movements of the Gospel in the life of an individual. We also believe that it is through the Gospel that God transforms lives and modifies behavior as He gives us a new heart.

In G4 Groups we attempt to walk through the Gospel in slow motion with a concentrated focus upon a particular life-dominating struggle. We do this in a setting of transparent community because we believe God changes people in the midst of relationships.

We believe that the Gospel speaks to both sin (things we do wrong) and suffering (painful experiences for which we are not responsible) to bring peace, wholeness, and redemption. We also believe that every person is both a sinner and a sufferer. However, we believe the Gospel is best understood and applied when we consider how the Gospel relates to the nature of our struggle. The nine steps below are those used by G4 Groups to address struggles of sin and suffering.

| Sin-Based Groups | Suffering-Based Groups |
|--|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 1. ADMIT I have a struggle I cannot overcome without God.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 1. PREPARE yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually to face your suffering.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 2. ACKNOWLEDGE the breadth and impact of my sin.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 2. ACKNOWLEDGE the specific history and realness of my suffering.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 3. UNDERSTAND the origin, motive, and history of my sin.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 3. UNDERSTAND the impact of my suffering.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 4. REPENT TO GOD for how my sin replaced and misrepresented Him.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 4. LEARN MY SUFFERING STORY which I use to make sense of my experience.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 5. CONFESS TO THOSE AFFECTED for harm done and seek to make amends.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 5. MOURN the wrongness of what happened and receive God’s comfort.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 6. RESTRUCTURE MY LIFE to rely on God’s grace and Word to transform my life.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 6. LEARN MY GOSPEL STORY by which God gives meaning to my experience.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 7. IMPLEMENT the new structure pervasively with humility and flexibility.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 7. IDENTIFY GOALS that allow me to combat the impact of my suffering.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 8. PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 8. PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 9. STEWARD all of my life for God’s glory.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 9. STEWARD all of my life for God’s glory.</p> |

To learn more about G4 Groups visit www.summitrdu.com/g4

“Where Do I Begin?”

In life and counseling, finding the starting point can be difficult. Life is fluid enough that identifying where to begin with a life-dominating struggle can feel like finding the beginning of a circle. In order to help you with this very important question, Freedom Groups have developed a progression of five levels of starting points.

A struggle in one of the higher categories may have many expressions or contributing causes in the lower categories, but unless the upper level concerns are addressed first (i.e., substance abuse should be addressed before conflict resolution skills), efforts at change have a low probability of lasting success. The degree of self-awareness usually increases as you go down the page. The level of denial usually increases as you move up the page.

1. **Safety** – When the basic requirements of safety are not present, then safety takes priority over any other concern. Safety is never an “unfair expectation” from a relationship. If safety is a concern, then you should immediately involve other people (i.e., pastor, counselor, or legal authorities).

This category includes: thoughts of suicide, violence, threats of violence (to people or pets), preventing someone from moving freely in their home, destruction of property, manipulation, coercion, and similar practices.

2. **Substance Abuse / Addiction** – After safety, the use of mind or mood altering substances is the next level of priority concern. Substance abuse makes the life situation worse and inhibits any maturation process. The consistency and stability required for lasting change are disrupted by substance abuse.

This category includes: alcohol, illegal drugs, prescription drug not used according to instructions, inhalants, driving any vehicle with any impairment for any distance, and similar activities.

3. **Trauma** – Past or present events resulting in nightmares, sleeplessness, flashbacks, sense of helplessness, restricted emotional expression, difficulty concentrating, high levels of anxiety, intense feelings of shame, or a strong desire to isolate should be dealt with before trying to refine matters of character or skill. Trauma is a form of suffering that negatively shapes someone’s sense of identity and causes them to begin to constantly expect or brace against the worst.

This category includes: any physical or sexual abuse, significant verbal or emotional abuse, exposure to an act of violence, experience of a disaster, a major loss, or similar experience.

4. **Character** – This refers to persistent dispositions that express themselves in a variety of ways in a variety of settings. Because both the “trigger” and manifestation change regularly and hide when convenient, it is clear that the struggle lies within the core values, beliefs, and priorities of the individual. Skill training alone will not change character.

This category includes: anger, bitterness, fear, greed, jealousy, obsessions, hoarding, envy, laziness, selfishness, pornography, codependency, depression, social anxiety, insecurity, and similar dispositions.

5. **Skill** – With skill level changes there will be a high degree of self-awareness that change is needed in the moment when change is needed. However, confusion or uncertainty prevents an individual from being able to respond in a manner that it is wise and appropriate.

This category includes: conflict resolution, time management, budgeting, planning, and similar skills.

Hopefully, after reading these five points, you will have less of a “jump in anywhere and try anything” mentality towards your struggles. Change is hard but knowing where to start helps to establish confidence. Remember, you are not alone. Christ will meet you and the church will walk with you at any of these five points.

A more detailed version of this material can be found at bradhambrick.com/traige2.

Step I

“What Am I Supposed To Do with This?”

PREPARE yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually to face your suffering.

“Living in denial about my spouse’s sin would be more costly than anything God would take me through in the restoration process.

God is good for bringing me to the point of knowing what has happened.

Therefore, I will put myself in the best physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual position possible to face my suffering.”

Memorize: Jeremiah 7:9-11 (ESV), “Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’ – only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Commit adultery, swear falsely” – God understands the betrayal of sexual sin and being lied to by one you love.
- “Stand before me in this house” – God understands the way sexual sin can change your perception of your home.
- “We are delivered” – God has heard broken promises that his bride (the church) would turn from her false lovers.
- “Only to go on doing” – God has had to respond when those promises repeatedly come up empty.
- “Den of robbers” – This experience of yours was on Jesus’ mind when He cleared the temple (Matt. 21:12-13).

Teaching Notes

“I heard Gary come in, and I heard the boys greet their father. Normal sounds. But this wasn’t a normal household. Nothing was normal anymore. I wasn’t normal. All I could do was cry and ask questions. I was obsessed. Everyone would be fine if I could just move on. They could all just live their normal little lives with all the other normal people (p. 41)... Nothing surprised me anymore. Except me—I surprised me all the time (p. 177).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

“During times of great difficulty, it’s common for people to neglect their own self-care... Feelings of shame or embarrassment often prevent a partner from turning to resources that could normally be a source of comfort (p. 105)... “[Testimony] I fluctuate between wanting to forgive him and filing divorce papers. I have always been the ‘stable’ one in our relationship and, recently, I feel like I’m going crazy (p. 37)... In general, it’s advisable not to make major decisions in the early days, unless you need to leave for your safety (p. 32).” Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

“Co-addicts may assume that when the sex addict gets into recovery, all their troubles will be over. They may think their problems are due solely to the sexual acting out and when that stops all other difficulties will stop. The problem is that they expect the sex addict to do all the work of recovery (p. 173).” Mark Laaser in *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*

“Most marriages in which both partners are committed to making the partnership work and go through the confession and repentance process usually survive and often become even more intimate (p. 347).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

“The spouse needs to realize he or she can contribute to the pain in many ways as well. One of the most common is whom they tell about the adultery and how they share that information... The truth is that those who are told all the details about the infidelity are rarely told all the details about the restoration process as it progresses. Yet we expect those same people to follow us on our path toward healing with only half the information. It is an unfairly placed burden on those who love us and want to protect us from harm (p. 117)... As a general rule of thumb, we suggest that as much of the pain as you have shared with others, that much of the healing process also needs to be shared with those same people (p. 252).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

Embedded Study

You were not ready for this... and you should not have to be. Being ready would have meant living in fear, resentment, or numbed denial. Being caught off guard and overwhelmed is the best possible and healthiest response to sexual sin by your spouse. That doesn't lessen your pain but it should help alleviate some of the sense of shame and failure you may feel.

In these early stages, you do not know if you know the whole truth and you don't know how to discern when you will have learned everything you need to learn (or even how to discern what you do and don't need/want to know). That is an incredibly disorienting position to be in. It's like being spun around 20 times, given a broken compass, and told to run North as if your life depended on it.

At this stage in the process, sexual sin is being used as a broad term, encompassing pornography, emotional affairs, and adultery. Some distinctions between these will begin to be made in Step 2. Right now you do not yet confidently know that your spouse has been completely honest about his/her sin. Therefore this chapter will focus on how to prepare yourself to receive the information that will need to be disclosed.

This chapter is meant to give you a North-ward rail to hold on to at a very confusing time. The True Betrayal study is meant to be studied with a trusted companion as you walk (not run) North. This trusted companion is not your spouse, at least not yet. Neither of you are objective enough at this stage in the journey to serve as each other's primary companion in this struggle (that is undoubtedly part of the sting and shame associated with sexual sin in marriage).

A pastor, counselor, or G4 Group should be involved in the journey you and your spouse are on. If not, it is likely you will take on a parental role towards your spouse, give up unnecessarily, or declare things resolved prematurely in order to "close the book" on this uncomfortable chapter. Each responses may feel right (i.e., "My spouse needs to know how wrong his/her actions were and to be held accountable" or "I just can't handle this right now, so I want out" or "I am supposed to forgive and move on, right?"), but each usually leads to an unhealthy recovery.

This material assumes an initial level of admission, repentance, and willingness to restore the marriage on the part of your spouse. If this is not present, you will receive some guidance for your personal-emotional recovery, but may also want to consult Appendix A on "How to Conduct an Intervention for Sexual Sin."

How Do I Prepare?

If it is right and healthy for you to be shocked, then what does it mean to prepare? To help you on this step, we have five key areas for you to consider:

1. Don't Hurry or Give Up
2. Create Realistic Expectations
3. Find the Right Kind of Community
4. Establish Non-Negotiables
5. Care for Yourself Physically

Doing these things "right" will not make the journey easy. Part of the challenge of recovering from the betrayal of sexual sin is that right actions are frequently not accompanied by circumstantial or emotional relief. When you diet well you can see the numbers on the scale go down. When you budget well you can see you debt decrease or savings increase. But even when you respond well to the betrayal of sexual sin, it still hurts and you are left wondering "Am I doing this right?"

Unless you recognize this tendency you will change directions a dozen times in the coming weeks. The result will be that you feel like you are right back where you started. This is not too far from the truth. If you take five steps West get frustrated and go seven steps South feel guilty and take four steps North before feeling taken advantage of and run six strides East and finally collapse to cry (or rage) only to look up and realize you are only two steps South of where you started and too exhausted to take another step. The goal of this seminar and notebook is to help you escape that trap.

I. Don't Hurry or Give Up

"Point me in the direction of 'better' and let me go. If 'better' doesn't exist, tell me now so I can quit hoping." The news of your spouse's sexual sin can feel like a siren calling for intense, immediate action or like a tragedy that calls for a ceremony with the finality of a funeral. It is big, powerful news and taking time to learn the truth does not seem to match the magnitude of your emotions or desire to act.

A. Avoid Threats. It is very easy to get caught up in saying “what I ought to do” or “what I have every right to do.” Anger is an appropriate response to the betrayal of sexual sin. Threats, however, only reinforce how “unsafe” and “uncertain” you feel. In the coming weeks and months, it will be important for both of you to not speak in coded language.

It is better to say, “I am angry... I feel hurt... I don’t feel safe with you... I don’t believe anything you say... I don’t know if I am willing to remain married,” than to say, “What if I sleep with your best friend, maybe I should send him/her some pictures on Facebook... Don’t think I haven’t had chances to cheat, maybe next time I’ll take my chance... You were willing to risk our family for a sexual thrill, so don’t think I’ll let you see the kids if we divorce.”

While simple truth doesn’t seem to communicate all that you are experiencing, threats muddle rather than clarify what you are trying to communicate. The ensuing conversation becomes about Facebook, who propositioned you, or child visitation schedules rather than the impact of your spouse’s sexual sin on you and the marriage. You walk away more convinced your spouse doesn’t “get it” and your spouse walks away thinking about the content of the threats more than the root of his/her sin and the change required.

“Making your ambivalence clear at the early stages of recovery is important for the relationship. I’m not all the way in this relationship and I’m not all the way out is an honest way for the addict to know exactly where you stand. This gives the addict an opportunity to ‘walk the walk’ of recovery and recognize that the relationship is on thin ice and that he or she needs to put recovery first (p. 49).” Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

B. Be Patient Making Changes. The revelation of sexual sin drops like a bomb. Unless you make some significant decision to change, it can feel like you are condoning or ignoring the explosion. When a child is lost in a public place the first thing we tell them to do is to stay put (don’t run and, thereby, get more disoriented) and look for someone who can help (a police officer or employee). Similar advice applies after the discovery of sexual sin.

Ill-informed, bold changes can add to the confusion in your life and marriage. If you realize these initial changes are not a good fit later, you can easily feel like you are “going back on your word” or are “being weak” when you reverse or alter them. The most important thing you can do as the dust settles is to find someone to help. More will be said about this under “Right Kind of Community” below. The best initial action is to go from isolated to guided, rather than unaware to running in the dark.

“To abandon the relationship at this point, however, is akin to having a broken bone and not setting it. Broken relationships require attention as well. Failure to attend to this self-care can be crippling to future relationships. And if there are children involved, problems are inevitable. Whether you go or stay, it makes no difference. Mending will be required. And as painful as it is, there will be less pain and more effective healing when the fracture is dealt with as soon as possible (p. 54)... The irony of using divorce as a way to escape the inevitable grief is that it creates more (p. 59)... You’ll likely feel pressure from others to end your relationship as though that would end the emotional turmoil you’re in... Most therapists suggest you make no significant changes during the first year of recovery (p. 75).” Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

One of the more difficult decisions is about separation. There are a few situations where immediate separation is advisable.

- The sexual sin is against another member of the household.
- The offending spouse continually denies clear evidence of an on-going sexual relationship.
- The offending spouse has an active history of physical abuse or controlling family resources.
- The offending spouse persistently refuses to adhere to the non-negotiables (section #4 below).

Otherwise, separation or divorce become the focal point of life and supplants the priority of removing the sexual sin. The driving question becomes “What does the offending spouse have to do in order to come back home or stop the divorce proceedings?” The couple gets distracted many by tertiary decisions (finding an apartment, who pays what bills, time with kids, how often to talk on the phone, etc...) rather than addressing the sexual sin.

The goal for decision making during this time is to keep the main thing the main thing. Pre-mature separation, attacking the adultery partner, telling your spouse’s parents or friends, or having a revenge affair all accomplish one thing—replacing the original sexual sin as the focal point of change.

C. Don’t Excuse or Deny Sin. If the prior two points were about “don’t hurry” this one is about “not giving up.” Surrender can come in two varieties: denial or excuse. In the first variety you might try to live as if this never happened; equating forgetting with forgiveness (much will be said about forgiveness in chapter seven; while God does call us to forgive that is not the only, or even prominent, thing God is concerned about in your initial response to your spouse’s sexual sin).

Read John 8:32. It is easy to doubt this passage after the revelation of your spouse’s sexual sin. It is easy to think, “I know the truth now, but I don’t feel free. I feel weighed down and trapped. Knowledge isn’t power. It sapped my strength.” But ignorance is not freedom. Ignorance is fiction. Part of preparing yourself to face your suffering is being able to thank God that He has pulled you out of the darkness of ignorance. In the same way that God is pulling your spouse out of darkness of sin (John 12:46).

In the second variety of surrender you explain away your spouse’s sin in amoral, blame-shifting, or fatalistic categories. There are many versions of this kind of thinking.

- “This is just what men/women do.”
- “I must not have met his/her needs, so this is really my fault.”
- “Maybe if I just have more sex or be more romantic he/she will stop.”
- “Maybe I don’t deserve to have a faithful spouse. After all, I’m not perfect either.”
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

Read Galatians 5:14 and James 2:8. When we make sin about us (blaming gender, love tanks, sense of worth, etc.) we have radically redefined sin, and, thereby, the entire gospel. The entire law, including to love God with all our being, is summarized in the command to “love you neighbor as yourself.” In sexual sin people use their neighbor to love themselves so they can feel like God – highly praised and affirmed. Your spouse’s sexual sin was first and foremost an affront to God. Any other interpretation you give to his/her sin (like the examples above) will lead to a short-lived and ineffective solution, and will transform any future attempts at marriage enrichment into acts of sexual-sin-prevention which make it very difficult for you to resist bitterness or insecurity.

2. Realistic Expectations

“What am I allowed to expect? Is it too much to ask her to change cell phones? Is it wrong to expect him/her never to masturbate again? Can I expect him/her to fully invest in his/her recovery while at the same time pursuing me? Is it selfish to want to be pursued like that?” The questions can go on and on, and these are just the questions you have for yourself. The litany of questions you have for your spouse will be a subject for Step 2.

At this stage in the process, it is enough to recognize that you and your spouse are not on the same time table. Your spouse has known about the sexual sin much longer than you have. What was shocking for you to learn was probably a relief for them to have known (if they are repentant). What is “breaking news” to you is history for them. The battle you just entered is a battle they have been fighting (to some degree) for some time.

These factors greatly impact expectations. In Step 2 you will begin the process of learning the history your spouse (and you) has been living. In Step 3 you will learn more about how these separate time tables affect your emotions, your sense of history-identity, and your marriage. In order to have realistic expectations you begin by recognizing that the two of you are not “on the same page.” You are just now realizing why you have been on separate pages.

A. Self. You can expect yourself to be all over the place. Angry at the sin. Hurt by the betrayal. Eager to forgive and move on. Sad for your loss. Overwhelmed to the point of being nauseous. Ready to divorce. Yearning for when things were good (even if it was only during dating). Fearful that your whole marriage has been a lie. Questioning your judgment about everything, because if you missed this what else did you miss. Wondering if your thoughts will ever stop. Depressed because you don’t think things will ever be the same. Insecure and wanting to be held or to have sex to re-affirm the marriage. Disgusted at the thought of being touched or intimate again. Then you get angry again and prepare for another ride on the emotional merry-go-round.

What most people want and can’t have in this situation is control. That is what makes most of the false interpretations in the previous section appealing – it gives some sense of control (i.e., “If I can fill his/her love tank by speaking his/her love language and see the world through the pink/blue lens of his/her gender, then I am safe from experiencing this pain again.”). It makes sense, but it is always a bad trade to exchange truth for control.

“When co-addicts become self-absorbed, they want immediate gratification and they want long-term guarantees. The process of healing begins when they abandon the need to control how healing happens (p. 59).” Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

So what are reasonable expectations of yourself?

- Your emotions will fluctuate and a recurrence of unpleasant emotions is not necessarily a “setback.”

- As you learn new information about your spouse’s sexual sin the progress you made previously will be disrupted.
- The common themes of sexuality in television, movies, and books will be upsetting.
- “Petty” conflicts of others will be hard to tolerate, find interesting, or give compassion for a time.
- Sleep and eating habits will be a truer reflection of your progress than your emotions.
- You may excessively cling to those things or people that you view as dependable or that you have control over.

B. Spouse. Change is not a straight line. There are probably few instances where this statement hurts more than with sexual sin within a marriage. This does not mean that any recurrence is acceptable because it’s “normal.” Below we will discuss what to set as non-negotiables. But before we get there (in order to help protect you from retreating to things you can’t control) we will discuss unrealistic expectations in light of the messiness of change.

“If you love me” or “if you were really sorry” phrases or thoughts are one of the more common ways for unrealistic expectations to get expressed. Usually they are unrealistic because of their time table (now) or expected effect (make things better) rather than content (fidelity). Regardless, kind of expressions listed below will result in your spouse inevitably failing to meet your expectations and each failure will carry the full weight of pain as the initial revelation.

- If you loved me, you will never struggle with lust again.
- If you loved me, you would never think fondly of your adultery partner again.
- If you loved me, you would be the husband/wife I always wanted you to be.
- If you loved me, you would know [blank] would hurt me without me having to tell you.
- If you loved me, you would be improving on [blank] responsibilities while working on your sexual sin.
- Other: _____

A very reasonable and functional expectation of your spouse would be to complete the False Love study. This would give you some sense of assurance that the things that are important to you and necessary for change would be addressed, even if the time table does not match your preference. While we will discuss trust restoration in Step 7, at this stage, it may be helpful to realize that trust is often initially given to a third party (ultimately God, but also a counselor or G4 group) and as your spouse works cooperatively with that trusted third party your trust begins to transfer back to your spouse.

C. Sex. Marital sex can take on many different meanings after sexual sin. Sometimes the offended spouse becomes hyper-sexual, trying to use sex to recreate the lost security and oneness. The tendency can be even stronger when sexual sin is misunderstood to be caused by unmet emotional needs. Other times the offended spouse can become disgusted by sex; being reminded of the sin even in the wholesome context of marital intimacy.

The danger in either reaction is the way the response is viewed later. The hyper-sexual response is often looked back upon with shame – “My spouse cheats or looks at porn and I shamelessly throw myself at him/her like I was lucky to be part of his/her harem.” The desire for security through marital sex is viewed as weakness rather than part of God’s created design.

The disgusted-by-sex response is often looked back upon as a source of security – “Avoiding sex kept me safe. I couldn’t be hurt again; at least not in the same way.” Here the desire for security is plucked from the context of marriage. If this belief persists then the sphere of relationships deemed safe shrinks – it might only include children or same-sex friendships.

At this early stage, realize that sex will not be normal for a while. There may even be times when you feel worse after sex. Don’t get attached to the meaning sex has during this time and don’t measure the marriage based upon the quality or frequency of sex. Sex is the celebration of intimacy. There is work to be done before intimacy is restored. Until that time sex will not be what it was designed to be. Allow your expectations of sex to recognize that.

There will be times when a period of abstinence should be enacted. Often during and after sexual sin, sex becomes “ultimate” in the offending spouse’s life. When this occurs more sex or better sex will not be a blessing, rather it will only feed the lie that fuels the sin. Taking a 90 day sexual fast—when this is advisable—will be discussed with your spouse in Step 6 of the False Love material. If you believe this is necessary or beneficial for your marriage, then you can recommend that your spouse read page 59 in their study.

“Early in recovery, sex addicts need to observe a period of celibacy in order to reverse the belief that sex is their most important need... Throughout the healing journey, a couple may want to be celibate at other times in order to center themselves emotionally and spiritually... Sex addicts must learn to be sexual as an expression of their emotional and spiritual feelings for their partner (p. 181).” Mark Laaser in *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*

3. Right Kind of Community

It is harder to talk about sexual sin than just about any other sin that dominates or disrupts our life. This is true even in contexts where people are committed to openly wrestling with life-dominating struggles.

“The problem is that even in circles of recovering people, sex addictions is rarely discussed or addressed (p. 17).”
Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

Yet isolation only magnifies the pain of betrayal. Too often divorce is the only reason sexual sin gets discussed openly. The result is a double whammy where (a) divorce or a miserable marriage seem like your only future possibilities and (b) the lack of any positive examples for you to draw hope from during this time.

The question becomes, “Who do I talk to?” The criteria below are meant to help you identify the best people.

- **Tell those who have spiritual authority over you.** We feel fake where we have not been honest. It will be incredibly difficult to gain encouragement or support from your church involvement when your direct church leaders do not know about your situation. This means you should inform your small group leader and the pastor you know best. If not, you will quickly feel like you are only going through the motions at church or that their shepherding of you becomes increasingly less personal or “relevant.”
- **Seek agreement with your spouse on those with whom you share your suffering.** At the very least, inform your spouse of the person(s) to whom you are speaking. If your spouse is against this kind of support, it is wise to begin with a counselor who has obligations of confidentiality to allow time for your spouse’s defensiveness to subside. Who you talk to and how that is communicated with your spouse is an important part of the support you receive being a blessing to the long-term health of the marriage.
- **Only tell those you are willing to include in the restoration process.** When you share your suffering (your spouse’s sin), you are inviting someone on a journey. They need to be someone you are willing to involve for the full process. Emotional “vomiting” in your social circles will leave your spouse as “villain” or “suspect” indefinitely and will, thereby, be unhealthy for potential restoration.
- **Do not tell those who would quickly advise you to separate.** If your situation meets the criteria for immediate separation discussed above, then you need the support (not advice) to leave. Otherwise, you want to avoid people who would view supporting you as requiring them to be against your spouse or your marriage. This is a false dichotomy. Your emotions will fluctuate dramatically in the coming days and weeks. You want those you confide in to be a source of stability and perspective; not people who are emotionally reacting to your spouse’s sin as if they were personally offended.
- **Make sure your motivation is to seek comfort not revenge.** When your spouse hurts you it is natural to want your spouse to hurt too. You will find that when revenge is your motive who you tell and what you say will create more mess than relief. By refraining from revenge, you are not merely protecting your spouse or the marriage, you are expressing faith in God’s ways as your source of protection (Prov. 3:5-8).
- **Have a prepared statement for those who ask questions but do not need to know.** It will likely be obvious to those around you that something is wrong. There are two principles to keep in tension: (a) you can always tell more; you cannot tell less, and (b) truth stops speculation and, thereby, reduces gossip. In most cases you may acknowledge your pain and appreciate their concern, “I am facing some hard things right now and would appreciate your prayers. At this point, I am keeping it as a personal matter and would ask you squelch any speculation you hear from others about what ‘might be’ wrong.” If it is obvious to others that the stress is coming from your marriage, you might say, “We are facing some challenges right now and are working through them. We would appreciate your prayers and ask you to squelch any conversations speculating on what ‘might be’ wrong.”
- **Allow parents and other family to be told as part of confession if possible.** Confession is an important part of recovery and restoration. Part of overcoming the lying associated with sexual sin is your spouse being honest at a cost without being caught. Confession to parents, family, or close friends affected by his/her sin or who should be in the accountability structure is when this would ideally happen. Your spouse will be asked to do a thorough confession in Step 5 of False Love. Unless job changes, separation, or other “obvious” life alterations are required, then it is best to allow your spouse to inform his/her parents and family at the time that their spiritual maturity will allow them to participate in this confession as a way of participating in God’s work in his/her life.

- **Talk to your children.** Appendix B provides age-appropriate and situation-appropriate guidelines. It is better to have intentional conversations when you have prepared what you will say rather than avoiding the topic until circumstances sparks the conversation; making your words and emotions much less predictable.

“In early recovery, parents should hold family meetings to let the children know in simple terms what is going on (p. 187).” Mark Laaser in *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*

4. Establish Non-Negotiables

“What can I or should I ask for?” is a common question. There can be an intense sense of pressure felt about these early expectations. It can feel like “things getting better” depend on you knowing what to ask for in the minutes and hours after learning of your spouse’s sin. The purpose of these materials is to relieve that burden.

Your ultimate request is that your spouse would take the steps necessary to forsake his/her sin and restore the marriage. But that is not what is referred to here as “non-negotiables.” Non-negotiables, as the word is used here, means the immediate steps that are necessary to limit further damage and display the initial fruits of repentance. Until these non-negotiables are met the process of restoration has not begun because the actions of destruction continue.

- **If the sexual sin involves any direct interaction with a real person, break off all contact.** This applies for emotional affairs and physical adultery. Appendix B in *False Love* provides guidance on how your spouse should do this and how you should be involved in the process. Until this step is taken, you should not attempt to take any of the other restoration steps in this notebook.

“Your spouse needs to know that, for your marriage to get better, the adulterous relationship must be cut off. Indecision in this matter is a decision against your marriage. Until your spouse has made a real commitment to end communication with the other person, the uncertainty of your marriage should be reflected in the home (p. 15).” Winston Smith in *Help! My Spouse Committed Adultery*

- **If there was any sexual contact with another person your spouse should get tested for sexually transmitted diseases.** This is both a protective measure for your physical health and step that demonstrates the real risk of sexual sin. Until this is done, there should be no sexual intimacy between you and your spouse. This is a humbling action for your spouse that often makes what he/she has done more real to them.
- **If the sexual sin involved on-line activity, accountability software should be installed on the computer.** This software can be found at xxxchurch.com (free) or covenanteyes.com (more features). Initially you should receive the internet activity report produced by these programs. Later we will advise that a same-sex accountability partner receive these reports in order to protect you from taking a parental-role with your spouse and to facilitate the restoration of trust.

5. Care for Yourself Physically

While most people recognize that their spouse’s sexual sin is an intensely stressful (sometimes even traumatic) time, most people faced with their spouse’s sexual sin neglect the basic elements of self-care. Everything else seems more important.

If you neglect your self-care, you will multiply the impact of your spouse’s sin in your life. This will increase your sense of hurt, temptation towards resentment, and the number of things that start to go wrong. It will decrease your desire or ability to work on the marriage. The number of things you want your spouse to “get” and the gap in his/her understanding will become greater as you experience the effects of poor self-care.

A primary obstacle to your appropriate self-care is the natural focus on making sure your spouse is “being good.” The non-negotiables are intended to limit your expectations at this stage in the process. The highest degree of assurance you can have about your spouse’s behavior is being “reasonably certain.” Trying to be more certain than this will result in being consumed with things outside of your control.

“[You] may have found yourself constantly [wondering what the addict is up to. Much of your energy may be focused on trying to fix the addict—at the expense of your own self-care (p. 12).” Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

- **Rest.** This may be the hardest part of self-care. The sexual sin of your spouse registers as a threat and the last thing we are prone to do in times of feeling threaten is rest. You may need to remind yourself that resting is not a form of enabling or condoning your spouse’s sin. Rest is about you being a finite person, not merely a luxury for

you after you “know” that your spouse is being good. In these early stages most of what needs to be “done” must be done by your spouse.

Your roles at this stage are largely “resting” roles: (1) to allow the facts to come to light, (2) to resist allowing restoration to move forward until repentance and confession have occurred, (3) to understand the influence this betrayal has upon you, (4) to rest in the gospel for your identity more than believing the distorted messages of your suffering, and (5) to be prepared to respond with wise grace as facts are known and confession occurs. These “resting” objectives will take you through the end of step six in this study.

As for the frequent struggle to sleep, the following suggestions may be helpful:

- Believe that sleep is intended as a good gift from God and do not feel guilty for resting.
 - Pray that God would give you restful sleep and believe He wants you to have it.
 - Memorize passage of Scripture and repeat them slowly as you lay down to sleep.
 - Play soft music or nature sounds to help prevent your mind from thinking while trying to sleep.
 - Reduce the level of caffeine and sugar in your diet.
 - Avoid daytime naps so that your sleep is in concentrated blocks.
 - Establish a bed time routine. This may be particularly difficult since bed time is a time when you are typically close and sometimes intimate with your spouse.
 - Take a warm bath to relax your body.
 - Try muscle relaxation or stretching exercises before going to bed.
 - Establish a deep slow breathing pattern that simulates sleep breathing.
 - Talk with a medical professional about the possibility of a sleep aid.
- **Eat.** Loss of appetite and subsequent weight loss are common reactions to learning of a spouse’s sexual sin. This can stem from a desire to be more attractive to your spouse, but most often the loss of appetite is tied to the traumatic nature of being betrayed by your spouse and not knowing what to believe. Some suggestions for nutrition when your appetite is suppressed would be:
 - Take a vitamin C booster to sustain your immune system.
 - Drink nutrient rich fruit or vegetable beverages.
 - Eat smaller meals more times throughout the day.
 - Schedule when you will eat and do not wait until you feel like it or remember to eat.
 - Moist, nutritious solids like yogurt or fruit are easier to eat when appetite is low and mouth dry.
 - **Exercise.** Cardiovascular exercise will help reduce the physiological buildup of stress, increase appetite, and fatigue the body for sleep. Exercise also helps counter the passivity or energetic anger that are common responses to learning of your spouse’s sexual sin.
 - **Express.** To not communicate your emotions at a time like this is a form of being silenced or silencing yourself. You can communicate your emotions verbally, in writing, or honest self-reflection. At this point there is not a “right way to feel.” It is important to note that everything that you feel during this time is real but may not be true. That distinction will be unpacked in later chapters.

Ideally, your spouse will be willing to hear what you are thinking and feeling as a part of his/her learning the impact of their sin (Step 2 in False Love). If your spouse is unwilling to listen or responds in unhealthy ways (defensiveness, self-pity, blame-shifting, brooding silence, etc.), it is better to wait until he/she completes Step 2 of False Love before embracing this expectation. Until then those you identified in the “Right Kind of Community” section should fill this role.

Ideally, you would allow the content of your words to carry the meaning rather than the volume or “drama” of your speech. Part of the influence of living in the presence of hidden sin is that we begin to communicate in code or by secondary means (passive-aggressive actions or words, allowing volume to demonstrate the degree of hurt, using the “drama” of threatening divorce or separation or threatening to counter-cheat to convey the level of betrayal felt).

- **Don’t Isolate.** There is a real tension between feeling fake and feeling exposed in relationships after learning of your spouse’s sexual sin. Avoiding people is a tempting way to escape this tension. But when you do this, another painful thing happens – the sexual sin of your spouse consumes an even larger percentage of your thought life, time, and social life.

Part of preparing to face your suffering is to resist the actions (like isolation) that would allow your suffering to consume your life. Even if hobbies are less enjoyable, conversations seem uninteresting, or relationships feel fake, they still play a role in healthy living that is vital for the struggle ahead.

- **Go to Doctor, if Needed.** The potential value of a sleep aid has already been discussed, but a medication to take the edge off of anxiety or depression might also be beneficial if you are experiencing panic attacks or feeling a level of despair that lead you to contemplate suicide. When your anxiety or depression are the result of this kind of traumatic life event, you are not experiencing anxiety or depression that is caused by a chemical imbalance, so the treatment should be short-term (discuss this with your doctor), but there is no spiritual or relational merit in facing the full blunt of your emotions if they are overwhelming and can be reduced.

You Can Do This

Reading the last several pages in light of everything else that is going on in your life has to be daunting. It is easy to look at the uncertainty ahead and automatically think, “This is too much and too undefined.” But it is important to remember that escaping (in whatever form escape may take) is not a “more safe” option.

“We tell couples to be more afraid of not healing than going through the healing process (p. 53).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

Read Psalm 91. This is a psalm that calls out to God as refuge and fortress. Notice how the psalmist prays through the various times of day in verses five and six (day, night, noon). The psalmist takes comfort that sin will be punished in verse eight. The psalmist reminds himself of God’s unseen protection in verses eleven and twelve, but acknowledges the dangerous setting in which that protection is given in verse thirteen. Finally, in the last three verses, the psalmist reminds himself that his responsibility is to cling to God in the midst of trouble. Read verses fourteen to sixteen as God’s words directly to you (replace the pronoun “he” or “him” with your name).

Encouragement Focus (PREPARE):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Which of the five areas of preparation are you strongest? Weakest?
- How are you tempted to try to control your spouse’s actions or be a parent to him/her?
- Are you caring for yourself in the six ways listed under “Care for Yourself Physically”?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- _____
- _____

Step 2

“What I Already Know Feels Like It Could Kill Me”

ACKNOWLEDGE the specific history and realness of my suffering.

“I will look at my life and acknowledge what has happened as my history.

I will not try to move forward out of a false history or with no history.

I trust that God can and will redeem what is and what has been.

Evidencing my faith in God I acknowledged my specific history to [name; counselor or group].

This brought great fear [describe] and then relief [describe].”

Memorize: James 4:4-6 (ESV), “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, ‘He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?’ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Adulterous people!” – God can relate to the sense of betrayal you feel. Every sin violates our covenant with Him.
- “Friendship... is enmity” – God will not accept the “just friends” or “just porn” excuse for violating covenant.
- “Jealously” – Jealousy is the emotional response God has to the betrayal of covenant.
- “To Dwell in Us” – It is the oneness-relationship that God shares with His people that causes His response.
- “Proud... humble” – The criteria for God to re-establish relationship is not intense remorse, but humility.

Teaching Notes

“A spouse may be the last one to accept this evidence. A part of them doesn’t want the pain of accepting the truth. The spouse may even become involved in elaborate explanations of why it can’t be true. You may have heard the phrase, ‘the family is the last to know.’ Families often aren’t the last to know, but they may be the last to accept the facts (p. 69).” Mark Laaser in *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*

“A hurting, motivated wife came to me for counseling and said she had practiced submission, hoping to help her husband make some needed changes. I replied that submission was not God’s tool for accomplishing change. Confrontation was that needed skill. She needed to assertively confront her husband, not angrily, but rather with ‘great patience and careful instruction (2 Tim. 4:3 NIV) (p. 338).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

“No matter how many details you know about your partner’s acting out, the ultimate choice to change his behavior lies with him or her, not with you. Having more information won’t give you more control. On the contrary, sometimes too much information can cause you additional problems. You may end up obsessing even more about your partner’s behavior... The formal disclosure may take up to two hours or more... Many couples consider this session to be a turning point in their relationship, an opportunity to establish a healthier marriage (p. 29).” Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

“I knew the next question before I heard it. I knew that answer before he said it. There was no satisfaction here, no new information to be had. I searched for a way to elicit new information, trying to figure out what I need to know now. And then the thought crossed my mind. *I don’t care*. But it wasn’t the *I don’t care because there’s nothing in me to care with* thought. This was the plain *I don’t care to know any more* thought—because I’d heard it all. Because I was bored (p. 145-146).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

“Whether your marriage survives or not, you will have to forgive and let go of bitterness. But you can’t forgive a wound you haven’t acknowledged—you won’t even know what you have to forgive. You are laying a foundation for forgiveness by being honest about how you’ve been wounded (p. 6)... For your marriage to become better, you have to talk about what happened and why (p. 19).” Winston Smith in *Help! My Spouse Committed Adultery*

Embedded Study

Chances are your imagination has been running wild. When we don't know the facts about a bad situation, we have a tendency to fill in the blank with the worst possible details. More painful still, our imaginations have the capacity to create more possibilities than could have really happened, but because we don't know the truth we emotionally react as if every hypothetical were the reality.

During this time of “acknowledging the specific history and realness of your suffering,” you will likely begin making sense of things that have seemed out of place for a long time. As this happens, remain humble towards your interpretations. Each interpretation will be influenced by the limited information you have and the intense personalizations that come with sexual betrayal.

“The one cheated on often knows something is not quite right but can't put a finger on it. The one in the affair is often oblivious to the changes taking place: the different behavior patterns, the irritability or indifference towards the mate and the marriage, and distorted thinking along these lines: the partner is becoming less attractive, the tension is somehow the mate's fault, the partner is no longer understanding, and the marriage was never that good anyway (p. 348).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

There is a temptation that comes with information you will gain during this step – trying to use the information you gain to control or master your spouse's behavior. As you learn more about the what, when, and how of your spouse's sin (why is examined in Step 3 of *False Love* and rarely delivers as satisfying of an answer as you desire), it is natural to think you can use this information to protect your spouse from his/her sin. Or you may protect yourself by controlling your spouse. Either approach inevitably leads to an unhealthy dynamic of taking responsibility for your spouse's sin or parenting-style relationship.

“If you are in a relationship with an addict, please know it is the addict's responsibility to identify and avoid pornographic materials. It is not your responsibility to protect the addict from all things you think are pornographic (p. 31).” Mark Laaser in *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*

This is why and how even painful truth sets you free (John 8:32): free from infinite hypotheticals, free from owning your spouse's sin, and free from ignorance. In this chapter you will go through the process of learning the extent of your spouse's sexual sin (at least as much as he/she will disclose at this time) and receive some initial guidance on what to do with that information.

This chapter will be built around answering five questions.

1. What should I ask my spouse and how should I ask him/her?
2. What benefits do I gain from knowing this information?
3. What benefits does my spouse gain from sharing this information?
4. How and when should we evaluate the health of our marriage before the sin?
5. What should I do with what I learn?

What / How Should I Ask My Spouse?

The main factual content of what your spouse should share with you is outline in the description of his/her “full disclosure” in Step 2 of *False Love*. This is meant to remove the I-have-to-ask-the-right-questions-in-order-to-get-the-full-answer game (not a fun or fair game). If your spouse is unwilling or procrastinates in completing this exercise, then there is not a “magic” way to ask questions that will produce the information you desire. Do not place the pressure on yourself to ask questions “just right.” In such cases, restraining from sexual involvement, sleeping in a separate bedroom, requesting a higher degree of counseling involvement, and contacting your church leaders for an additional level of disciplinary involvement may be appropriate responses.

While completing the full disclosure exercise is good and beneficial step in the right direction for your spouse, it will likely be very difficult to hear. Realizing this will help both of you during the disclosure process.

“[Testimony] It was the best and worst day of my life. I knew for once that he told the truth at the risk of great personal cost. It gave me hope that he could grow up and face life's responsibilities. It was the first time his words and his actions were congruent. I felt outraged and sick, yet I also felt respected and relieved. It gave me hope for our relationship (p. 31).” Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

“Adultery is like a funeral, and you need to view the body. Mates need a thorough, honest confession (viewing the body) to validate that a real loss has taken place. Then they can slowly grieve and reclaim the marriage. If confession comes out in dribbles then trust continues to be broken (p. 349).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

Read Job 1:13-22. Hearing reports of evil invading your life is incredibly hard. Notice that when you read Job’s intensely emotional response (v. 20) you admire him rather than view Him as weak. Even as you read His words that are factually true but border on despair (v. 21a), you naturally read them as filled with faith because they are still addressing God and looking to Him for hope (v. 21b). Use Job’s initial response as an example for your initial response to your spouse’s disclosure – emotionally honest, physically expressive, and directed God-ward. It is wise to take your spouse’s disclosure and discuss it with God before you try to discuss it with your spouse.

Discussing the disclosure with God before your spouse does not replace bringing your questions to your spouse. It would be tempting for both of you to believe that one intense, honest conversation should “put this subject to rest.” Repent and forgive in one lengthy talk, right? Wrong. In *False Love*, your spouse has been taught that disclosure and confession are two separate actions. Rarely does the shame, deception, recidivism, and defensiveness of sexual sin allow these actions to occur simultaneously, although most people giving their disclosure would (at that time) consider it fully confessional.

“The first thing you need to realize is that disclosure isn’t a one-time event—it’s a process (p. 32).” Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

For this reason, it is false to think that asking additional questions only makes the situation worse. There does come a time when additional questions are counter-productive, but that is when either (1) the questions are being asked as a form of punishment to force the offending spouse to relive their shame, or (2) you already know the answers to the questions and are holding on to the false hope that eventually the answers will become untrue. Otherwise, questions can be a healthy part of assimilating the hidden sin into your life story and gathering the information necessary to know that future decisions are being made with adequate awareness.

“We wrongly believe that to love or forgive means never bringing sinful realities into focus since they would result in pain. Such thinking is dangerous and debilitating; it avoids pain at the expense of healing (p. 79).” Earl & Sandy Wilson, et al in *Restoring the Fallen*

Full Disclosure Follow Up: After your spouse’s full disclosure and you taking time to think about and talk to God about what you’ve heard, you will still have questions. You will have questions to clarify what you’ve been told and you will have questions that just randomly pop into your mind. If you bring these to your spouse in a random fashion, it will make assimilation of the new information harder. When you are hurt these randomly ordered conversations negatively affect the trust built through the additional disclosure. Random emotionally connected questions produce random logically unconnected answers that seem “fishy” even if true (and your current hurt makes it very hard to be objective about this).

For this reason, it is suggested that you write out your questions as they come to you (“popcorn” style), and then organize them. Having your questions grouped together will help your spouse’s answers fit into a cohesive history and, thereby, help you assimilate the answers. Now that your spouse has put the effort into writing out his/her full disclosure, this reciprocated effort is warranted. There are several ways that you can organize your questions.

- *Based upon the full disclosure outline* – The recommended outline for the full disclosure was organized around the different expressions that sexual sin can take. This would allow you to ask questions based upon different aspect of the sin. This structure is often most helpful when you still do not feel like you know or understand what your spouse has done.
- *Based upon the history of the marriage* – In this approach, the questions are arranged based upon a time line that may begin with dating and comes to the present. This structure is most helpful when the lies associated with sexual sin removed the confidence that you know your spouse or your own personal history (the theme of “disrupted story” will be developed more in Step 4).
- *Based upon subject areas* – You may find that your questions better cluster around certain subjects (i.e., behavior at work, guy’s/girl’s night out, taking phone calls outside the house, etc...). This structure can be more helpful when your uncertainties gather certain events, devices, or people.
- *Based upon the dominant emotions you are feeling* – When the other structure prove ineffective, you can arrange questions based upon the emotions they come from or illicit (i.e., anger, fear, sadness, etc...). This structure is recommended for when you believe your spouse has been honest with you, but you do not think they “get it” about their sin’s impact on you.

The “Why?” Question: This is the most common question with the least satisfying answer. Most of the time the “why?” question creates a Catch-22 scenario: either the answer comes across as blame-shifting (i.e., “Because you/we weren’t...”) or ignorant (i.e., “I don’t know. It just kinda happened.”). One is insulting; the other infuriating.

“The reality is that we will never find a good enough reason for some of the wrongs done... Neither of us found ‘the answer’ or ‘the reason’ Gary chose to risk everything for an affair. He just did. Mona had to accept that as fact so she could move forward (p. 172).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

In order to get anywhere productive with this legitimate question, we must grapple with the nature of sin. Sin is ultimately foolish and foolishness will never be explained rationally. When we try to explain sin rationally it always results in some form of blame-shifting.

“All sin is ultimately irrational.... Though people persuade themselves that they have good reasons for sinning, when examined in the cold light of truth on the last day, it will be seen in every case that sin ultimately just does not make sense (p. 493).” Wayne Grudem in *Systematic Theology*

As you ask the “why?” question, you need to recognize that the best answer that you are going to get is either an expression of repentant dissatisfaction (i.e., “I was upset with you for not appreciating me and, wrongly, I found someone who would,” or “I was under so much pressure that I used porn as a form of escape”) or acknowledged foolishness (i.e., “It doesn’t make any sense now, but I wanted to learn about different sexual experiences and porn was a fun way to do it ‘without risk,’” or “Once I started getting attention, I liked it and never did anything to stop it from escalating”).

No answer to the “why?” question will be satisfying. Ultimately, when asking the why question you are looking for the idolatry at the root of the sin – what did your spouse wanted so badly that he/she was willing to sin in order to get it? Your spouse may not be able to see his/her desire as an idol at this stage. In Step 3 of *False Love* your spouse will explore the motives of his/her sin. This is when you can anticipate more productive conversations about “why” to begin to emerge.

Playing the Detective: You might ask, “What if I don’t think my spouse is telling me the whole truth? How far do I go to get the truth? Should I check his/her computer, phone, bank records, etc...?” Ideally, in this situation, you would be honest with your spouse and say, “I am having a hard time believing you and would like for you to live transparently enough to settle my fears.” In Steps 5 and 6 of *False Love*, your spouse will learn that transparency in marriage is normal rather than a punitive response to sexual sin.

If your spouse responds negatively or negligently to your direct request, then verification of your concern may be something you choose to pursue. If you do seek to verify your concerns by checking on your spouse’s activity without his/her awareness, then you should adhere to the follow principles.

- If your spouse is actively engaged in *False Love* with a counselor, mentor, or group and participating in the restoration process, it is not advised that you not seek information without your spouse’s awareness.
- Before taking any investigative step, you should be seeing a marriage counselor or, at least, a personal counselor. A relationship at this level of trust deterioration will have a hard time surviving, even if you fears are disproven, without outside guidance.
- You should resolve before you check anything to tell your spouse what you have done, what you found, and why you deemed this step necessary. Gaining information you will not share will only serve to further damage the relationship and you.
- You should not do anything illegal in the pursuit of information. Your spouse’s past or continuing immoral action does not warrant you taking illegal actions no matter how hurt you feel.
- You should not make this your regular practice. Investigation, even when it finds nothing, does not build trust. If your search finds problematic materials and your spouse will not acknowledge clear facts of sin, then you may need to take the next step outlined in Appendix A. If your search proves empty, then you should inform your spouse of your search, your concern, and trust that God will expose your spouse’s sexual sin (if ongoing) as He was faithful to do on the previous occasion(s).

“It is important for the wife to walk the fine line between trust and caution. One extreme keeps a wife in ignorance and the husband in his secret sin. The other extreme keeps the wife in a miserable life of fear which never disappears completely, no matter how hard the husband is trying (p. 34).” Kathy Gallagher in *When His Secret Sin Breaks Your Heart*

What Benefits Do I Gain?

You might be thinking, "Remind me why knowing about my spouse's sexual sin is a good idea again." Acknowledging the specific history and realness of your suffering is a good thing, even if it is painful. Stephanie Carnes outlines seven benefits to knowing the truth about your spouse's sexual sin (list adapted from *Mending a Shattered Heart* p. 26-31; bold text only).

1. **Clarity about the situation:** Agreeing to work on a marriage with undefined sexual sin is like buying a house without having an inspection – foolish. You don't know if the house is a "really good deal" until you know what condition it's in and should assume the worst if the owner refuses an inspection. Similarly, you don't know what you are forgiving or "working on" until you know you're the breadth of your spouse's sexual sin and should refrain from giving the benefit of the doubt if he/she refuses a full disclosure.
2. **Validation that you're not crazy by making sense of the past:** The lies that cover sexual sin come with an alternative history that doesn't make sense. As you learn the specific history of your spouse's sexual sin, it will begin to make things clear that were previously confusing or contradictory. This is important if you are going to have a sense of confidence and security about life or marriage.

"[Testimony] One of the most helpful things about the disclosure for me was that it confirmed my reality. My husband had repeatedly told me how crazy and jealous I was. Over time I had started believing him. Finding out I had not misread the situation helped me to begin trusting myself, that I wasn't crazy as he had said or as I had thought (p. 31)." Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

Read Jeremiah 6:14-17. God is confronting His people because their explanation for their actions did not match the situation. They were saying "Peace, peace" (i.e., "Everything is fine. Nothing is going on. You've got nothing to worry about.") when they should have been confessing their sin (v. 14-15). God confronts their lies and then advises the people to look at their lives (repeated multiple times) and examine them by His standards (v. 16-17). God is modeling the response He would have you give to that voice in your mind that questions, "Do I really want to know the truth? Wouldn't it be easier to live in blissful ignorance again?"

3. **Validate suspicions that offender denied:** This form of validation is less about the past and more about the future. When reasonable evidences of sexual sin are denied (especially if your questions are retorted with anger or attempts to make you feel guilty), then you lose a sense of confidence that you can or will know the truth in the future. The full disclosure should include statements of "you were right to question me when..." or the full disclosure follow up should include question like, "Was I right to be concerned when I questioned you about...?"
4. **Have some sense of control:** When the offending spouse is in control of information through deceit, then he/she has control of the marriage. This does not necessarily mean he/she is a "controlling spouse;" that designation goes to a spouse whose controlling behavior extends beyond covering up personal sin. When accurate information is shared through the full disclosure, control is able to become balanced again. However, because of the shift in power (from one-sided to balanced) as things become healthy the offending spouse may begin to feel controlled as he/she adjusts to normal again.

Before the disclosure, information coming to light was experienced as "being found out" and would create intense fear in your spouse. In an effort to keep the information hidden, these times of involuntary disclosure were probably accompanied by various forms of manipulation (an attempt to artificially regain control). You should be able to notice a difference in your spouse's tone as the control-factor is balanced during disclosure.

"It is obvious that your husband is manipulating you. You mention that every time you attempt to discuss his problems with him, he somehow twists the whole conversation around and makes you the focal point of the discussion, rather than him. You also said that when you confront him with undeniable evidence about his unfaithfulness, he manages to get everything so confused that you 'don't know up from down' (p. 43)." Kathy Gallagher in *When His Secret Sin Breaks Your Heart*

5. **Evaluate the offending spouse's commitment to the future of the relationship:** *Honesty is a primary indicator of someone's level of commitment.* Most often in sexual sin deceit is as much (if not more) of the problem than lust. The offender often believes the lie, "It will only hurt my spouse to tell him/her what I've done, so I am protecting my spouse." That makes lying feel noble and demonstrates a commitment to self that exceeds the commitment to the marriage. A full disclosure and non-defensiveness during the follow up is a time for the offending spouse to re-learn experientially what commitment to the marriage looks, sounds, and feels like.

Read Matthew 15:1-20. Jesus said it was vain to worship God and seek to honor our covenant-relationship with God if we are not honest (v. 8-9). Jesus picked apart the games that the Pharisees and scribes would use to say

that they were technically honoring the covenant expectations (v. 3-7). Jesus was responding to a question where the Pharisees and scribes were trying to turn the whole subject back on Him and what they thought He was doing wrong based upon their distorted way of thinking (v. 1-2). What Jesus wanted from them was an honesty that understood what covenant-honoring was and how their actions, even their misguided efforts to correct their sin, violated the covenant (v. 10-20). That honesty was the beginning of honoring the covenant.

6. **Hope for the future of the relationship:** Ignorance and genuine hope are mutually exclusive. Naiveté is to ignorance what knowledge is to hope. While what you are learning in this step may seem anything but hopeful, knowing the truth allows you to have a greater assurance that the "next steps" will be more effective than your past efforts at improving the marriage.
7. **Finally having the information necessary to decide about the future:** The full disclosure allows you to make an informed decision about your willingness to continue in the marriage. In the absence of a full disclosure and non-defensive follow up, your decision is influenced as much by your spouse's lies, rudeness, or distance as it is by his/her sexual sin. It is not recommended that you try to make a decision about divorce at this step in the process (that is discussed in Step 7). But a benefit of the full disclosure is that you should now have the factual content to help you make such a decision after you process the pain of what has happened.

Admittedly, these are bitter-sweet benefits. But the courage and strength you muster to receive these "benefits" change you and your marriage for the better. As you learn the truth it is important to "make a decision" rather than "have a reaction." You will be emotional about what you've learned. That is healthy and normal. But let your actions (what you do during and after those emotions) be guided by thought and reflection rather than just attacking the pain.

What Benefits Does My Spouse Gain?

It is important for the full disclosure not to become an exercise in penance by your spouse. Disclosure is not a punishment; in that mindset the offending spouse is seeking to "pay for" their sin by "taking their medicine." Disclosure is an opportunity to participate in God's redemption by coming to live in the light of truth. Viewing disclosure as penance or punishment should be guarded against because it distracts from the grace of God at work and is another way of casting the offended spouse into a parental role.

In order to help you approach the disclosure as an opportunity for you to participate in an act of God's grace in your spouse's life consider the following five points that describe the benefits of disclosure for your spouse (adapted from Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart* p. 30; bold text only).

- **An end to denial:** This is the most painful part of the full disclosure for your spouse. But the fact that we are calling disclosure an act of God's grace means that you should not feel compelled to respond to this pain with pity or try to alleviate it. Hopefully you will be able to have some compassion for the difficulty of the exercise. It is during disclosure that your spouse not only stops lying to you, but also quits lying to themselves. In order to lie well, you have to begin to "buy" what you're "selling." Disclosure is when the reality of "what I've done" and that "I am the one who did it" comes crashing in.

"If you love and care for the addict, resist the temptation to rush in and alleviate the addict's despair with quick or simplistic solutions. God may be at work in the despair to bring about lasting change in the addict's life (p. 159)." Mark Laaser in *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*

- **An end to putting on a false front:** This is the most embarrassing part of the full disclosure for your spouse. Stories create characters. Lies create a false persona. Stories require a setting. Lies require false history. As your spouse completes the full disclosure he/she gets to be a real person in the real world for the first time since the sexual sin began.

Read I John 1:8. When we deny our sin we deceive ourselves. Put another way; when we refuse to repent we are not who we think we are. We then have to redefine things around us to explain what should be attributed to our own selfish, foolish choices. Our persona and the world in which we think we live becomes more and more false. Acknowledging our sin is the first step to living in reality.

- **Hope for the future of the relationship:** The thought, "If my spouse really knew me (see next point), they would hate and be destroyed by what I'm doing," saps any real hope for the future of the marriage. While disclosure means facing this fear, it also creates the foundation on which real hope and change can be built.

- **A chance to be truly known by his/her spouse:** Pornography or adultery creates fictional or secret relationships that reinforce the message that no one else really understands or cares. That message is reinforced the longer that person remains withdrawn and secretive. This is why pornography and adultery foster loneliness. Often after disclosure your spouse will feel a sense of relief, as if a burden has been lifted. It may be hard for you to understand the positive emotional response your spouse may have to this benefit of his/her disclosure.
- **A new start for the offending spouse:** A new start does not mean that your spouse gets to begin living as if nothing happened. It does mean that the reference point of life changes. Before disclosure each day was lived bracing against the day when sin would be revealed (because ultimately we know sexual sin will not remain hidden forever). So each day is lived waiting for when he/she will have to “start over;” whatever good that might be done today will inevitably be “undone” by the secret when it comes out. After disclosure the offending spouse is free to fully engage life without a reason to brace against its impending destruction.

How and When Do We Evaluate the Pre-Betrayal Marriage?

This may be the most difficult part of acknowledging the specific history and realness of your suffering. The disclosure only requires you to listen and is very factual in its content. Following up with the disclosure only requires you to collect the questions that naturally come to mind and put them in some sort of order. During disclosure everything that is discussed is bad or wrong.

Evaluating the pre-betrayal marriage requires a degree of objectivity during a time of highly fluctuating emotions. During this evaluation things will be both good and bad; but the good things will not excuse the sexual sin and the bad things will not explain the sexual sin. However, the evaluation needs to be done for two reasons.

1. The sexual sin, while the most obvious and emotionally urgent issue may not be the most destructive factor in the marriage. If there are more significant problems in the marriage than the sexual sin, then purity will not “fix” the marriage. It is likely that the sexual sin will have common roots (idolatry of power, immaturity, control, etc.) with these larger problems. During this time of concentrated change, the pursuit of purity by your spouse must also address these larger concerns.
2. In cases where these larger concerns do not exist, the couple may begin trying to fix the marriage by getting back to what they had before. Whenever your past is brighter than your future it is a recipe for despair. During a crisis, pre-crisis can seem like heaven; or the “good old days.”

The evaluation below is meant to help you assess the condition of the marriage before the sexual sin interfered. It would be unwise to allow this evaluation to shift your focus from marital restoration to marital enrichment. *Marital restoration* (the subject of this material) involves repairing the unique and significant damage done by your spouse’s sexual sin. *Marital enrichment* involves creating a pattern of life and interaction that fosters God’s design for a healthy personal and married life. Marital enrichment solidifies marital restoration; it is not a replacement for marital restoration.

Instructions: Read the following descriptive statements. Consider how well they describe your marriage before your spouse’s sexual sin. This exercise should be completed after the full disclosure in order to ensure that you know when “before” the sexual sin began.

(CD) Completely Disagree, (SD) Somewhat Disagree, (NS) Not Sure, (SA) Somewhat Agree, or (CA) Completely Agree

| | | | | | |
|--|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1. I knew the important life events that shaped my spouse’s character and beliefs. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 2. My spouse knew the important life events that shaped my character and beliefs. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 3. I enjoyed hearing about the day-to-day events of my spouse’s life. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 4. My spouse enjoyed hearing about the day-to-day events of my life. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 5. I regularly thought about how to bless my spouse based on what I know of them. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 6. My spouse regularly thought about how to bless me based upon what they know of me. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 7. I resisted making a list of things that I want to change about my spouse. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 8. My spouse resisted making a list of thing he/she wants to change about me. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 9. Our marriage was free from the use of illegal drugs. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 10. Our marriage was free from any abuse or excessive use of alcohol. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 11. Our marriage was free from gambling. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 12. Our marriage was free from lying to cover up painful or embarrassing events. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 13. I recognized that marriage is a living relationship and will require work and attention. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 14. My spouse recognized marriage is a living relationship and requires work and attention. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |

| | | | | | |
|--|----|----|----|----|----|
| 15. We showed the ability to love and support one another in good times and bad. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 16. I resisted the urge to think that marriage or my spouse should solve life’s struggles. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 17. My spouse resisted the urge to think that marriage or I should solve all life’s struggles. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 18. I allowed my spouse to see my weaknesses without defensiveness. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 19. My spouse allowed me to see their weaknesses without defensiveness. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 20. I was comfortable knowing how to encourage my spouse when he/she was down. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 21. My spouse was comfortable knowing how to encourage me when I was down. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 22. I did not have expectations of my spouse the regularly lead to me feeling jealous. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 23. My spouse did not have expectations of me that regularly lead to them feeling jealous. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 24. I enjoyed and agreed with how we divided the responsibilities of managing our home. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 25. I consistently fulfilled my household responsibilities as we agreed. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 26. My spouse consistently fulfilled their household responsibilities as we agreed. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 27. We were able to talk about new responsibilities when they emerged. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 28. I had a regular time of reading from the Bible | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 29. My spouse had a regular time of reading from the Bible. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 30. I regularly shared with my spouse what I learn in my time of Bible study. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 31. My spouse regularly shared with me what he/she is learning in Bible study. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 32. We felt comfortable asking each other to pray for specific concerns. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 33. We agreed on the importance and frequency of church attendance for our marriage. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 34. We agreed on the importance and frequency of small group attendance. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 35. I believed my spouse’s friends are a positive influence and a blessing to our marriage. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 36. I believed my friends are a positive influence and a blessing to our marriage. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 37. We had couple friends who model and actively pursued a healthy marriage. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 38. I voluntarily abstained from habits or practices that make my spouse fearful or upset. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 39. My spouse voluntarily abstained from habits or practices that cause me fear or upset. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 40. I made the changes that marriage necessitates without resentment or bitterness. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 41. My spouse made the changes marriage necessitates without resentment or bitterness. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 42. My sense of humor did not put my spouse down or highlight his/her weaknesses. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 43. My spouse’s humor did not put me down or highlight my weaknesses. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 44. I valued the things my spouse told me enough to remember them. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 45. My spouse valued the things I shared with him/her enough to remember them. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 46. I felt safe to express my thoughts and opinions with my spouse. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 47. My spouse felt safe to express his/her thoughts and opinions with me. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 48. I was able to deal with change without it disrupting the marriage. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 49. My spouse was able to deal with change without it disrupting the marriage. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 50. We did a good job of selecting wise times to have difficult or in-depth conversations. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 51. I was willing to be interrupted to hear what my spouse has to say. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 52. My spouse was willing to be interrupted to hear what I have to say. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 53. We agreed on the type or level of offenses that need to be discussed. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 54. I maintained honor towards my spouse even when we disagree or argue. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 55. My spouse maintained honor towards me even when we disagree or argue. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 56. I resisted the temptation to “clam up” or “shut down” when saying something difficult. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 57. My spouse resisted the temptation to “clam up” or “shut down.” | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 58. I did not use “being honest” as an excuse to be harsh or dogmatic. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 59. My spouse did not use “being honest” as an excuse for being harsh or dogmatic. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 60. I did not allow my personal or marital goals to take precedent over the marriage. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 61. My spouse did not allow personal or marital goals to take precedent over the marriage. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 62. I was able to effectively forgive and not keep a record of wrongs. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 63. My spouse was able to effectively forgive and not keep a record of wrongs. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 64. My spouse felt safe when I expressed my anger or hurt. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 65. I felt safe when my spouse expressed his/her anger or hurt. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 66. I recognized that my spouse cannot be expected to meet all my emotional needs. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 67. My spouse recognized that I cannot meet all of his/her emotional needs. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 68. I resisted grading my spouse or marriage based on how fulfilled I felt. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 69. My spouse resisted grading me or our marriage based on how fulfilled he/she felt. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 70. We were able to talk about our family finances without defensiveness or arguing. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 71. I felt safe because of how we manage our finances. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 72. My spouse felt safe because of how we manage our finances. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |

| | | | | | |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|
| 73. I felt free to make spending decisions within our family budget. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 74. My spouse felt free to make spending decisions within our family budget. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 75. My spending habits contributed to a sense of peace and stability in our marriage. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 76. My spouses' spending habits contributed to a sense of peace and stability in our marriage. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 77. I did not hide expenses or debt from my spouse. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 78. My spouse did not hide expenses or debt from me. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 79. We were willing to live simply enough to give time to the things that really matter. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 80. We agreed on the distractions that interfered with our time priorities. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 81. I was joyfully sacrificial in my love for my spouse. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 82. My spouse was joyfully sacrificial in his/her love for me. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 83. My spouse got the best of who I am. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 84. I believe I got the best of who my spouse is. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 85. I resisted the temptation to keep score of who had done more for the other. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 86. My spouse resisted the temptation to keep score of who had done more for the other. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 87. I was a growing person and felt like I had new things to share with my spouse. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 88. My spouse was a growing person and had new things to share with me. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 89. I regularly put intentional time and effort into romancing my spouse. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 90. My spouse regularly put intentional time and effort into romancing me. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 91. I was growing in my ability to enjoy and appreciate things that are important to my spouse. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 92. My spouse had a growing ability to enjoy and appreciate things that are important to me. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 93. I knew the things that most effectively communicate love to my spouse. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 94. My spouse knew the things that most effectively communicate love to me. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 95. I looked for new ways to express the things that my spouse found most affirming. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 96. My spouse looked for new ways to express the things that I found most affirming. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 97. I was able to hear and receive the love and affirmation my spouse gave me. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 98. My spouse was able to hear and receive the love and affirmation I gave him/her. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 99. I was able to put myself into words and shared myself with my spouse. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 100. My spouse was able to put him/her self into words and shared him/her self with me. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 101. We were balanced in who requested and initiated sex. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 102. I was satisfied with the frequency and quality of sex in our marriage. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 103. My spouse was satisfied with the frequency and quality of sex in our marriage. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 104. I felt like I could meet my spouse's sexual expectations and desires. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 105. The language my spouse uses to describe sex was wholesome and non-offensive to me. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 106. I was unselfish during sex and sought to find greater pleasure in my spouse's enjoyment. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 107. My spouse was unselfish during sex and sought to find greater pleasure in my enjoyment. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 108. I did not use sex as a tool to get things I want or punish my spouse. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 109. My spouse did not use sex as a tool to get things he/she wants or to punish me. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 110. My spouse and I agreed on the difference between sex and intimacy / closeness. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 111. My spouse and I agreed on the balance we want between sex and intimacy / closeness. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 112. My spouse and I could talk about what we enjoy and want from our sexual relationship. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |
| 113. My spouse and I could talk about our fears or insecurities are related to sex. | CD | SD | NS | SA | CA |

Remember this evaluation is **not** your new "to do list" replacing the marital restoration efforts under way. Any couple taking this assessment would find aspects of marital enrichment to work on. Your goal in this assessment is to identify any long-standing marital problems that would have contributed to the sexual sin or undermine the sustained progress achieved during the restoration process.

If there are particular areas of marriage enrichment that need attention **after** the marital restoration is complete, then know that that this evaluation is an abbreviated version of five *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage* seminars available at bradhambrick.com/gcm and covering: marriage foundations, communication, finances, decision making, and sex/intimacy.

What Do I Do With This Information?

In most cases, the healthiest first thing you could do is rest. Chances are you have learned a great deal of information that is troubling. Some of your fears just became reality. Other fears are in the process of being calmed (although likely resisting it). Disclosure is a hard time, that while beneficial and necessary, is traumatic as it happens.

Remember, in most cases, the majority of the information learned is only “new to you” not “new.” Because it is new to you, your mind and emotions are prone to respond as if what you learned as just happened. In your world these things are “breaking news” and carry the impact that comes with an imminent threat. Taking some time, even if it’s a few hours, to get away from your spouse and let these things settle in as “past events” is important.

The majority of what you will do with this information is covered in the coming steps: three (understanding the impact of these events upon you, your spouse, and your marriage), four (understanding the destructive messages and meanings that come with the betrayal of sexual sin), five (mourning the reality of what has occurred and the damage done), six (learning how the message and meaning of the gospel is able to redeem the impact and false messages of your betrayal), and seven (figuring out what to do in light of what you’ve learned about your spouse, yourself, your marriage and your God).

The main thing at this point is not to become overwhelmed by or misuse the information gained. The quotes below demonstrate common ways that this amount of new information can be overwhelming or misused. While you are coming to grips with what you have learned, this is an important time to utilize the support network you developed in “The Right Kind of Community” in Step 1.

“She insisted that I spend every waking moment convincing her I was here for the duration, that I wasn’t going to quit. And I had better answer every question exactly as I had answered that same question the last time—and the time before and the time before. Any slight variance in my answers was cause for suspicion: Why had my answer changed? What wasn’t I telling her? What lie had I just been caught in? It was an endless assault (p. 46-47).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

“The spouse is now in possession of some very effective weapons that could easily be turned against the infidel. Your commitment to each other means that you choose to use the knowledge for the good of your marriage, not for its destruction (p. 154).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

“I had become so paranoid and fearful during the years... My obsession with what he was doing, thinking, saying, plotting, and so on reinforced my fears... My hyperactive imagination kept me in a prison of despair during this whole period (p. 33).” Kathy Gallagher in *When His Secret Sin Breaks Your Heart*

Encouragement Focus (ACKNOWLEDGE):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Did you hear your spouse’s disclosure and ask the follow up questions you wanted the answers to?
- Did you assess the pre-betrayal condition of the marriage in a fair and accurate way?
- Prepare: Are you caring for yourself in the six ways listed under “Care for Yourself Physically” in Step 1?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- _____
- _____

Step 3

“What’s Going On with My Thoughts and Emotions?”

UNDERSTAND the impact of my suffering.

“I used to fear facing the reality of my spouse’s sin and would not acknowledge it, so I expected myself to live as if their sin never happened [describe].

I can see how his/her sin has affected me [describe].

It was wrong to interpret the impact of his/her sin as my failing or my emotions as weakness.

God is more gracious than that and I must agree with Him and not my fears.

The impact is starting to make sense and help me see life differently [describe].”

Memorize: Psalm 55:12-14 (ESV), “For it is not an enemy who taunts me—then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—then I could hide from him. But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. We used to take sweet counsel together, within God’s house we walked in the throng.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Psalm” – God knew we would need words to express the pain of betrayal’s impact and graciously gave them.
- “Not an enemy” – This multiplies the pain. Hence David repeats it twice. Love leaves us unbraced for betrayal.
- “Then I could hide” – When betrayal occurs at home it feels impossible to “get away.” Rest is hard to find.
- “My familiar friend” – Not only are you hurting but your normal/rightful source of human comfort is taken away.
- “Used to... together” – It hurts each time you see something you used to enjoy together. It hurts because it’s hard to enjoy now and it hurts because you may wonder if it was all a lie.

Teaching Notes

“The news that Carol was in a relationship with another man shook the very foundations on which Ron was building his life. In his time of crisis the things he had considered so important had no value (p. 14).” Mike Summers in *Help! My Spouse Has Been Unfaithful*

“Husbands and wives are often shattered after revelation because they believed they knew their spouses so well that the person could never have pulled off having an affair... Infidels are often astounded by their own ability to lead a dual life, to separate one life from the other (p. 137).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

“Many partners find themselves making compromises in the relationship that lead to the loss of their sense of self. Examples include acting against your own morals, values or beliefs, as well as giving up on life goals, hobbies, and interests. Other examples include changing your dress or appearance to accommodate the addict, or accepting the addict’s sexual norms as your own... You may have struggles with feelings of unworthiness or perfectionism. As a result you have settled for feeling needed in the relationship and compromised yourself to keep the peace or feel valued (p. 14).” Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

“The affection that I wanted for so long was now mine in abundance. He was constantly wanting to hold my hand and hug me and kiss me – and I was sick (p. 23).” Kathy Gallagher in *When His Secret Sin Breaks Your Heart*

“Gary was not the man I had thought he was, but I was no longer sure who I was either. For that matter, who were we as a couple? Were we a couple (p. 24)?... That night my life took on a new timetable: before the affair, during the affair, and after the affair. Everything during was now marred and distorted: our family trip to Disneyland, Gary and I going to Hawaii. I recalled snippets of conversation with both Gary and my friend and suddenly heard and saw completely different things (p. 26)... You each will process at your own pace. Remember, the infidel began this process before the affair even began. The spouse typically begins at revelation (p. 54).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

“An affair erodes their carefully constructed security system. It erects an interior *wall of secrecy* between the marriage partners, at the same time it opens a *window of intimacy* between the affair partners. The couple is no longer a unit. The affair partner is on the inside, and the marital partner is on the outside (p. 25).” Shirley Glass in *Not “Just Friends”*

Embedded Study

It is one thing to experience the impact of your suffering; it is another thing to understand the impact of your suffering. You have been experiencing the impact full force since the revelation of your spouse's sexual sin and (likely) even before discovery you were wrestling to make sense of its impact without the central piece to the puzzle. In this chapter, we will begin to understand the connection between what happened and the changes in your life, emotions, and relationships.

In this chapter we will look at three subjects.

1. Factors that Increase Impact
2. The Impact on You
3. The Impact on the Marriage

As you go through this chapter you need to have realistic expectations for yourself. Gaining a better understanding of chaos does not make it orderly. At first what you read may simultaneously make sense – providing a degree of relief – and make no sense at all – leaving you feeling more overwhelmed. That might tempt you to think that you failed or that the effort is pointless. This simply means that within a storm no amount of education in meteorology (the study of weather) will keep you from getting wet.

“Adultery recovery is overwhelming, all-consuming. It is a rare person indeed who can think clearly in these circumstances (p. 101).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

At the end of this chapter you should be able to say some of the following statements. “I’m not the only person who has felt this way... I’m not crazy... There are reasons my spouse and I see things so differently... That doesn’t necessarily mean he/she is hard-hearted or that I’m over-reacting... It makes sense why my ability to remember or keep track of time is disrupted... Etc.”

Factors that Increase the Impact

All sin is equally bad, but not all sin has equal impact. As you prepare to examine the “type” of impact your spouse's sin has had on you and the marriage, it is important to first examine factors that influence the “degree” of impact. The purpose of this reflection is not to determine the amount of repentance your spouse should give. “Amounts” have more to do with penance than repentance. Remember, your healing can take place regardless of whether your spouse repents.

The goal is to give a framework for answering the frequent questions, “Am I over or under reacting? Should I be hurt this bad or worse? Do I trust too little or too much given what has happened?” There is no formula for these questions or even a scale for hurt-quotient or trust-quotient. But understanding the key factors that escalate impact should allow you and your spouse to discuss the influence of his/her sin in a more open, objective fashion.

If while trying to discuss these factors your spouse gets defensive (i.e., saying things like “I may not be perfect, but at least I’m not [list your fault]... If you won’t forgive, then you’re the one who is sinning now... Either you’re going to trust me or not. I don’t see how talking about his is going to help... I said I was sorry. What more do you want from me?”), then these discussions should be delayed until they can be had with a counselor or other mediator.

Here are ten factors that increase the impact of sexual sin on the offended spouse and the marriage. Most of these factors should be revealed during the full disclosure. This purpose of this section is not to teach you something new, but to help you discern how to “weigh” the information you are receiving.

1. **Type of Sin:** All sexual sin is a form of betrayal. “Lesser betrayal” is a phrase like “minor surgery.” It only has meaning to those who are not experiencing it. However, this should not be used to validate all fears that emerge from the betrayal (i.e., “If my spouse looks at porn, what’s to stop them from visiting a prostitute?”). The purpose of the full disclosure is to remove the sense of mystery that makes this slippery slope and other unhelpful forms of logic seem less plausible.
2. **Length of Sin:** The longer the struggle with sexual sin, the less the offended spouse feels like they knew their spouse and the less confident they should be that the sin will be eliminated immediately. Also, the longer the offending spouse has struggled with the sin, the more impact the sin will have on his/her character, values, and thinking. The more values have to change, the more likely the offending spouse will have bouts of defensiveness or self-pity during the change process.
3. **Degree of Lying:** Lying forces the offended spouse to live in an artificial reality created by the offending spouse. When disclosure happens all the false parts of his/her reality comes crashing down and the offended spouse is left to get to know the new, real world. This creates a great deal of confusion, uncertainty, and anger. Some elaborate

deception schemes reach the point of creating a double life. In these cases, the impact of deception far outweighs the impact of the sexual sin.

“The biggest hurt experienced by the spouse is the deception. Anything that even remotely resembles deception causes more pain (p. 120).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

4. **Number of Times Caught and Repeated:** When sexual sin is not dealt with appropriately it almost always repeats itself. That is the reason this study and its compliment are so extensive. Each time a couple feels like “we’ve been here before” the larger the impact of the sexual sin. Repetition increases impact by attacking the hope that things can or will be different “this time.”
5. **Number of Incomplete Disclosures:** Trust is the primary relational commodity damaged by sexual sin. Incomplete disclosure is the most intense amplifier of sexual sin’s impact on trust. With each incomplete disclosure, the offending spouse is left thinking, “There will always be more no matter how much I ‘know’?” The only news that is trusted is bad news. Good news becomes viewed as only an “incomplete story.”
6. **Social and Economic Impact:** Who knows (friends, family, co-workers, etc...)? How much did it cost (secret credit card, job loss, job demotion, gifts for adultery partner, etc...)? These serve as reminders, points of shame, and unnecessary limits. Each must be accepted as forced sacrifices. Forced sacrifices are hard to view as an act of love for the offended spouse because they contain pain and lack the voluntary nature with which loved usually honors and protects the giver of love.
7. **Risk-Factor of Sin:** Risks vary from, “You knew I would be hurt if I found out,” and “Our kids could find these images on the computer” to sexually transmitted diseases, a child could be conceived, fire-able offenses at work, and permanently altering our family structure. With the increase risk factors involved with sexual sin, the less protected and safe the offended spouse feels.
8. **Closeness of Person(s) and Places Involved:** If the sexual sin involved a friend of the offended spouse, then the amount of emotional pain and life restructuring required to restore the marriage will increase significantly. In these cases the betrayal of sexual sin is two-fold as two primary sources of comfort (spouse and friend) have been lost. When the sexual sin, especially adultery, occurred in the home the emotional pain is increased as the number and frequency of memory triggers multiply.
9. **Accusations of Spouse to Defend Sin:** Before the sin is disclosed or during the “heat” of discovery, the offending spouse often hurls many accusations at the offended spouse to defend, explain, or divert his/her actions. These statements become points of anger, division, and insecurity that will expand the impact of the sexual sin.
10. **Interpretation You Place on Sin:** You will add interpretations to what your spouse has done. While you can expect repentance from your spouse for the first nine items, your spouse can only give compassion for this item. These are messages that you create that your spouse cannot refute or disprove as long as you cling to them. These messages will be the primary subject of Step 4 and will find their replacement through the gospel in Step 6.

The Impact on You

As you seek to understand the impact of your spouse’s sexual sin upon you, it is important to recognize that these impacts will come in two varieties: (1) impacts for which understanding, time, and removing the destructive elements of the suffering story are the remedy; and (2) impacts which call for actions from you or your spouse in order to counter the effects of the suffering.

For the first variety, the corrective elements will be defined in Steps 4 through 6. For the second variety, the corrective elements will be defined in Steps 7 and 8. Your goal in this chapter is merely to “understand.” If reflecting on these aspects of impact on you is overwhelming, remember you can take your time – recovery is not a race.

There is the obvious emotional impact of your spouse’s sexual sin: numbness, anger, despair, fear, jealousy, regret, embarrassment, shame, depression, and other emotions. These emotions are assumed in each of the impacts discussed below. But the ten changes below focus more on the relational or dispositional affects than the emotional expressions. Most of them have to do with influences that began before the discovery of your spouse’s sin or common unhealthy ways of responding to a spouse’s sexual sin.

- I. **Tolerating an Unhealthy Lifestyle:** Unhealthy does not always mean unfaithful, but unfaithful requires increasing degrees of unhealthiness to grow. The types of unhealthy marital habits can small or large: keeping the

computer in a low traffic area of home, not communicating schedules and having blocks of unaccounted for time, separate budgets, unmonitored spending, mixed gender recreation without your spouse, allowing personal hobbies or work to crowd out time for marriage, crude or demanding language about sex, responding in anger to questions, or growing disinterest and infrequency in sex. When sexual sin is a part of your spouse’s life and you do not know it, then these unhealthy lifestyle changes become the “normal” of your household.

Read Ephesians 4:3-13. Paul says that the lifestyle associated with sexual sin “must not even be named among you (v. 3).” The lifestyle characteristics described above should be changed; not just because they make you uncomfortable, but because they create an atmosphere where sexual sin (and many other sins) are easy. When Paul talks of major changes to language that are “out of place” (v. 4) he says that this should be done with thanksgiving (both in content of speech and attitude of heart). It is not in response to your preferences that your spouse should make these changes (insinuating when you are “less sensitive” things can return to “normal”) but in response to God’s design for a healthy marriage.

2. **Changing Role or Identity:** It is hard to live in sin and live responsibly. As the offending spouse becomes less responsible, the offended spouse takes on the role of parent, nag, stiff, or rescuer. If the offending spouse is generally irresponsible, these relational roles can become an identity. After the sin has been discovered the roles can become even more pronounced. After discovery, the offended spouse can feel a sense of identity confusion (i.e., “I feel lost. I don’t know who you are or I am anymore.”) or escape into other roles (i.e., devoting yourself fully the kids or work to avoid the pain and confusion that comes with being a spouse).

“[Case Study and testimony] Lorie, 34, is a nurse and mother of two young children. She believed that her 10-year marriage to Todd, an engineer, was good. True, their sex life had decreased recently, but Todd told her it was because he was involved in an important and demanding project at work, and he was usually exhausted by evening... Lorie’s life began to fall apart when she accidentally discovered Todd’s secret sexual life on the computer... She later said, ‘I felt total distrust in myself, my spouse, and the relationship. I felt betrayed, confused, afraid, and stunned. The person I loved and trusted most in the world had lied about who he was. I felt I had lived through a vast and sinister cover-up (p. 24).’ Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

Read Ephesians 5:22-33. At this time it is better to read this passage for a refresher on marriage functioning. Your marriage is strained and away from what God designed it to be. But it is important to notice that in each case the spouse role (husband and wife) is secondary to and an example of the relationship with God (“as to the Lord” and “as Christ”). Whenever we face trials we have tendency to define ourselves by our struggle. In times like these it is easy to be defined by your marriage more than your God. When that is the case how you see yourself and how you relate to your spouse will be negatively affected.

3. **Acquiring Controlling Tendencies:** “I don’t want to be hurt again.” The controlling tendency has a very understandable origin. “Healthy” (discussed in impact variable one) becomes controlling when it doesn’t allow the other person to voluntarily choose “healthy.” Controlling claims to know what you’re thinking, feels threatened to be wrong, must have “say” not just awareness of money and time, or demands proof of subjective realities. After the betrayal of sexual sin, these responses are usually done more from self-protection than vengeful punishment. But regardless of motive they eat away at the betrayed, now controlling spouse and withers efforts at marital restoration. Control promises safety but provides a counterfeit version of safety at the cost of creating an environment for healthy restoration.

“What you will have to face, Kelly, is that you cannot make your husband do the right thing. You cannot talk him into it; you can’t shame him into it; you can’t police him into it; and you can’t threaten him into it. However, what you can do is begin learning the secret of how to entrust him into the hands of the Lord. After all, only God can change his heart (p. 94-95).” Kathy Gallagher in *When His Secret Sin Breaks Your Heart*

4. **Becoming Inconsistent:** This is the other side of the controlling tendency. Inconsistency can come into your life in several ways. First, before discovery, you may find that nothing you do makes a difference in the marriage and begin to give up on things that are important. Second, after discovery, you may make so many declarations about changes that “should be made” that not all of them can be done consistently or find that some of them were not as relevant as they seemed in your initial fear. You begin to feel weak or hypocritical for not following through on what you said. Third, after discovery, you become emotionally overwhelmed and quit in areas of life or marriage that you know to be important. Regardless of its cause a lifestyle of inconsistency establishes itself and eats away at the good intentions of a healthy marriage.
5. **Growing Gullible or Cynical:** The lies of a spouse’s sexual sin can push the offended spouse in one of two unhealthy directions: gullible or cynical. You feel torn. “At some point I have to give the benefit of the doubt,

right?” But on the other hand, “So much that sounded plausible was a lie, why believe anything but my doubts now?” It feels like the only choice is to believe everything or believe nothing. “Truth” begins to feel like a cruel joke. You want it to know the truth, but each time you have thought you did, it changes (i.e., more of the story comes out or another hurtful choice is made).

Read Hebrews 2:10-18. This passage raises the question of trust in the midst of suffering. That is the difficult battle you are facing as you seek to resist being either gullible or cynical – learning how to trust wisely in the midst of suffering. Notice the passage ends with Jesus compassion for your predicament (v. 18). Jesus to was betrayed by one he committed His life to (Matt 10:1-4), whom he trusted enough to manage His earthly money (John 13:29), and had the power to destroy Him with affection (Luke 22:47-48). You may feel like this skepticism and uncertainty is a “lifelong slavery” (v. 15) know that Jesus is able to deliver. He is with you in the midst of this uncertainty (Heb. 13:20-21) and will ultimately let the truth be known (Heb. 4:12-13). *True Betrayal* and *False Love* are designed to allow truth to be known by confession, which is best for your spouse’s restoration and the benefit of your family.

6. **Growing Passive Toward Life:** “It doesn’t matter what I do.” These are painful words. Whenever we speak them it reveals that we have lost the exclusive ability to do, protect, or create what is most important to us. They are the words of a parent whose child has a terminal disease, the business owner facing bankruptcy, and the spouse whose partner has been unfaithful. Nothing feels permanent, solid, or dependable anymore. Emotional or relational investment no longer guarantee the desired result like they once seemed to. It is easy in this environment to become passive in such a way that depression becomes a cocoon protecting you from the unpleasant realities of your marriage and family.

Read Philippians 3:7-16. Paul knew he did not have what it took to continue (v. 12a) and that what he had been building his life upon was not capable sustaining him through his current situation (v. 7). He had to remind himself and his readers to “press on” and not allow this sense of being overwhelmed to paralyze them (v. 12b). Paul did not literally forget his past (v. 13). He frequently referenced it (2 Cor. 11:21-33; 1 Tim. 1:12-17). But Paul is talking about not allowing our past to define us more than God’s ability to work in our present and future. This is the mark of maturity (v. 15) to which he was striving and calls on us to strive for.

7. **Growing Insecurity:** This insecurity may be expressed through fear or anger, but regardless of its expression you begin to live with a constant barrage of questions about yourself, your spouse, and your marriage. Everything is being evaluated and there seem to be no certain answers to any of the questions. The net effect of living in this kind of questioning is that everything begins to feel personal, as if it is a commentary on your actions and worth. It is from this self-referential way of thinking that each action, word, or even silence in you day begins to illicit fear, doubt, anger, quick hope, deep disappointment, and other intense emotions.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:1-18. Paul is in the midst of an intense and personal conflict. He is struggling with how he comes across (weak in person; strong in his letters). He wants to maintain the humility of Christ while boldly answering his critics who question his ministry. Notice how Paul struggles to avoid making an intensely personal conflict self-referential. From the tone of his public letter, it is safe to say that Paul also struggled to maintain this distinction in his personal thought/emotional life. Be encouraged by his vulnerability while learning from his example.

8. **Living a One Variable Life:** Living a one variable life can happen in several ways after a spouse’s sexual sin. First, as your marriage becomes the most intense issue in your life, it is easy to allow the condition of your marriage to define your life. Second, you can focus on the “one thing” your spouse should do next as if it would make everything better. Third, you can use your fluctuating response to your spouse’s sin as the measure of your faith in or walk with God. However we reduce our life to a single variable it has two effects: (a) it makes our world smaller, and (b) it makes every problem in our now small world seem bigger. The result is that we create a mental environment that is inhospitable for hope or encouragement.
9. **Relating as a Codependent:** Codependency can be defined as a relational style built upon the false assumption that sin plays by consistent rules. The “game” in codependency is to learn the “rules of sin” (at least the particular sin of the particular person that is affecting you) so that you can prevent the sin from occurring. The “advantage” to the game is that it gives the façade of control over another person. The problem with codependency is that these rules do not exist, it makes you responsible for your spouse’s sin, and it results in the preferences of your spouse becoming your functional god. As you resist the urge to relate codependently, you will experience the fear of realizing that your spouse’s sexual sin is outside your ability to control. But you will also be laying the foundation for a marriage that can be a relationship of mutually responsible, mutually honoring people.

A similar seminar to this one can be found for codependency at bradhambrick.com/codependency.

10. **Post-Traumatic Stress:** After the discovery of your spouse’s sexual sin, it is common to live with a high degree of emotional and situational intensity for a period of time. This can be “traumatic” in both the descriptive and clinical sense of the word.

“The deception and the secret life of the sex addict bring unprecedented turmoil, fear, and pain to the partner (p. 11).” Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

In some cases, this trauma can create the experience of Post-Traumatic Stress (PTSD). PTSD is when an individual faces an event he/she is unprepared to handle and the impact of that event has a lingering impact on life functioning. If you are experiencing any of the following symptoms six months after the discovery of your spouse’s sin, then you are likely experiencing the effects of PTSD. As you create a safe and transparent home environment, these symptoms should subside. If not, then seeking personal counseling for these affects is advisable.

- _____ Intrusive recollections of the events surrounding your spouse’s sexual sin or your discovery.
- _____ Recurrent dreams associated with your spouse’s sexual sin.
- _____ Flashbacks where you feel like you are re-experiencing your spouse’s sin or the discovery of it.
- _____ Intense distress when you experience things that remind you of your spouse’s sexual sin.
- _____ Feelings of detachment from others.
- _____ Difficulty concentrating at your normal levels.
- _____ Hypervigilance – always looking for what is about to go wrong.

A similar seminar to this one can be found for trauma at bradhambrick.com/ptsd.

The Impact on the Marriage

Your spouse’s sexual sin doesn’t just impact you as an individual. It also impacts the marriage in ways that are distinct from its impact upon you. You may have already been experiencing these impacts of your spouse’s sexual sin, but were unable to articulate them and did not know what to attribute them to. In this section we will look at two impacts of sexual sin upon the marriage relationship: (1) creation of two time tables and (2) the principle of least interest trap.

Two Time Tables

This may be the most important relational dynamic to understand. Using the metaphor of dancing – the two of you may learn all the right steps in this material, but you must realize that you are in different places in the song. Unless you realize this and allow for its implications you may put a great deal of effort into learning to dance, but fail to get synchronized in a way that makes a harmonious marriage.

The divide began when your spouse began to sin and did not tell you. Your spouse likely began to experience something similar to the following progression. As your spouse stepped into sexual sin, his/her emotions probably followed a pattern similar to the pattern your emotions have followed as you have suspected and learned of their sin.

- **Shock** – “There is no way that person would be interested in me.” Or, “Could it be this easy to find stuff on the internet?”
- **Denial** – “We don’t mean anything by what we’re doing. We’re just being friends.” Or, “I’m not really hurting anybody. It’s just porn and no one will find out.”
- **Anger** – A sense of self-condemnation for doing something he/she knew to be wrong.
- **Bargaining** – Convincing him/herself it’s not that bad based upon one of the motives in Step 3 of False Love.
- **Depression** – A sense of guilt and hopelessness when he/she wanted to get out their sin, but felt trapped.
- **Acceptance** – Sin became normal and it seemed as if she/she was going to get away with it.
- **Forgiveness** – Buying the lie that the sin was necessary or right based upon a growing commitment to the motive sin fulfilled in his/her life. Or privately accepting God’s forgiveness if the adultery was ended before you learned of its existence.

You likely did not find out about your spouse’s sin until he/she was in the latter stages of this progression. However, at the point that you learned of your spouse’s sin or when you began to be suspicious of it, you started at the beginning of an awkwardly similar emotional journey.

- **Shock** – “Could my spouse really be sinning against me sexually?” Even asking the question seems wrong.

- **Denial** – “No, there has to be another explanation.” Time is spent explaining the clues based upon a different story line.
- **Anger** – As certainty builds or discovery hits, the wrongness of your spouse’s actions is met with the appropriate emotional response, anger.
- **Bargaining** – Usually this centers around all the possible explanations you create for the “why” question and the implications you develop for each potential answer.
- **Depression** – A form of depression is part of accepting a painful reality that you cannot change. Another form of depression comes from the themes of your suffering story we will examine in Step 4.
- **Acceptance** – In order for this acceptance to be anything more than mere resignation to unchangeable pain, your spouse’s sin and its impact on you will need to be mourned (Step 5) and processed in light of the gospel (Step 6).
- **Forgiveness** – Regardless of whether you chose to restore the marriage, you will need to come to a place of forgiveness towards your spouse or you will allow this pain to wither your life from this point forward. But we will discuss forgiveness in Step 7.

Hopefully, you can begin to see why it has been so hard for the two of you to communicate even when/if you agree on the facts in a given conversation. The two of you are talking from two different places. This reality is not a reflection of future incompatibility or whether the pain is reconcilable. It is simply the effect of lying.

This explains why there are so many cross references to other chapters between this material and *False Love*. What is changing is not just habits and lifestyle, but “time tables.” Your spouse doesn’t “get it” the way you want them to, because (at least in part) he/she is not where you are. They keep telling you that “you don’t understand,” because (at least in part) you are not where they are.

False Love and *True Betrayal* are written not only to guide you through the next steps of what to do, but to bring you to the same place again (or for the first time). But these differences in time tables will make it very tempting to believe “this is not working,” because “we don’t feel like we’re on the same page.” If you feel like it is more than the pain of sin that is between you, you are right. It is also this “time table” distance of deception. As long as there is honesty through this process, that distance should subside.

Principle of Least Interest Trap

The person who is least interested in a relationship holds the most power in the relationship. This is the principle of least interest. When this principle becomes active within a marriage, it is never healthy. The marriage begins to operate on the basis of power and leverage rather than love and sacrifice. When this happens marriage quits being a microcosm of the gospel and becomes a microcosm of the world.

Typically (not always) the spouse sinning sexually is the first to become the less interested in the offended spouse. This is both because his/her sexual appetite is being quenched somewhere else and because of a sense of guilt when around the offended spouse. That guilt is often verbalized as “feeling judged.” This lesser interest comes with a double reward: sexual satisfaction and increased “voice” in the marriage. If the latter doesn’t happen, then that is only used to as additional “reason” for sinning in the mind of the offending spouse.

After the sexual sin is discovered the offended spouse quickly has all the power, unless the offending spouse is committing adultery and considering ending the marriage. Over the course of the next days and weeks it often begins to feel like the only way to get something done is to threaten the relationship by expressing “less interest.” Yet, even when this is done for a good reason, the cumulative effect is negative. Soon neither person feels safe. Divorce begins to feel like the only option.

Frequently, this power play dynamic existed in the marriage before the sexual sin. When this is the case, then both spouses are familiar with the “rules of the game.” When this is true, the power play dynamics are less “innocent” (consequences of the sexual sin that neither spouse was prepared for) and more clearly a continuation of manipulation by both spouses. It is just that after the sexual sin, the couple can play their old game with a much more powerful weapon. In these cases mutual repenting for playing games with the marriage long before the sexual sin is a prerequisite to continuing in these materials.

When the principle of least interest is not part of a long-standing marital pattern, the question becomes, “How do we get out of this new power play dynamic?” The dynamic is going to exist whether it is “used” or not. The dynamic is going to be felt whether the “less interested” spouse is leveraging his/her newly gained influence or not. Here are several points to help you navigate the principle of least interest trap.

- The primary reason for making changes in the marriage should be because they are healthy and adhere to God’s design for marriage; not because they adhere to one spouse’s preferences. An outside counselor will often be

helpful in discerning this distinction. Once the marriage has returned to operating on love and sacrifice again, personal preference can begin to have their God-intended, healthy influence in decision making again.

- Where insecurity exists because of the offending spouse’s sexual sin or deceit, he/she should do all that is possible to alleviate this concern because it is healthy not merely to make his/her spouse happy. If there is resistance to the necessary change and the offending spouse’s primary motive is to please the offended spouse, this will lead to resentment or an expectation for a reciprocation—both disruptive to the restoration process.
- Do not use phrases similar to “If you were really sorry you would...,” or “Because you hurt me, you owe it to me to...” when requesting changes to restore the marriage. These feed the morally-created power differential in the marriage. Even when the request is honored, the nature of these requests do little to restore the marriage. Power request only prove that you fear me, not that you love me; so I must remain strong, rather than being free to trust. It is best to let your request stand alone, “It would help me recover [relax, trust, etc...], if you would...”
- Recognize that this time of communication and decision making is unique. Do not begin to think that this is “how things are going to be from now on.” This mindset will either feed despair towards divorce or reinforce a fear-based competitiveness that makes it “only logical” to keep the upper hand. This is a unique season in your marriage, which if handled correctly, will be just that – a season.
- Begin to separate “change” from “power.” This is a vital distinction for the long term health of any marriage. Actually it is just another way of defining what it means to trust. *Trust is the belief that reasonable requests will be honored without the need for relational leverage.* This definition of trust should allow you to begin to build trust without thinking trust has to mean “putting myself in a position to be hurt by you again,” a definition of trust that radically diminishes the likelihood that trust will be given. When reasonable request require leverage trust is not warranted yet. The progression or developing trust will be discussed in Step 7.

Read I Corinthians 9:8-14. Paul was in a conflict that had the strong potential to devolve into power play dynamics – some in the church at Corinth were accusing him of being in the ministry for money. Notice that Paul begins by stating what is healthy and holy (v. 8) – those who labor deserve compensation and this is what God established for both man and beast. After establishing this, Paul was careful to allow the focus to remain on the point where his audience most needed to receive the gospel (v. 12). Similarly, as you walk through understanding the impact of your suffering with your spouse your goals should be: (a) clearly stating what is healthy and holy for marriage, and (b) keeping the focus on where your spouse needs to embrace the gospel in order to experience lasting change.

Encouragement Focus (UNDERSTAND):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Accounting for the factors of impact, have you assessed the impact of your spouse’s sin on you personally?
- Accounting for the factors of impact, have you assessed the impact of your spouse’s sin on the marriage?
- Prepare: Are you caring for yourself in the six ways listed under “Care for Yourself Physically” in chapter one?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- _____
- _____

Step 4

"Is What I'm Thinking... True, Right, Real, Helpful, Crazy?"

LEARN MY SUFFERING STORY which I use to make sense of my experience.

"I formed beliefs [define] about myself, life, marriage, and God based on my spouse's betrayal. I lived out of those beliefs [describe] because they were all I knew and they 'fit.' Those beliefs became the guiding themes of my life story. Putting those beliefs into words scares me [describe why]. I reject that false life story and am committed to learning how my life fits into God's great story of redemption."

Memorize: Solomon 8:6-8 (ESV), "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised." As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- "Set me as a seal" – Expecting your spouse avoid sexual sin and to honor the marriage covenant is reasonable.
- "Love is strong" – The betrayal of sexual sin hurts so bad because love is so good and so powerful.
- "Fierce as the grave" – Sexual betrayal is a very tangible experiences of "the wages of sin is death (Rom 3:23)."
- "Flashes of fire" – The intensity of the emotional pain can have psychosomatic effects of pain, nausea, or illness.
- "If a man offered" – This is why it hurts and is offensive if your spouse tries to do or offer some form of penance.

Teaching Notes

"How many people knew about the affair? I didn't know and would never know... I felt as if I were wearing a sign that read, "NOT GOOD ENOUGH!" (p. 61)... God, I need a miracle here. You're the great Healer. Heal us! Let me wake up from this nightmare. We're sitting here breathing, and yet as surely as there is air moving in and out of my lungs, I know we're dying. But I want to know why I have to die when the sin is not mine! I didn't do this (p. 75)... In my weary brain there were only three alternatives: lying to myself, being lied to, or pain. If there was no pain, then someone must be lying (p. 98)." Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

"Quite often I hear in counseling, 'If he loved me he wouldn't have had the affair.' I sadly respond, 'He loves you and he had an affair (p. 347).'" Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

"Couple shame makes them feel that they have a bad marriage and that people won't want to associate with them (p. 183)." Mark Laaser in *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*

"[Case study] Tiffany could not believe what she just heard. After all of the sexual improprieties her husband Jason had engaged in, he was blaming her for his acting out. According to Jason, Tiffany was critical, blaming, non-supportive, and wasn't meeting his sexual needs (p. 7)... Examples of impaired thoughts for co-addicts include *I deserve to be treated this way. I can't do any better. If I was performing better sexually this wouldn't have happened* (p. 21)... Many co-addicts, even before marrying a sex addict, have come to believe that sex is the most important sign of love. This makes them the perfect partner for a sex addict, who usually believes that sex is his or her most important need (p. 35)." Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

"And I was angry! Gary and his partner had 'repented and been forgiven.' They could move on with their lives. Well, I couldn't! I resented the fact that I had not committed this sin, yet I still had to carry the pain. Why didn't they just run away together? By now I could have been moving on with my life instead of being stuck. And at least I wouldn't have had to suffer in silence; everyone would know if they'd run off. Even as I thought these things, I knew the absurdity of them. We all suffered. We all were suffering. But it was so unfair. No one had ever wanted to have an affair with me! There had been no desire so strong that I had risked everything to satisfy it. Gary had risked everything and everyone for her. What had he ever risked to have me? Maybe I wasn't worth having. Maybe I should just disappear (p. 110)." Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

Embedded Study

Medical professionals who work in the area of chronic pain often differentiate between pain and suffering. Pain is the physical experience (i.e., a pinched nerve) that travels from nerve to nerve and registers in the brain. Pain can be treated medically. Suffering, however, is the sense of hopelessness or despair that attaches to pain. It does not travel via nerve endings, but is part of our immaterial mind (not our physical brain). Hence there is no medical treatment for suffering. That is a work done in the soul not the body.

As we look at the suffering story which you use to make sense of your experience, we are examining suffering (i.e., the meaning you have given to your experience) rather than pain (i.e., the act of betrayal or how you learned of it). As in chronic pain, *both pain and the suffering are real* and should be treated. In Steps 4-6 we will treat the suffering. As your spouse works through *False Love* and in chapters Steps 7-8 of *True Betrayal* we will treat the pain of your experience.

You might ask the question, “Why are we dealing with the ‘suffering’ before the ‘pain’? Can’t we do both at the same time?” We are. If you spouse is working through *False Love*, that is the most important component of working on the pain that can be addressed at this stage.

At this time in your spouse’s work, he/she will be learning what it means to genuinely repent to God, how to thoroughly confess his/her sin to you (humbly seeking forgiveness, not just giving you an accurate history), and learning what is reasonable to expect of him/her in the restoration process. This is an important time for your spouse, but these steps may not be as conversationally interactive as the previous steps.

“However, in early recovery there is very little available for you because all the energy you partner put into his or her addiction must now be directed toward his or her own recovery... The addict can no more understand your need for remorse than you can understand what it’s like for him to not act out for 30 days (p. 50).” Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

Unless we take some time to work on the suffering side of your experience, it would be tempting for you to grow increasingly passive, impatient, and bitter as your spouse transitions from steps where there is a high information transfer to steps that produces less information to share.

These do not have to be “the silent steps” for you. They can be a time when you work through the information you have gained in the first three steps of your journey. You have taken in an unsettling amount of information. It would be unwise to quickly move forward without taking time to assimilate what you’ve learned, distilled the destructive messages (Step 4), grieve the betrayal (Step 5), and reframe these painful events in light of the gospel (Step 6).

While you may share with your spouse pieces of Steps 4 and 5, the more complete version of what needs to be said will put into words as you complete Step 6. Realize that your spouse will be in a similar place in his/her journey through Steps 4-6 of *False Love*. Hopefully, the honesty and disclosure of Steps 1-3 has developed enough trust to sustain this middle leg of the journey.

As we define and examine the suffering story you use to make sense of your suffering, we will do so in three sections.

1. Sexual Sin: A Disrupted Story
2. Ten Potential Themes of Your Suffering Story
3. From Facts to Themes to Story

Sexual Sin: A Disrupted Story

Suffering rooted in deceit has a unique capacity to disrupt our life; it affects our sense of who we are, what we want, what is safe, and where we’re going. Suffering not rooted in deceit affects in the present. It may be intense, but it is “now.” We have some capacity to decide what to do with it and our decisions have influence. For example, if you were being physically abused, you would know who was hitting you, when it started, how many times you’d been hit, and how intense each blow was. You would have choices that affected the situation: would you hit back, separate, or call the police?

However, sexual sin is hidden, so it is “then” or “already” before you know about it “now.” It feels impossible to fight the past in the present. Yet this unknown past is part of your story. Strangely you are asking questions about your life in the same way that you read a novel – wanting to know what happened next. You are like an adopted child hearing a story from his adopted parents about a time before he became a part of the family asking, “Do I remember that?” The mere fact that you don’t know your own story is simultaneously unsettling, infuriating, and frightful.

"One wife said to me as she became aware of her husband's affairs, 'Give me my life back! Take me back to twenty minutes before we started talking; I want my husband back just as he was (p. 103)!' Harry Schaumburg in *False Intimacy*

The fact that you do not know your own story makes it so much easier for false (i.e., even if partially true) story lines to begin to dominate how you make sense of your life. Things that might only be true of this situation (i.e., or potentially true of this situation) begin to be generalized to apply to all of life. When this happens fear, anger, insecurity, or other emotions that you feel become a permanent part of your life.

It does no good to say, "All of life or the rest of your marriage will not be like this season." You didn't see this season coming. When you have an enemy you can't see it only makes sense to always be on guard, right? Deception makes sexual betrayal feel like a ghost. It was haunting your life before you knew it.

How Do I Respond?

Chances are the above description may have only made things temporarily worse. Putting pain into words can initially make it more painful. What you can gain from this section is a better understanding of why the destructive scripts we will examine are so "sticky." You feel intense pain and have a void of meaning to explain it. Therefore, only the most negative messages seem to "fit." In light of that, consider the following recommendations as you go through this chapter.

- **Go slow.** This will likely need to be a highly reflective step for you. When we consider the meaning that we give to traumatic events, it usually requires a bit of introspection. But times of emotional volatility are usually not when we think most clearly. So this step may take longer than the previous ones.
- **Don't confuse resonance to truth.** As you read, you may "connect" with several themes. As you connect with those themes the "realness" of how that theme has impacted your life will make that theme feel "true." This step is not meant to validate these themes as true (actually the ultimate intent is to do the opposite). The goal for this chapter is to help you put into words the messages you could take from this experience that would be most destructive so you can refute them with the truth and hope of the gospel.
- **Allow yourself to feel.** The fact that the themes are "real" in your experience, even if not "true," means that they will have an emotional impact. While unpleasant, that is not bad (you should not feel guilty about it). You should not be unmoved, even as you wrestle with these untrue themes. It is possible to know by faith that they are not true and still be upset by how closely they seem to define your life.
- **Don't expect a single answer.** A single answer would mean that your situation and circumstances were simple. This is not true. As you read you want to gain "ears to hear" the false messages you use to make sense of life. Previously they may have defined life undetected. As you learn to hear them as false without feeling guilty for their presence, they begin to lose their power.
- **Try to attach emotions to themes.** It is in this step that your emotions may begin to make more sense to you. It may have felt like a single trigger could cause a swing between fear, anger, insecurity, and disgust without a reason for the fluctuation. As you identify the themes that give emotional force to each trigger, the emotional fluctuations will likely make more sense. For example, the "trigger" might be your spouse giving you a compliment but the responses fly between insecurity (theme: trust is dangerous; how can I rely on you feeling this way later?), anger (theme: if you loved me, then you would have never said that to anyone else), and disgust (theme: men/women are liars; that is what you would say).

Ten Potential Themes of Your Suffering Story

How do we get from experience to story? We begin to summarize our experience in thematic statements. Whether we verbalize these statements or just feel them to be true, these themes become the basis of how we prepare for the future and interpret the present. These themes make some experiences highly relevant and others "exceptions to the rule." These themes begin to define who we are, who God is, and what we should expect from others or life.

We are going to look at ten unhealthy themes that you can use to make sense of your spouse's sexual sin: (1) something is wrong with me, (2) this was my fault, (3) if you loved me, then..., (4) trust is dangerous or naive, (5) sex is ultimate, (6) sex is the "ring of power," (7) I am the unwanted one, (8) life would be easier if..., (9) intensified male/female stereotypes, and (10) everything is second class now.

As we discuss each one, we will be seeking to strike a balance. On the one hand, we want to be descriptive and compassionate, so that you can hear yourself in these themes and know that you are not the only one who thinks this way. On the other hand, we want to refute these destructive messages as false so that you do not confuse the fact that they “explain the way you feel” with “they must be true.”

Each theme may be partially true. For example, there is something wrong with all of us – we are born sinners (Rom. 3:23). What makes these “false themes” is when they are treated as “the whole truth,” used to explain your spouse’s sin, or become the absolute and necessary rule by which you relate to others.

1. **Something Is Wrong with Me:** This theme echoes insecurity through a self-perception of deficiency. It assumes that my excellence is the only barrier between my spouse and sin. When this theme becomes dominant in your life, it quickly makes every “off” thing in your world a source of guilt and shame. Before long, your inability to do things “right” is the reason any and everything goes “wrong.”

After betrayal through sexual sin, this often begins by comparing yourself to the favored pornographic images or adultery partner. Whatever is different between them and you is what is “wrong” with you. It is not long before you begin comparing yourself to the most favorable qualities of each person you meet. Life becomes an emotional game where your weaknesses have to compete with everyone else’s strengths.

The world no longer feels safe, because you assume that your deficiency is more obvious to the rest of the world than it is to you. Compliments and words of encouragement can be perceived as words of pity offered to someone who “obviously needs them.” Only those relationships where you have a clear function with measurable outcomes (i.e., work) or where you serve a clear care taking role (i.e., children or parents) may feel safe.

How have you been tempted to interpret your spouse’s sin as, “Something is wrong with me”?

Read James 2:1-13. This theme assumes the sin of partiality. It assumes that those who are “better” by a cultural preference (in James’ case it was wealth and fashion) are more deserving of being treated with honor. Any life theme that assumes sin will breed dysfunction. Read James words in verse twelve as written to you, “[paraphrased] Think, speak, and act as someone who is not judged by physical appearance or performance but by the requirements of God who rejoices when humble hearts live free of condemnation.”

2. **This Was My Fault:** One step beyond “something is wrong with me” is “this was my fault.” Now my “wrongness” explains your “badness;” my “deficiency” resulted in your “depravity.” Often the defensive words of the offending spouse drive this theme home. Even the repentant words of the offending spouse trying to answer the why question often serve to reinforce this theme.

The tempting part of this theme is that it provides a façade of control. If it really was your fault, then you could make sure it never happened again by doing better. Its seeming utility makes this theme very appealing when everything seems out of control. In the midst of chaos it seems plausible to trade truth for a sense of direction.

The problem is that it turns everything you do to bless your spouse into porn-prevention or adultery-prevention. This slowly turns blessings into bitterness. The short-term relief (which this theme often really does provide) comes at the cost of turning acts of love (which must be other-minded to be life-giving) into acts of self-protection. With time the nagging, fearful “was that good enough” questions inevitably return.

How have you been tempted to interpret your spouse’s sin as, “This was my fault”?

Read Ezekiel 18:1-20. Notice that it was common in Ezekiel’s day to explain one person’s behavior on the basis of another’s (i.e., a parent eats sour candy and the children pucker). Often we think these kinds of explanations are the new findings of “deep” thinkers in our modern day. God refutes this way of understanding life with strong language. God is vivid and repetitive (see Jeremiah 31:27-30). This theme is false and God is grieved to see His children live under its weight.

3. **If You Loved Me, Then...:** This theme tries to make things simpler than they are. This theme can be applied retrospectively (i.e., “If you loved me then, you would not have looked at somebody else”) or in the present tense (i.e., “If you loved me, then you would ‘get it’ about how this makes me feel.”). Either way, this theme is built on

the premise that you can't love someone and hurt them. Life and love are not that neat. These feelings are real (like those captured in the quote below), but that are not necessarily the whole truth.

“Our sexual intimacy had been cheapened—actually nullified—because it was shared with many others. It had little or no value to him because he preferred a cheap thrill rather than the real thing; me, his wife. The pleasure he wanted from our union could be found or purchased on any street corner or in any massage parlor (p. 153).” Kathy Gallagher in *When His Secret Sin Breaks Your Heart*

It is accurate to say, “If you loved me *well*, then...” The choice to sin against your spouse sexually, and all the precursor choices and motives that accompany that action, are a contradiction to covenant love. This theme accurately captures the act of betrayal, but it falsely defines your spouse and the future of the marriage by that action. No scene (or even series of scenes) has to define an entire movie.

Seeing the truth and probable exaggeration of this theme allows you to be both hurt and hopeful. As you crystallize the messages that you are tempted to take from this suffering, fight the tendency to make betrayal the defining event(s) of your marriage. One way to think of forgiveness, in anticipation of Step 7, is allowing another theme—one of wise redemption and restoration—to become the dominant theme of your marriage.

How have you been tempted to interpret your spouse's sin as, “If you loved me, then...”?

Read Revelation 2:1-7. Ephesus was a great church. The letter that bears its name (Ephesians) is one of the richest in the New Testament. Paul had a unique and powerful love for them and this church for him (Acts 20:36-38). But now, some years later Jesus charge against them was, “You have abandoned the love you had at first (v. 4).” But Jesus did not give up hope. Rather he called for decisive change (v. 5), acknowledged good qualities (v. 6), and placed responsibility to respond upon them while maintaining hope for a positive outcome (v. 7).

- 4. Trust Is Dangerous or Naïve:** Love was intended to make us feel safe (1 John 4:18). Love assumes trust. This is why the betrayal of sexual sin hurts so badly. Fear of experiencing that pain again is what makes it hard to view trust as something that could be good. Hence, it is so easy to begin viewing trust through a negative lens and write trust off as the practice of young fools or people who don't live in “the real world.”

Premature trust is dangerous and naïve. This is why in Step 7 we will discuss healthy, wise ways to restore trust. You prepare yourself for that step by resisting the urge to treat the theme of trust like it is the exclusive property of Stephen King (or other horror-theme authors). Trust did not hurt you. Sin hurt you. If someone woke up from sleep because of an earthquake, they should realize that sleep did not destroy their house; the earthquake did.

Trust is the soul's rest. When you allow the theme of trust to become disparaged, you begin to write a very weary life story. While you may need to learn what warning signs to give more credence to, that does not mean that trust is dangerous or naïve. It just means that our ultimate trust and identity must be placed in something greater and sturdier than our spouse.

How have you been tempted to interpret your spouse's sin as, “Trust is dangerous or naïve”?

Read Isaiah 50:10-11: Isaiah points out that the only place where fear and trust can co-exist without internal turmoil is in our relationship with God – the fear of the Lord and trust in the name of the Lord (v. 10). However, this does not preclude taking wise steps to facilitate security. For example, lighting a fire and carrying torches in dark places (v. 11a). These come from God and are a gift from His hand (v. 11b). However, when our trust is in the torch (our ability to find information) more than the Giver of the torch (His faithfulness to make known what is vital to know), then we will have no rest (v. 11c).

- 5. Sex Is Ultimate:** Another twisted theme that emerges after a spouse's sexual sin is that “sex is ultimate.” It can take several forms: a good marriage is defined by a good sex life, a good spouse is defined by his/her ability to perform sexually, or the value of a person is defined by their ability to please others visually/sexually. Hopefully, stated in short, concise statements of this theme ring false.

This theme is reinforced when you are told by your spouse (and too often also by friends or counselors) that the reason for sexual sin was that you were not “filling your spouse's love tank.” The message becomes sex is ultimate,

because “I am only safe from future betrayal if I consistently meet this ambiguously defined standard with someone who just hurt me. If I don’t, then I bear the blame for his/her betrayal.”

“Sex is ultimate” gets further reinforced because sexual sin changes the appetite for sex in the sinner. With pornography, sexual sin creates an expectation fueled by a fantasy world of professional sex athletes and vast amounts of visual variety. With adultery, sexual sin creates an expectation fueled by the level of planning and risk that accompany each sexual encounter. Both dynamics create an artificial high and center life on sex. Until sex is less than ultimate, it will never consistently fulfill its maximum pleasure-giving function within marriage.

“It is difficult for Christian spouses to confront inappropriate sexual demands in marriage because they may assume it is their duty to be submissive (p. 67).” Mark Laaser in *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*

“Our Christian task is to remember that every sexual union is profound. It always points to the deeper union that we have with Christ by faith. Sex mirrors the glory of God in the gospel. It exists because it expresses God’s oneness with His people, His fidelity to us, His ownership of us, His self-sacrifice, and the pleasure we can take in this relationship... Sex is a good thing, there’s no question about that, but we don’t need sex. Humanness, found in Jesus, is not defined by sexual intercourse.” Edward T. Welch in “The Apostle Paul: On Sex” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* (Fall 2005).

How have you been tempted to interpret your spouse’s sin as, “Sex is ultimate”?

Read I Corinthians 6:19-7:5. Too often the end of I Corinthians 6 is separated from the beginning of chapter seven. This passage, as a whole unit, speaks of the two people who have authority over our body: Christ, as our Savior, and our spouse (if married). We see that sex within marriage does have a role in averting temptations (7:2), but Paul does not take the next step to say that the absence of sex in marriage causes sin. Rather, Paul would go on to say that there is never an excuse to sin (I Cor. 10:13). In this passage, he says the reason for sin is “your (the offending spouse’s) lack of self-control (7:5).” The point to be taken from this passage is: sex is good and should be enjoyed frequently in marriage, but it cannot become ultimate.

6. **Sex Is the “Ring of Power”:** This imagery is borrowed from *The Lord of the Rings* series by J.R.R. Tolkien. It can be a mutually established theme and often begins before the betrayal (i.e., withholding sex to punish or giving sex to get something one wants), or even before the marriage (i.e., validating one’s worth or social status by who is willing to have sex with you). With this theme pre-established, a spouse’s betrayal only stokes the fire.

In this theme, sex becomes a tool for personal gain or validation rather than an instrument to bless your spouse. There is a reason why it seems like an innately bad idea to store “power tools” in the bedroom; they destroy the setting in which real love making can occur. When we make sex a “power tool,” we have contributed to the destruction of sex with sex itself.

We will never strip sex of power; the pleasure and unity it creates (for better or worse) gives it power. But we can make sex “not about power.” Until we do, we will be like the “fellowship of the ring” in Tolkien’s book. Each one thinking that we can use the ring’s power for good, but our narrow definition of good magnified by the ring’s power creates an evil that destroys us. Sex is only good when it is used to bless and not gain.

How have you been tempted to interpret your spouse’s sin as, “Sex is the ‘ring of power’”?

Read Philippians 2:1-11. This may be the hardest theme to unwrite from the marriage story, because it transcends sex. We have a tendency to use everything (not just sex) to gain rather than to bless. This passage is one of the greatest marriage passages in the Bible, although it never mentions marriage. As the two of you progress through *False Love* and *True Betrayal*, you should begin to notice the demeanor of this passage defining more areas of your marriage (i.e., finances, “me” time, conversation topics, etc.). It will begin to define other areas before it is able to define sex again (or for the first time). Notice that Paul began writing this passage to a group experiencing great strain (i.e., the repeated use of the word “any” in verse one), and summarizes the key principle in verse four before illustrating the ultimate example of Christ-in-relationship in verses 5-11.

7. **I Am the Unwanted One:** It is easy to fall into the same romanticized fiction as your spouse did, after the betrayal of sexual sin. This can be very overt by wanting someone to desire you and risk everything for you like

they did for your spouse. Or, it can be more subtle – being jealous of your spouse’s sexual enjoyment and inadvertently beginning to label it a good experience to be desired.

Even if you do not try to become “the wanted one” through some extra-marital means, “the unwanted one” theme can still be very strong. It may manifest itself in listing all the things “the other man/woman” got from your spouse that you didn’t. Or, you could hear it the way you recite all the things that made “the other man/woman” (or images) more desirable than you.

Another common manifestation of this theme is retreating to relationships where others are dependent upon you and your desirable function is very clear (i.e., children or workplace). These relationships are used to hold at bay the feeling of being unwanted rather than refuting the legitimacy of the theme itself. When we only try to silence these feelings, then we must push away from all reminders of feeling unwanted, this includes our spouse and makes efforts at restoration much harder.

“She was no longer his best friend... The kids would be home soon. She was, after all, still a mother. And never before had her mothering instincts been more acute. No matter what, this would not be allowed to harm her children (p. 215).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

How have you been tempted to interpret your spouse’s sin as, “I am the unwanted one”?

Read I Peter 2:9-10. This passage can be summarized in a single statement, “You are wanted!” Peter draws on image after image to reinforce his point. The great thing about this passage, although sometimes hard to take, is that our wanted-ness to God as a “chosen people” is not based on anything about us (Deut. 7:6-7). This means we cannot lose God’s wanted-ness or have it stolen from us. We do not have to compete to keep it because we did not compete to receive it. This must provide the foundation and courage from which you face the pain from your spouse’s sin. It has been said, “Your identity is what the most important person in your life thinks of you.” When the intensity of the pain caused by your spouse’s sin tempts you to define yourself by the “unwanted” message, this passage and the priority of your relationship with God will be something you have to remind yourself frequently.

8. **Life Would Be Easier If...:** This theme is the search for quick relief. It can sound like, “Life would be easier if, we just went ahead and divorced... my spouse had left with his/her adultery partner... we had never gotten married in the first place... I was still living in ignorance of his/her sin.” Each of these if-statements, has the imaginative advantage of not being real. They can be imagined to be better because reality is hard. Anything that is vague or not-real is easy to imagine as better than a current hard circumstance.

When you escape into these if-statement stories, it is similar in dynamic (although not morally equivalent) to your spouse’s sin. As you battle this theme, you may gain sympathy for how easily an unwanted theme of escape can return. Even when your spouse sincerely engages the battle of forsaking sexual sin; this struggle may remain for a period of time. Use your struggle as a time to pray both of you and ask your spouse to do the same.

It is helpful to remember how unfair the playing field is for these if-statement stories. Imagine you had to choose between two jobs. If you took job A, then whenever job A was difficult (i.e., demanding boss, long hours, bad commute) it would be tempting to think, “I bet job B would not have been like this.” Job B would never have problems, only non-problems. Similarly, each of your if-statement stories never has problems, only non-problems.

How have you been tempted to interpret your spouse’s sin as, “Life would be easier if...”?

Read Matthew 6:25-34. If-statement thinking is very similar to anxiety – which is most commonly built off of “what if” thinking. Both are rooted in hypotheticals that never have to be lived out; they get the advantage of existing only in our imaginations. In that way, we are in control of our pain – something that we long for when we are in the midst of a trial. Jesus is honest about life having troubles (v. 34), He also knows that God is faithful and that our hands are full with today’s reality without the crowding effect of hypotheticals.

9. **Intensified Male/Female Stereotypes:** “This is just what men/women do!” can be the summary statement that makes sense of a spouse’s sexual sin. Gender becomes an enemy. Personal differences of character and integrity no longer matter in light of certain sexual organs. Any strengths or attractiveness (not just physical) of the opposite sex becomes lost in the anger-fear of what “they” will do.

With this theme, almost inevitably, come a set of unhealthy rules that have to be used when relating to the opposite sex (i.e., always give them what they want or they’ll betray you, never trust them, put them in their place, etc.). These kinds of rules become self-fulfilling. Either you will feel used, or the relationships will deteriorate to the point you were “proven right.”

Beyond this, this theme codifies foolishness as “common sense.” Anyone who disagrees with you either “doesn’t understand” or just hasn’t experienced what you experienced... yet. Maybe more than any of the other theme, once embraced this theme becomes impenetrable. The evidence necessary to disprove it or even the context in which the evidence could be revealed is rejected out of hand.

How have you been tempted to interpret your spouse’s sin through, “Intensified male/female stereotypes”?

Read Genesis 2:24-3:24. God is aware of how sin affected gender differences. But we also see that God was in control of how sin affected gender differences; the consequences were not random and did not catch God by surprise. God took decisive action where needed – removing Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (3:22-23). But He did not dissolve the institution of marriage. The differences were not so great that the damage was irreparable. Rather, God chose to make marriage a picture of the Great Reconciliation work He was doing through the gospel (Eph. 5:29-32). To say that men/women cannot be trusted is to focus our attention on gender instead of the real enemy of sin—of which men and women are equally susceptible.

10. **Everything Is Second Class Now:** This theme assumes the best and the worst at the same time. It assumes your spouse can put his/her sin behind them, that the marriage can be reconciled, and there could be a long future for your marriage. It just assumes that this best-case scenario will always be a notch below what it could have been. No good thing or mark of progress comes without a sigh.

The affect is that every good aspect of marriage is imagined as if it “would have been one level better.” Our imagination always allows for this. We can imagine a building one story taller, a strawberry just a bit sweeter, sunset just a bit brighter, a Grand Canyon just a bit deeper, or anything else just a bit more.

“You may think if your marriage survives, it will always be a damaged, second-class relationship. This is not true. All marriages are damaged in one way or another. A marriage becomes beautiful when the husband and wife face their brokenness and invite Jesus to work in them... The resurrection marriage isn’t less beautiful because it has passed through death; it’s more beautiful (p. 9-11).” Winston Smith in *Help! My Spouse Committed Adultery*

This brings us face to face with one of the great mysteries of God. God decided a redeemed-free world was more perfect than an undefiled world without freedom. We question Him on this almost every time we suffer. We think the world would have been better if there was no opportunity for sin. But God believes redeemed relationships have a special and unique beauty. We are not the only ones confused by this, even the angels of heaven are intrigued by it (1 Pet. 1:12).

How have you been tempted to interpret your spouse’s sin as, “Everything is second class now”?

Read Hebrews 7:15-25. Our God is not a god of limited restoration. The worst part of this theme is not how glum it makes us feel, but how small it makes God appear in our eyes. The author of Hebrews repeatedly points out the superiority of Christ. In this passage he pointed out how Christ is able to offer “a better hope (v. 19).” The quality of this hope is so great that “he is able to save to the uttermost (v. 25).” When this theme begins to cloud your appreciation for what is or can be done for your marriage, remind yourself of who is the most active person in your marriage—Christ, your High Priest, interceding on behalf of your marriage.

“Everything centered around how my husband’s actions were affecting me. My pain and circumstances were big, while God was very small in my eyes (p. 29).” Kathy Gallagher in *When His Secret Sin Breaks Your Heart*

These are not the only ten destructive themes of suffering that can be used to make sense of your marriage. Hopefully, they do help you articulate the themes that have been plaguing you. More than this, it is hoped that this section gives you a pattern (1) to **articulate** the destructive messages of your suffering, (2) to honestly **acknowledge** the pain, and (3) to **counter** them with Scripture even before you see (4) how they are **replaced** with the gospel (Step 6).

Articulate: What other destructive themes do you use to make sense of your spouse’s sin?

Acknowledge: How do these messages contribute to or intensify the pain that you feel?

Counter: How does Scripture counter the core beliefs or perspective of your suffering story?

Replace: Knowing truth is different from having that truth become the dominant theme of your life. You may be discouraged as you’ve read counters to your suffering story that you truly believe, which don’t seem to overpower the fear, anger, or depression that you feel. Begin now by praying a simple honest prayer to God about where you are. Use the simply, desperate prayer of the father who feared for life of his child as an outline, “I believe; help my unbelief (Mark 9:24)!”

From Facts to Themes to Story

How do we develop an experience or set of experiences into a story? The answer to this question will be unique to each person. While we may all interpret painful life experiences with similar themes or combination of themes, the way we move from events to story is not uniform. At the end of this step we want to provide you with a chart to help you identify potential connections between the material you’ve been learning.

| Situation or Marital Trouble (Step 2) | Impact (Step 3) | Destructive Script (Step 4) | Behaviors (target of Step 7) |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Argument about details of a situation | Increased Second Guessing | It’s all my fault | Excessively apologizing & planning |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

* Chart is modified and adapted from Leslie Vernick in *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong* (p. 38)

Some individuals benefit more from reflective questions than a chart exercise. The questions below are meant to provide a guided, inductive tour of how you have moved from experience to story. Start by reflecting on what you have learned to this point in the process.

- How you have already begun to make sense of your life with the 10 themes above or ones you added to the list?
- Which of the theme(s) do you most naturally gravitate towards?
- Is this gravitation new (only beginning with your recent relational pain) or a long standing tendency?
- How have these themes distorted your interpretation of *new life events* not directly related to the betrayal? Your interpretation of *past events* not directly related to the betrayal?
- How have these themes distorted your anticipation of future life events or relationships?
- What phrases or thoughts capture your preferred theme(s)? How often do you say them to yourself or others?
- Who or what has become more and less trusted or enjoyable as your conflicted relationship(s) has endured?

As you reflect on these questions, it should help you see how you are moving from facts to story. If you do not like what you discover, do not be alarmed. The fact that you can see the destructive themes as “not good,” means that the destructive themes do not have the place of dominance in your heart and mind.

Encouragement Focus (SUFFERING STORY):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Were you able to see how your life story became disrupted after the revelation of your spouse’s sin?
- As you identified the themes you used to make sense of your suffering, were you able to experience a degree of comfort (knowing you were not the only one)?
- Prepare: Are you caring for yourself in the six ways listed under “Care for Yourself Physically” in chapter one?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- _____
- _____

Step 5

"It Feels Like I Loss Something"

MOURN the wrongness of what happened and receive God's comfort.

"I am willing to agree with God emotionally about my suffering.

I can see that God does not just want me to 'get over this'

but to 'love me through my loss and pain.' [describe difference]

I will accept that 'blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Matt 5:4)'

as expressed by God's loving me personally through this group.

Mourning my suffering with God and this group has changed me [describe]."

Memorize: Zephaniah 3:18-19 (ESV), "I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach. Behold at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame, and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth." As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- "I will" – God is voluntarily involved. You do not have to beg. God is more eager to help than you are desperate.
- "You who mourn" – God has a special compassion for those who are mourning (Psalm 56:8).
- "Suffer reproach" – God understands that there is more to your grief than the loss of something precious.
- "Deal with all your oppressors" – You can trust God with your spouse and everyone else involved in his/her sin.
- "Lame... outcast... shame" – God knows your experience: feeling powerless, rejected, and embarrassed.

Teaching Notes

"We found that not recognizing the loss, not mourning, only made it worse (p. 131)... It took us a while to identify the things we had lost, and even when we did, accepting that they were really gone was more difficult than we expected it would be. However, once we were able to name them, it seemed we had taken another step on the path of healing. We didn't feel so stuck (p. 132)." Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

"Forgiving the addict prematurely is a common problem for many partners... It is essential for you to grieve your losses before being able to forgive (p. 50)." Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

"It is definitely a healing moment, however, when *both* infidel and spouse can acknowledge the depth of pain the adultery has caused: when the spouse can say they believe the infidel 'gets it' (p. 117)." Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

"We had to mourn the time of Gary's unfaithfulness, but that did not mean his faithfulness to Mona or to God could not be resumed (p. 135)." Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

Embedded Study

Unpacking your suffering story was painful and exhausting. The temptation is now to want to whatever is "next" just to get you away from the pain. God is more gracious than to drive you that hard and that fast. God wants to care for you as a person and that involves knowing when you need rest and comfort more than "progress." This is one of those times. Mourning is how we find rest in the midst of something painful and sad without living in denial or surrendering to cynicism.

Having identified the destructive themes of your suffering story, you can now mourn the various losses associated with your spouse's sin without reinforcing those lies. Until we articulate our suffering story as false or distorted, we would be prone to meditate upon our suffering story instead of mourning our true losses in a healthy, God-honoring way.

Mourning does not mean hope has died. Confusion on this point is often why couples resist this step in their personal and marital recovery process. Mourning is a time of emotional transition. In a vehicle the driver must come to a stop before changing the transmission from reverse to drive or press the clutch to change from one gear to the next. Mourning serves a similar function in a relationship. It is the pause that allows a new type of work to begin.

In this chapter we will examine mourning in three sections.

1. What Is Being Mourned?
2. Mourning's Evil Twin: Bitterness
3. How to Mourn?

What Is Being Mourned?

That can be a harder question to answer than many couples anticipate, especially when they chose to restore the marriage. There is a definite sense of sadness and that something was lost, but couples cannot always articulate what has been lost. The offended spouse can feel like he/she is "piling it on" if they initiate these conversations. The offending spouse may bring it up in his/her confession, but even when they do, it is addressed from the vantage point of guilt not grief.

For other couples whenever the grief component of restoration is discussed it degenerates into conflict. The purpose of this section is to raise the question in a neutral setting. You can look down the page and neither of you have to guess what the other person's "agenda" is for "bringing it up." You can read the description and offer your opinions without disagreeing (or being perceived as attacking) one another.

As you read through the list of things that are commonly mourned after a spouse's sexual sin, it is important to realize that each item may be grieved both personally and collectively. Personally, as the offended spouse, you will grieve the absence of these things. However, if your spouse is repentant, he/she will also join with you in grieving the absence of these things. In the process of restoration it would be incomplete if only one or the other happened.

Below is a list of ten things that are commonly mourned after a spouse's sexual sin. The list (bold text only) is an adapted compilation of lists from Gary and Mona Shriver's book *Unfaithful* (p. 132-140) and Stephanie Carnes' book *Mending a Shattered Heart* (p. 42-43). Do not think that all of them have to apply to you or your marriage.

1. **Loss of Relationship as It Once Was:** There is no going back; no un-writing history. Those words carry the sting of grief. While the future can be brighter than the past, the marriage will lack some of the innocence it had before. The marriage will be something new and different. "New" may be better, worse, or just different. That has yet to be determined. But grieving the loss of what was is an important part of spurring on the development of what will be.
2. **Loss of the Dream of Your Relationship:** No one dreams of their marriage being violated by sexual sin. So processing these events has definitely been "off script." The impact of this is more than just saying, "This is not what I wanted to happen." The dreams that you have for a relationship as central to life as marriage become part of your identity and how you evaluate the events of life. So when this dream gets changed it influences most every area of life. This is why this mourning can have all the disorienting effects of grief related to the loss of a close loved one.
3. **Loss of the Purity of the Marriage Bed:** This is a form of mourning that often spikes with intensity. Sex is a spike of intensity (for better or worse), so it only makes sense that if you have grief related to sex that this morning would carry the same degree of emotional volatility. Each of you wonder, "What is my spouse thinking about?" while having sex. Underlying that question is grief. It is a time when the destructive messages of your suffering story come crashing back. But as you resist these themes; your goal is to experience them as mourning rather than the more tempting, "safer" emotions (i.e., anger or self-protecting despair).

4. **Loss of Faithfulness:** The pain and internal tension are great when the very thing that God created to signify fidelity (marriage and sex) becomes a reminder of some form of infidelity. It is the equivalent of every hug reminding you of rejection and every compliment echoing your deepest insecurity. Relational glue has become a repellant. If you try to just “fight through” this dynamic without mourning the loss of faithfulness, you will either (a) feel like you are pretending nothing happened or (b) angrily cry out, “I just can’t do it!” and walk away. This is a loss that has to be mourned before it can be restored.
5. **Loss of Trust or Emotional Safety:** The sexual sin of a spouse makes home feel less like home—a place of safety and refuge from the stresses of life. One of God’s ordained places of rest becomes what you wish you could get a break from. The person you most want comfort from is the same person who caused the pain from which you are seeking comfort. Even though this need not be permanent, it is sad and should be mourned as a loss or else you may think you are “being silly and over-reacting.”
6. **Loss of Sexual Safety:** STD’s are the most obvious danger associated with sexual sin, but they are not the only thing that causes a lack of safety. The safety of sex is how it communicates, “I am my beloveds and my beloved is mine (Solomon 6:3).” When that affirmation is called into question uncertainty fills a place of great expected certainty. This gap between what should be and what is cause us to feel unsafe, even if there is no physical danger. If you do not grieve this loss, then you will try to “just be stronger or braver” but this type of self-willed strength and bravery undermine the tenderness and vulnerability with are intended to mark sex.
7. **Loss of Financial Stability:** Mourning can be as practically triggered as it is emotionally triggered. Sexual sin can affect finances in many ways: the loss of a job, the incurring of debt while sinning, blocking a promotion, or needing to turn down opportunities in order to protect the damaged trust of the marriage. These are involuntary sacrifices on the part of the offended spouse. You got no vote on whether these were brought into your marriage. Unless these changes are grieved, they will become roots of bitterness and weapons. They are a real loss, that while not as important as the marriage and family, are very significant. It is mourning that allows you healthily avoid being silenced about these losses.
8. **Loss of Identity (Personally and as a Couple):** Identity change is always a part of grief, although many people miss this because of grief’s powerful emotions. Personally, you can begin to view yourself as the spurned or unwanted spouse. Often this becomes less how you feel and more a label you wear. As a couple, you can begin to define the marriage as damaged, stained, or just “not who we were before.” It is right to acknowledge the marriage as damaged and stained. This is true and should be grieved. However, when you use these words to define the marriage rather than describe the current condition of the marriage you move beyond grief to despair. It is also right to acknowledge that you are “not who we were before.” But as you grieve, separate the pain from the suffering story that so easily attaches to the betrayal, and make needed changes to the marriage so that “who you will be” can be better than “who you were.”
9. **Loss of Church:** Church will feel different... at least for a while. If you and your spouse keep the sin completely secret, then your church involvement will likely feel increasingly less “relevant” and more superficial as you think “no one really knows what we’re going through” and wonder “how would they respond if they did?” This is why *False Love* and *True Betrayal* guide you and your spouse to confide in strategic people within your church. Without these conversations you will likely add the distancing of many close Christian relationships and sense of community to the list of things you are grieving. Even with wise disclosure and a supportive church (individuals within the church), church life and personal faith may feel different. You may look back and see this as one of God’s greatest blessings during this time. Even if this is the case, it is appropriate to grieve the changes, so that God’s blessing does not become a reason for living in denial.
10. **Loss of the Sense of God’s Presence:** Pain has a way of making God feel far away. Pain by definition is close; if it were not close, then we could not feel it. Because of this, pain often feels closer than God. When it feels like pain has become between us and God, then our sense of God’s presence often dissipates. This loss is part of the suffering story – it is real but not true. God is not far even when pain feels closer. But whether the pieces of your suffering story are true, their real-ness and the fact that you have to battle to prevent them from defining your life is something to be grieved. Being able to grieve these losses should remind you that it is safe to be authentic because God’s care. Without God’s presence the weight of your losses would be crushing. Your ability to cry out to God, even in bewildered angry pain, is evidence of His compassion.

What other losses have you faced related to your spouse’s sin which should be mourned?

Read Matthew 5:4. It is easy to resent mourning. Whatever causes mourning is bad. But God calls the experience of mourning “blessed.” Why? It is the tenderness of grief that prevents our hearts from growing hard in a broken world. This is why mourning may feel risky; it is the first step in being vulnerable again. You cannot acknowledge the impact of your suffering and be honest about your suffering story without being vulnerable. Mourning requires placing yourself in a position to be comforted by another. This should begin with God. Let the thoughts you have as you go through these materials become conversations with God (prayer). Let God’s knowing your pain be confiding not divine ease dropping. Then your mourning should be expressed with your counselor, mentor, or close circle of friends who are going through this material with you. Finally, a key marker in the health of the relationship is when you are comfortable sharing and your spouse is able to compassionately hear your grief without growing defensive or falling into self-pity.

Mourning’s Evil Twin: Bitterness

Before we talk about how to mourn, it is important to take moment and define what mourning is not. Mourning has an evil twin that initially looks, sounds, and feels very similar to grief. But when it grows up this twin looks very different. The twin is bitterness. Bitterness is the evil twin who pretends to be your friend, but brings greater destructive the closer your relationship becomes. Mourning is the good twin, but the one we often avoid because we’re intimidated by it.

What do bitterness and mourning share in common?

- Both are triggered by an event that is personal and negative.
- Both exist on the unpleasant end of the emotional spectrum.
- Both feel very justified and make sense in light of the triggering event(s).
- Both feel very natural and like we are not “doing” them but that they are “happening” to us.
- Both involve a high degree of mental repetition.
- Both are seeking to make sense of life in light of the negative event.
- Both begin to shape the way you interpret the events and people around you.
- Both shape the way you anticipate and prepare for the future; change the way that you think of past events.

Read Hebrews 12:15. Bitterness is an awkward subject because it resides at the intersection of sin and suffering; your spouse’s sin and your suffering. Suffering carries with it the strong temptation to become bitter. The similarity of mourning (a necessary part of the healing process) and bitterness make it seemingly impossible to flee the vicinity of temptation. It would be easy to read Hebrews 12’s instruction to pluck out bitterness by the roots as pressuring condemnation. But just like the prior steps took time, this one will too. Don’t feel like the clock is ticking for you to “just do it.” Notice the compassion in God’s instructions on bitterness—He does not want additional trouble to spring up in your life.

As you begin to resist bitterness, the pendulum of activity will begin to swing more in your direction. How this is handled by you and your spouse is very important. It is a time when the steps necessary to see the marriage restored are becoming more mutual. Up until this point, your spouse has been (rightfully) the more active spouse in the restoration process. Your role was one of listening, questioning, and healing personally. The fact that you are becoming more active at the point of battling bitterness is both a sign of progress and precarious.

Mourning can be understood as pre-forgiveness. Being able to face the reality sin’s impact and the losses it brought without succumbing to a desire for retribution is an important step in garnering the strength to say, “I forgive you.” If forgiveness implies a restoration of the relationship (not all forgiveness goes this far), then learning to be neutral in the offenders presence is an important step towards feeling positively (i.e., trust, affection, warmth, closeness) towards them.

In his booklet *Help! My Spouse Has Been Unfaithful* Mike Summers describes six things that bitterness does (bold text and bitterness statements only; p. 23-25). In order to better distinguish mourning from bitterness a contrasting effect of healthy grief has been provided. As you read through this section, hopefully you will begin to see two things: (a) bitterness is rumination over your spouse’s sin with the suffering story embedded and (b) mourning is processing the effects of your spouse’s sin while resisting the tendency to define life by the themes of the suffering story.

- **Bitterness Disrupts Peace vs. Mourning Makes Peace Possible Again** – There is no peace where evil is called good or is overlooked. Denial and is faux-peace that gives no more “peace juice” than a plastic orange gives orange juice. However, simply acknowledging a wrong does not bring peace. Thinking about a wrong over and over again is the essence of bitterness. One of the litmus tests for the degree of bitterness is the level of detail in our memory about the offense. This detail is maintained through repetition.

It is mourning that drains a wrong of its emotional power over you. Mourning is only something we do when we feel safe. Soldiers don’t mourn a fallen friend in the midst of a battle; they survive. Once they return home, they

mourn. Coming to a place where you can mourn what has happened (hopefully your spouse’s work in *False Love* has helped with this) is an indication that you are beginning to feel safe again.

- **Bitterness Destroys Joy vs. Mourning Is Foundational for Joy** – Bitterness keeps pain in the present. Bitterness knows no boundaries of time. Bitterness does not have memories; it has experiences. If a memory hurts, the offense is responded to as if it is happening all over again. When this is the case joy is perceived as an emotional mirage which disappears whenever a painful thought enters the mind.

Mourning allows pain to be in the past. It may still hurt, but you can see the difference between past hurt and present pain. The loss that you are mourning can be restored even if the past hurt cannot be unwritten. As you mourn, you realize that those things in your present are capable of being good again. You can acknowledge this without ever going through the self-deception of declaring your spouse’s past sin to be good. This provides a foundation for joy as your present improves without having to play mental games with yourself about the past.

- **Bitterness Depletes Strength vs. Mourning Replenishes Strength** – Bitterness is a form of anger and anger requires a great deal of energy. Anger feels strong, but that is because it is pulling from an excessive amount of your bodily reserves to artificially amp up your emotional-physical stamina. The result is an inevitable crash.

Mourning is a form of rest. When we mourn we quit fighting to control a pain that we did not cause which is in a time zone we cannot touch (the past). We surrender; not to the evil in our past but to living in the present. This surrender does require including our spouse’s sin in our life story redemptively (Step 6), but ceasing from an unconquerable battle provides the rest that replenishes strength.

- **Bitterness Distorts Focus vs. Mourning Restores Focus** – Bitterness cannot think of anything for long without returning to the offense that ignited it. Every subject feels like derivative of our pain. Emotionally our pain feels relevant to everything and when our pain is relevant it trumps anything else.

Mourning is the process that allows current events to stand on their own. Having grieved the losses related to your spouse’s sin, his/her sin does not have to be “relevant” at irrelevant times. Immediately after losing a close loved one everything reminds you of them. It is hard to think of anything else. After grieving you still remember them, but you are able to engage fully in life (even activities of which they were a part) without losing focus.

- **Bitterness Defiles Relationships vs. Mourning Honors Relationships** – Bitterness defines a relationship by the painful event. Often bitterness defines an entire gender by the painful event. When we are bitter, cynicism becomes easily mistaken for wisdom. The guiding questions of life become, “When are you going to hurt me again? How are you going to hurt me this time? How can I stop it?” Even if the marriage is maintained, the environment created by bitterness makes it inhospitable for the marriage to be restored.

Mourning recognizes the painful event as real but sees the marriage as larger. Mourning can see the spouse’s sin as “part” of the marriage; not the whole marriage. The marriage is honored as it is recognized as good, while the sin is grieved as being bad. It is mourning that allows us to make this distinction. Honor is given to someone or something when we recognize they are not defined by their worst or weakest moment.

- **Bitterness Displeases God vs. Mourning Pleases God** – Bitterness is a sin (not “the sin”). Like every other sin, it displeases God and creates separation in our relationship with Him. At a time when we are already feeling separated from our closest relationship, this can be particularly hard to accept.

However, God is pleased with our mourning and draws close to us in our sorrow. When we resist the approach captured in the old adage, “It is easier to be angry than hurt,” God approves of the courage represented in our grief. God does not delight in your pain, but He is pleased when you display His character with His strength in the midst of your pain. While mourning may not feel like faith, in the midst of suffering it can be the essence of faith.

How would you describe your current emotional response to your spouse’s sexual sin: more bitter or more mourning?

How to Mourn?

Hopefully you have identified what you are mourning and learned more about the destructive counterfeit of mourning—bitterness. But now the question becomes, “How do I mourn? It doesn’t seem right to have a funeral. We don’t want to bury anything or create a tombstone to visit. So what do I do to mourn?”

Read Joel 1:1-2:25: Often we quote Joel 2:25 without seeing the journey that preceded it. Christian grief is grief-with-hope because of the power of God's resurrection (1 Thes. 4:13-18). We know that God can, and ultimately will, "restore to you the years that the swarming locust have eaten." But noticed how God used mourning as preparation to receive this promise (1:8-9, 1:12-14, 2:12-13). In this case they were mourning their personal sin. You are mourning your suffering. But the principle remains applicable, mourning (our sin or the consequences of other's sin) is an important preparation to the work God intends to do in our life. When we miss this we begin to feel guilty and condemned by God for participating in the work of restoration He is doing in our lives.

Mourning is not nearly as active or voluntary as we want it to be. We want to master it so we can accelerate the process. Attempts to do that are generally unhealthy. The six points below will give you as practical and active as guidance as possible to help you grieve the losses you have experienced related to your spouse's sexual sin.

- **Realize mourning is not an event you can calendar.** There is no recipe or time table. Mourning is not a matter of crying for five consecutive hours with intermittent twenty minutes breaks of written reflection on painfully relevant question concluding with a ceremony of destroying what you've written. Mourning will likely involve crying and reflection. It may even be assisted by symbolically destroying what you've written. But these steps, nor any others, "are mourning."

Mourning requires letting yourself be weak and cared for by God in light of your pain. The intrusion of your spouse's sin has likely made being "out of control" like that seem very unsettling. But it is this willingness to surrender yourself to God's protection that is the primary evidence that mourning is reaching its conclusion.

"You don't need to be fixed (p. 1)... Cars and refrigerators break down; people don't. We shed tears, cry, or weep. We were created to cry. It's a fitting response to sorrow (p. 32)... Grief brings you into the world of the unknown (p. 4)... Grieving is a disorderly process. You won't control it, nor can you schedule its expression (p.12)." H. Norman Wright in *Experiencing Grief*

- **You will not "finish" mourning before you move to the next step.** Defining mourning as a "step" in this journey can be somewhat misleading. Like you may have found with previous steps, you will not completely resolve this step before moving on. Hopefully you will have (a) understood the importance of mourning at this stage in the process, (b) have a clearer picture of what mourning entails, (c) understand how mourning lays the foundation for future steps, and (d) made enough progress in this area allow upcoming steps to be effective.

Mourning is emphasized here to provide an emotional break and time of needed emotional recovery in your journey. You will not feel "finished" because your journey is not yet complete. At this time you are establishing a pattern of resting-by-mourning when you become emotionally weary.

There is another seminar entitled *Taking the Journey of Grief with Hope* patterned after the same nine step model that deals specifically with grief. If you want additional guidance on the subject of mourning or feel that you are stuck on this step, you can find that resource at www.bradhambrick.com/griefseminar.

- **You are allowing steps 1-3 to settle in without the contamination of step 4.** Listening to videos, reading pages, and answering questions are not the same thing as allowing something to settle into your heart. The things that you have learned about your spouse, sin and suffering, yourself, and God are not meant that satisfyingly answers the questions popping into your mind (as if that were possible).

These truths are meant to walk you back into reality (after living in the artificial world of your spouse's deceit) and remove the lies by which your fears and hurt make sense of reality. Mourning involves saying good bye to the "reality" you thought was real and possibly some of the future plans you had built off that "reality."

As you do this, you may feel very alone and betrayed; not just by your spouse but also by God. Mourning is a time when you realize that God agrees with you about the wrongness of what happened. God was as betrayed by your spouse's sin as you were. Yet His ability to remain constant – comforting you without smiting your spouse – is the foundation of hope for you, your spouse, and your marriage. As you mourn, know that God is able to be both compassionate towards you and unshaken in His ability to deliver His care.

- **You are solidifying a sense of God's comfort for you suffering before considering changes to your thinking and actions.** As you consider how the gospel makes sense of your suffering (Step 6), you will be asked to think about your spouse's sin differently. Differently does not mean "less wrong." It will mean that you find different themes by which to make sense of your spouse's sin than those you identified within Step 4.

As you consider how you will respond to your spouse in the future (Steps 7 and 8), you will be asked to respond to your spouse differently than your instincts lead you. Differently does not mean “acting as if nothing happened.” It will mean (even if you choose divorce) that you resist the urge to treat them as a present threat. If you chose not to divorce, it will mean that you begin to take steps towards trusting and rekindling closeness in the marriage.

Mourning is that time of transition from information gathering and self-assessment to changes in thought and relationship. God gives this time of transition because of His care for you. God’s comfort and grace come before God’s call to change. As your spouse learns to love you in a godly fashion he/she will begin to respond with that same gracious patience.

- **You are reminding yourself you do not have to be “rushed” in the process.** It may feel like everything and everyone is just waiting for you to “get over it” or “if you were not upset/hurt, then everything would be fine now.” That is like blaming the fish for still flopping in the floor after you tipped its bowl and put the bowl back on the shelf. Consequences occur after and often last longer than actions. Hence, your recovery may be the last thing that happens in the restoration process.

It is difficult to acknowledge this reality without feeling rushed. The first part of stopping this dynamic is to talk about it. When you feel that someone is rushing you (even if the person is you) honestly reply, “I know that my recovery is next. That is the natural order of things: sin, discovery, full disclosure, and then recovery. I am just beginning to trust that I know the truth about what occurred and am now learning what to do and not do with that information. I would ask that you give me as much time to recover as it took my spouse to disclose.”

It is easy to place that sense of social rushed-ness as coming from God. Mourning is a time when you gain the strength of conscience to resist that tendency. When you grasp that God is not rushing you, you gain the emotional freedom to allow mourning to occur naturally.

- **You are able to be sad while recognizing that the sadness of this season is not the final or defining chapter of your life.** Grief reveals you are still living. You may feel “destroyed” but your ability to grieve proves that you are not. Your life story has a next chapter.

In mourning you are saddened by the painful events surrounding your spouse’s sin. But mourning is the time that creates a divide between that season of life and the next. This is similar to how after a death a time of grief serves as a mental marker between the season of life with a loved one and the season without them.

Mourning does not mean that you have an answer to the question, “What’s next?” But you know that you have mourned enough to continue when you begin to ask the question, “What now?” without a sense of guilt. Mourning is resolved when, after a loss or tragedy, our primary focal points moves from the past to the future.

What aspects of these depictions of mourning brought you the most comfort or changed your view of grief?

When or with who do you need more clearly define what healthy mourning looks like?

Encouragement Focus (MOURN):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Have you honestly assessed what losses you are mourning related to your spouse’s sin?
- Are you actively guarding against allowing this time of mourning degenerating into bitterness?
- Do you or those around you have expectations of mourning different from those described?
- Prepare: Are you caring for yourself in the six ways listed under “Care for Yourself Physically” in chapter one?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- _____
- _____

Step 6

“Replacing What Is Real with What Is True”

LEARN MY GOSPEL STORY by which God gives meaning to my experience.

“I have already told you how my spouse’s sin shaped my life [review step 4].

Letting go of that story, identity, and set of beliefs left me with only God.

It was good to begin rebuilding my life from that solid foundation.

Now I am beginning to understand my life with God and the Gospel at the center [examples from previous list reinterpreted].”

Memorize: Hosea 2:23-3:1 (ESV), “And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, “You are my People”; And he shall say, “You are my God.” And the Lord said to me, ‘Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulterous, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins.’” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “I will have mercy” – The search for fairness in the betrayal of any sin will leave you increasingly pained and alone.
- “On No Mercy” – Background: Hosea named his children “No Mercy” and “Not My People” to represent Israel.
- “He shall say” – The response of the unfaithful spouse is necessary if forgiveness can ever become restoration.
- “Go again” – If restoration is going to occur it will involve more than your spouse pursuing you.
- “As the Lord” – Each step of embracing the gospel story for your suffering calls you to remember Christ.

Teaching Notes

“She suddenly realized she had lost not only her marriage and her husband but also part of herself. There was absolutely nothing left to hang on to. She found herself completely insufficient for the first time in her life, and terror gripped her... She came to understand that she had put Gary above God. It was not that she thought Gary was God—especially now—but she looked to Gary to be her source of strength, comfort, and love (p. 66)... Our faith grew because we found we were not enough and God was (p. 67).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

“The foundation we rebuild on will be the foundation intended for marriage—God Himself. That foundation is sound because God is trustworthy. We rebuild the trust as if we were rebuilding a house brick by brick. The house fell, but God’s foundation is still safe (p. 185).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

“One’s past is never over except in God’s eyes. Our failures are woven into the fabric of our lives. The sinner can rejoice in God’s goodness and forgiveness while at the same time being reminded of his or her own vulnerability and helped to stand against ongoing temptation (p. 137).” Earl & Sandy Wilson, et al in *Restoring the Fallen*

“When we examine the Bible’s teaching on forgiveness, it’s helpful to distinguish two levels. We cultivate attitudinal or heart forgiveness before God concerning all offenders; we extend transacted or granted forgiveness to those offenders who repent (p. 15).” Robert Jones in *After Adultery*

“Believers need to dispel from their minds the myth that if you have forgiven someone and you love that person, you will never bring up the past. In reality, the past is inextricably woven into the present and impacts the future (p. 102).” Earl & Sandy Wilson, et al in *Restoring the Fallen*

Embedded Study

There is another step to take in your personal recovery before your focus shifts primarily towards the possibility of marital restoration (if desired and possible). By this point, the line between personal and marital restoration may feel blurred as one leads more naturally to the other.

As you read this chapter, it is important to emphasize again that you are not looking for the "explanation of" or "way to make sense of" your spouse's sin. Sin is illogical. Trying to make sense of it will keep you locked in pain and confusion. What you are seeking in this chapter is to regain a sense of meaning for life that can include both the wrong that was done while also providing hope and direction for the future.

For five steps we have examined how your life has been disrupted. We have looked at pain, history, and consequences as if they were pieces to a puzzle. We have sorted the pieces to understand them better. We have looked at how you are prone to put the pieces together in destructive ways. We have mourned that the puzzle is broken.

Now we are going to begin putting the pieces together again within the frame of the gospel. This frame extends the picture beyond any of the pieces we have examined and creates a larger context for experiencing each piece of the puzzle differently. In contrast to the way the suffering story connected the pieces, this gospel story re-framing turns a tragedy picture into a redemptive one. This will not be quick or easy, but it can be pervasive and "worth it."

We will work through understanding how the gospel story makes sense of your marriage in five questions: (1) who am I now, (2) who is my spouse now, (3) who is God, (4) what is sin, and (5) is love worth pain? We will look at these questions in light of the reading you have already done. We will not be able to give a particular reframing of your specific marriage story, but hopefully we will give you the framework to make sense of your marriage differently and with real hope.

Who Am I Now?

It is natural to ask, "What does my spouse's sin say about me?" Even once you embrace the reality that you are not the cause of your spouse's sin that is not the end of the identity questions. The shock of a spouse's sexual sin can rattle your sense of self even without the conclusion "This was my fault." You may still wonder, "Will I ever be the same? Am I the leftovers? Am I degrading myself by forgiving? Am I a fool? Am I blind to other important things?" These kinds of questions affect your ability to embrace the gospel story as your life story.

Changed and Unchanged

You are living with a real tension. You are the same person you have always been. But life is different and you are different. Both realities have to be reckoned in order for you to make sense of your experience in a healthy way.

First, you are you and will always and only be you. You are the person living the life and story God has given you to live. The "new you" cannot write a letter to the "old you" (or vice versa) and it be read by two different people. When you think of yourself as "a different person" you give your spouse's sin the same significance as your birth and conversion (new birth). It is important for you to know that there is a "you" that transcends these painful events.

Second, you are probably less innocent or naïve than you were before. Events and experiences cannot be unlearned. You may begin marking time as "before" or "after" your spouse's sin. Certain actions, words, places, or emotions may not be experienced the same way. This is true of every life experience (we are changing day by day), but powerful moments create more change in a shorter period of time.

Read Galatians 2:20. In this verse we see Paul wrestling with the same changed-unchanged dynamic. Paul is changed – "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." Paul is unchanged – "The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith." Paul was no less dependent upon God for life after his conversion than he was before. It was just that after his conversion, Paul realized how dependent upon God he had always been and began actively relying on God. Similarly, as you grapple with how you are both changed and unchanged many of the things you "know-know" now were true before you realized them. Paul was probably shocked at how cavalierly he lived before his conversion. Similarly, you may experience a sense of regret-fear-guilt for how innocently you lived before discovery. After conversion we see God's protection over our pre- and post-conversion life. Similarly, you need to begin to see God's protection over your changed-unchanged life.

Question: How has trying to make sense of life as either-or, changed-or-unchanged, made it harder for you to gain a sense of peace or stability? How does this both-and mindset alleviate those challenges?

Free to Choose

When the choices you want most (i.e., to stop the pain, to un-write history, to make the healing process neater) are unavailable, it can quickly feel like you have no choices or freedom at all. Throw on top of that the moral weight associated with what you “should” do (i.e., you should forgive, you should be committed to your marriage) and it feels like even more of your freedom is taken from you.

It is easy for this to create a sense of resentment. The natural response is, “My spouse was free to choose to sin and I am left with no freedom to choose in my suffering? That’s not fair. I think it stinks and I’m angry. I should be most free; not least free.” While it is easy to get caught in this mindset, unless you see life differently, then even doing the “right things” will produce more inner turmoil than fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

In this regard, it is better to think of there being “right directions” than “right responses” or “right answers.” Even the highly structured nature of this study cannot give the “right response” or “universal answer” to your situation. Part of how you are free is that you are walking in a direction that requires improvisation and pacing along that journey. General directions (i.e., north, south, or towards God) don’t define the pace at which we travel. God is patient as He travels with us and knows many paths through the valley of shadow of death (Ps. 23:4).

By way of giving some “general direction,” consider the following points of freedom in the direction of hope.

- You are free to choose not to remain married to an actively unfaithful spouse.
- You are free to choose whether to reconcile with a spouse who committed adultery.
- You are free to choose not to remain silent or accept an emotional affair.
- You are free to choose not to say that pornography is okay or accept its presence in your home.
- You are free to involve the support of Christian friends and church leaders in ways described in this material.
- You are free to choose the pace at which you are able to walk through the steps described in these materials.

Read I Corinthians 7:12-16. This passage captures well the freedom-in-a-direction dynamic. On freedom, Paul says the believing spouse is not to be “enslaved” (v. 15) to a spouse’s willful sin. In this case, Paul is talking about the abandonment of an unbelieving spouse as grounds for divorce. The principle of not being enslaved (i.e., obligated to participate, morally bound to remain silent) to a spouse’s willful sin is a God-given freedom. On direction, Paul says that our ultimate goal should be seeing our spouse’s soul restored to God (v. 16). *False Love* facilitate this by seeking to prioritize repentance towards God before steps of marital restoration.

Question: Do you see yourself as “free in a general direction”? What freedoms do you ignore because of the pressure from others? What freedoms do you ignore because of resistance to God’s general direction?

Loved by God

A crisis has a way of defining everything it touches. After a burglary it can be hard not to think of your “home” as a “crime scene” or a “window” as an “entry point.” After the sexual sin of your spouse it can be hard not to think of your “self” as “forsaken” or “unloved.” When we do this, we make the sexual sin the defining center of our life and identity.

In an indirect way, the sin of your spouse takes the place of God in your life. Usually God is replaced by the pleasure of sin. In this case, God is replaced by the life-defining impact of suffering. Part of embracing the gospel story over these events is to allow God’s love to be more central to your life and identity than your spouse’s failure. Until this occurs there will be no foundation for personal peace of marital restoration.

It would be inaccurate to call this idolatry; as if you were worshipping your spouse’s sin. But it is you giving the final say over your life to something other than God. It is believing that your spouse’s actions define you more than God’s affection towards you. In that sense, we must submit to Jesus’ Lordship over our lives as much in our suffering as we do in our sin.

Read Romans 8:35-39. Put all of your fears about what your spouse did might say about you into this passage. Put all of the arguments you use to convince yourself you are unloved into these verses. Read the passage out loud with your “junk” in the place the words “death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, etc...” Let this be the definitive word on your life. Take your identity and sense of security from the truth revealed in this passage.

Question: Do you believe you are loved by God? How does it impact your thoughts, emotions, and responses towards your spouse when you feel the pain of his/her offense?

Who Is God?

Because God is often portrayed exclusively as the forgiver of our sins (which is true), God can feel more available to your spouse’s sin than to you in your suffering. That only adds to the sense of abandonment and isolation you feel. Hopefully, through this study you have gained an appreciation that God comforts suffering as well as He forgives sin. We want to continue to highlight this side of God’s care in ways that are relevant to this step in your journey.

Faithful

If no one is faithful, then we are always on our own. It is easy to interpret the unfaithfulness of a spouse to mean that we are completely on our own. In this way, we begin to redefine God on the basis of our experience in marriage. This multiplies fear we feel. God promises to always be present.

God promises more than to never leave. God also promises to never forsake us. This means that God cannot be “faked out,” fooled or mocked. God will not be caught off guard and sent scrambling like you were when your spouse’s sin became known. When you feel a fear or anger-based drive to control your spouse or circumstances, remind yourself that there is a faithful God who is in control who allows you to be safe without control.

Read Deuteronomy 31:6-8, Joshua 1:5, 1 Chronicles 28:20, and Hebrews 13:5. This promise shows up throughout Scripture and always emphasizes both that God will not leave and that God will not forsake. God knows our tendency to view Him as absent or unconcerned and, therefore, makes this one of the most repeated promises of Scripture. It stands to reason that God is repetitious in His promises because we are repetitious in our fears. What we say to ourselves most we tend to believe. God repeats His promise as an invitation and example of how we are to cling to it—by repeating it.

Question: How have you seen God’s faithfulness to this point in your journey? Use these realities to counter the “hypotheticals” (i.e., what if statements) of fear that come to mind.

Our Pioneer

Couples often want to know that someone has been where they are and come out on the other side. Has anyone known this level of betrayal, pain, and rejection? If so, can I learn from their example? Even better, could I draw from their strength and find a way to be infused with their victory?

These kinds of questions are generally met with an awkward smirk that communicates “wouldn’t it be nice.” But the answer to these questions is, “Yes!” The answer to these questions is, “That is what the gospel is all about.”

One of God’s most frequent and powerful images for who He is in relation to us is the betrayed spouse. God’s bride whores around with many, many other idols (Ezek. 6:9). When one doesn’t satisfy, God’s bride doesn’t come home in broken repentance. She looks for another idol-lover and listens to all its stupid, empty promises.

God pioneered the road you are traveling. It was an impossible road before His God-man feet cleared the path you are rightly struggling to walk. By His grace, we have in the gospel both the map (direction) and the resources (power) by which to travel it. As you find yourself wanting to give up or wondering if it’s possible, reflect on what it was like to walk this road with no forerunner carrying the weight of the world’s sin (not just the weight of one spouse’s sin). Don’t use that image to discount your struggle, but to grow an appreciation for Jesus sacrifice. Your experience should magnify your understanding of what Jesus did. What Jesus did doesn’t minimize what you’re going through.

Read Hebrews 12:1-3. Notice it says to “consider” Christ “so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted (v. 3).” What does it say you should consider in order to gain this encouragement? Part of the reflection is that Jesus walked “despising the shame (v. 2)” of his journey. Jesus really did walk the road you are on. In the same way your spouse must trace Jesus’ steps in dying to self to taste real life, you are called to trace Jesus’ steps to know the “joy” set before you (v. 2) of seeing the restoration Christ died for realized. In this way the summary of how the gospel ministers to sin is the same as the summary of how the gospel ministers to suffering – Jesus in my place.

Question: What encouragement do you take from knowing that Jesus was your victorious pioneer on this difficult road?

Powerful

When we face something overwhelming, something that exceeds our emotional capability to absorb, we have a hard time imagining anything larger or more powerful. Here again our spouse’s sin can indirectly change our view of God. It’s not that

we think God is smaller. We are just so consumed with the moment we can't or don't imagine anything larger. This is a particularly beneficial reflection at this point in your journey.

You have heard the full history of your spouse's sexual sin and considered its full impact on your life and marriage. That had to feel larger than you cared to imagine. Take the power of how that affected you and then realize God is larger. God's power to redeem exceeds sin's power to destroy like the ocean exceeds a swimming pool.

Read Ephesians 3:14-21. Praise God! He is bigger than our imagination. Our imagination is no limit upon God's capability. The only thing our imagination can limit is our faith. As you read this passage, let it set to rest any fear or guilt that you felt as you saw areas of your personal doubt in God's power. Instead launch directly into praise for a God who is still bigger than you can imagine, even with your current imagination expansion.

Question: How would you put into words the picture of God's power that you have gained from this reflection?

Who Is My Spouse Now?

Every story has good guys and bad guys (“guys” meant to be gender inclusive). When you got married your spouse was one of the “good guys” in the story. With little arguments your spouse's hat went from white to gray, but hopefully with forgiveness turned to white again. After betrayal, however, it is easy to permanently label your spouse one of the “bad guys.” If the gospel story is going to take root, then it must radically alter this mentality in a way that balances personal responsibility with the possibility of redemption.

A Sinner, Not “Sin”

In a day of labels, we have a tendency to name people by their weakness and failure. We make strong “I am” or “You are” statements about things that used to only be descriptive (i.e., I feel, I did, I struggle with). We say, “I am an addict. I am depressed. I am anorexic.” With this mindset the label that will capture your spouse is “adulterer” or “sex addict.”

This may be an accurate description of your spouse, but it impedes the gospel story from breathing appropriate hope in your life when it is the defining label you use to identify your spouse's role/character in your life. Your spouse is a sinner who sinned in those specific ways, but with surrender to God's grace that does not have to be “who they are.”

When you fail to make this distinction it keeps you trapped with his/her sin (even if you choose divorce). Your spouse is major figure in your life story. Therefore you will think of him/her often. If you define your spouse's character by their sin, then each time you think of them their sin will flash in your mind.

To gain an image of what is being discussed, recall the movie *Bambi* when the little deer fawn is learning to talk and sees the baby skunk. Bambi says, “Flower.” Everyone laughs and the skunk says, “You can call me flower if you want to.” When you look at your spouse you will identify them in some way. What you call them will go a long way towards both your personal and potential marital restoration.

Read I Corinthians 6:9-11. Paul is speaking to a church that was filled with sexual sin in a city known for sexual sin. The majority of his readers would have faced what you are facing. Notice that the first things on his list of their past behaviors are sexual sins (v. 9). Paul does not minimize that they were or still are sinners. But in verse eleven he indicates that their character/name changed when he says “such were (past tense verb) some of you.” As you seek to identify who you spouse is in this gospel story, you cannot allow the type of sin they committed to become their character name in your life story.

Question: What “name” do you give to your spouse in your life story? What other names are currently true and would be less destructive than defining your spouse by his/her sexual sin against you?

A Fruit Bearer

For better (i.e., repentance, other-mindedness, authenticity, vulnerability, patience, concern) or worse (i.e., continued sin, self-pity, selfishness, isolation, defensiveness, demanding) your spouse will bear fruit that reveals the current condition of his/her heart. If your question in the previous section was, “What do I call him/her then?” The answer would be, “Their present fruit.”

Through *False Love*, your spouse is being asked to take decisive steps that would give you the “reasonable certainty” (that is the most life offers) that he/she is embracing a way of life that will facilitate a God-honoring marriage. These materials should also put your spouse in relationship with other trusted people who can help you evaluate the sincerity of these fruit.

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Read Matthew 12:33-37. The summary phrase of this passage is we are “known by [our] fruit (v. 33).” Unlike trees people can change fruit when we are grafted into the trunk of submission to God (Rom. 11:11-24). However, like fruit from trees, personal character takes time to produce. The type of fruit discussed above does not show up in the hours, days, and weeks after sin was found out. But this fruit is what shows up in the weeks and months that follow. By this stage in these co-study materials your spouse’s level of change should be becoming evident.

Question: What fruit do you see in your spouse’s life? What fruit does his/her counselor or accountability partner see?

Capable of Change

Hope is not about where we are but where we can get to by God’s grace. Few spouse’s in your position see all (by type or quantity) the fruit they want to see at this stage. If that fruit were there, you would have probably stopped this study and resumed “normal” life again.

Remember the gospel story is a living story that concludes with a face-to-face encounter with Christ (at our death or His return). Until then, the story is “in process” with lots of plot twists. During a season like this, we are prone to wonder, “When is it going to be finished?” That leads us to think that if “it” hasn’t fully happened yet, then it’s not going to.

This tendency towards hopelessness or cynicism is most easily attached to either (a) your spouse’s perceived inability to change or (b) your perceived inability to trust or feel affectionate towards your spouse again. In the next step we will discuss trust and affection. But if your spouse is faithfully working through *False Love* and trusted people around your spouse see more change than you do, it may be that you don’t have enough hope to see the change that exists. Fear has a way of blinding us to hope. Ask for an opportunity to talk with your spouse’s accountability partner or counselor about your concerns and their evidence that change is happening.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31. Paul is writing to the highly sexualized Corinthians church about the possibility of change and what would bring it about. The Greeks thought change would come from wisdom and deep insight, while the Jews thought change would come from power and bringing outside forces to bear on the situation (v. 22). The Christians didn’t fit in either camp and were mocked by both. Paul shows how the gospel is the power to change (v. 23-25) and uses the example of the Corinthian’s own testimony to verify his claim (v. 26-31). The fact that Paul would have to write a second letter to the Corinthians reveals they were far from perfect. But there was still enough fruit to verify God was at work.

Question: What phrases do you tell yourself to convince yourself change is not possible? How do these phrases shape your thoughts, emotions, responses, and sense of hope more than the Word of God and God’s activity in your marriage?

What Is Sin?

Sin probably seems like a much bigger and deeper word at this point in your life. You can sense how it is more than “the bad things that we do.” Sin is a destructive force that once unleashed seemingly takes on a life of its own. Dealing with sin requires more than uttering the soft words “I forgive you.” It requires something to die. The thought of Jesus having to brutally die on the cross for sin, probably seems like less of an exaggeration to you now. In this section, we will look at three aspects of sin important to help you to continue to build a gospel narrative for your experience.

Spiritual Adultery

Too often this phrase is used as a flippant description for “really bad” by those who have not experienced the weight of being betrayed by a covenant partner. It can be used as a biblically approved expletive for vertical dimension of sin. When that happens “spiritual” begins to carry the connotation of “less real” or merely “something you ought to think about” instead of a heart-breaking, life-changing choice (Gen. 3).

But this is not how God used this metaphor in Scripture. He used it knowing the full weight and pain of covenant betrayal. God used it to open our eyes and sober our minds when our hearts are their hardest. But God did use this description for all sin against Him. This means that your experience over the last weeks and months is the epicenter of the gospel narrative. Your experience is a taste of what God remedied for us in the gospel.

It would be a waste of this absolutely miserable experience not to marvel at the gospel. But this should not be a guilt exercise; turning the tables with, “I guess I am an adulterer too, why should I be upset with my spouse?” The first part is true when it is not used to turn the tables, but the question radically minimizes the power of the gospel and the awe at

what God did. God was upset. Your response mirrors His. Your pain should give you a clearer more robust picture of the gospel narrative, not a call to guilt-muted, unresponsiveness towards a manipulatively expressed theological truth.

Read Romans 9:22-10:4. Romans is a letter of deep, heady theological truths, but Paul uses the truth of physical and spiritual adultery from Hosea to make an emotionally resonating point. Paul wants to the reader to identify with what God did in the gospel to make salvation possible. Paul wants the reader to feel God’s heart for restoration with His unfaithful people if they will repent and be restored. Read this passage and gain an appreciation for your pioneering God who knows the depth of your pain and the joy of restoration when His people respond in repentance – even God had the non-remnant segment of His people (9:27-29; 10:1-4), but has been restored to many “undeserving” repentant people (9:30-33).

Question: How has your experience given you a greater appreciation for the gospel and trust in God’s character?

Sin is Illogical

Too often the “why” question just won’t go away. With every significant piece of progress we look back to see if the sin will make any more sense. And it doesn’t. The temptation at this point is to grow discouraged and begin to question whether any of the progress is real and wonder if we can really be any “safer” if progress has not explained the problem.

We can understand the motives of sin and the idolatries from which they emerge. We can understand the unhealthy aspects of our marriage and how they may have created an environment of temptation. But all of this does not “add up” to necessary sin. We can see genuine fruit of repentance and be encouraged by the transparency or closeness it allows. We can commit to plans for a healthier marriage and grow in cautious optimism for the future that is ahead. But these things do not “add up” to a safety that silences our fears.

When we treat sin like a science experiment that should follow a recipe or protocol for guaranteed safety, we again jettison the gospel story. The only thing that will protect the marriage is both spouses’ continual, mutual dependence upon God and willing, humble service of one another. The only thing that disrupts this is “choice” not “cause.” Sin is never a logical or necessary choice. So if we are going to allow the gospel narrative to redefine our experience, we must be willing to live with the tension and dependence it requires.

Read Genesis 3:1-21. As you read this passage, notice that none of the description or conversation makes sin logical. As we read the passage we are left with the nagging question, “Why? I know all that happened. I heard what was said, but why did they think the fruit was better than what they already had with God?” When our life is affected by sin, we still look back at Adam and Eve to vent our frustrations with the rhetorical question, “Why?” As we mature as Christians we learn to live without a satisfying answer, because we come to understand the nature of sin as illogical. We become satisfied to pursue God (in the opposite direction of sin) knowing that safety is not found in answer but in dependence upon God.

Question: What would it mean for you to surrender your “why” question and find safety in relying on God more than an answer that would only create pressure to perform in certain ways to self-protect?

A Conquered Enemy

Saying that sin is illogical can sound like surrender... and it is. But the surrender is to the Lord who conquered sin, not the illogical confusion sin creates. Sin may not have to submit to logic (actually it cannot submit to logic because sin, by definition, is counter to God’s created order) but it must submit to God.

If your spouse is unrepentant, his/her sin will not reign wild and free; defiantly thumbing its nose to you and God for all eternity. That sin will meet a greater pain than it caused you and an equal pain to what it caused God—Hell. Because God is not mocked, you can rest in knowing that the sin against you will not get the final word.

If your spouse is repentant, his/her sin will not “get off” free; fading into forgetfulness as if it never happened only to live in the privacy of your memory. That sin will meet a greater pain that it caused you and an equal pain to what it caused God—the cross. You can rest in knowing that even forgiven sin is not merely erased; it is still “paid in full.”

An implication of the gospel narrative for your suffering is to pray for your spouse’s repentance and the ability to celebrate repentance when-if it happens. When you truly believe that sin is conquered and you will not get the “short end of the stick” when it is forsaken, then you are grasping what it means to live with a conquered enemy in the Conqueror’s world.

Read Revelation 20:7-15. This is not the time to try to figure out the most accurate interpretation of the book of Revelation. Allow yourself to read "the big story" even if you don't understand all the details. In this passage you see the fate of your Enemy (Satan) and enemies (those who cooperate with Satan's destructive agenda). You see how clear and definitive the victory is and judgment will be. Death and Hades are tossed around and made to obey like rag dolls. Those who mock God no longer have any voice in their destiny. Those who submit to God have no pride or secret desire for their sin. This is how conquered the sin that has disrupted your life really is.

Question: How can you remind yourself of the greater protection you have in Christ than in any answer or commitment you seek to make sin make sense?

Is Love Worth Pain?

In a fallen world there is no love without pain. That doesn't mean that what has happened in your marriage is okay. But it is a caution against the tendency to seek guarantees after a significant betrayal. Love will always involve the risk of pain. So the answer to more accurately worded question, "Is love worth the risk of pain?" must be "Yes" because there is no other kind of earthly love to be had.

Pastor Mark Driscoll tells of a counseling case that captures this point well and the larger gospel narrative we have been speaking about in this chapter. This retelling is paraphrased.

A young wife was convicted to tell her husband of her adultery with his best friend in the first year of their marriage. She feared her husband would divorce her, because he had told her many times he could never recover if she were unfaithful. Realizing it was a sin to continue to live a lie, she confessed to her husband in the pastor's office.

Her husband stormed out of the office; truck tires leaving their skid marks in the church parking lot. She wondered if she would ever see him again. After prayer, she went home to an empty, quiet house. Well after dark her husband came home carrying a bag, grabbed her by the arm, and walked her back to the bedroom. He sat the bag on the bed and undressed his wife.

She stood cold and shivering, not knowing what was about to happen. The husband reached into the bag and pulled out a white evening gown. He put the gown over his wife and said, "I must choose to see you as Christ sees you."

With this their journey of healing and restoration began. This declaration was not the conclusion of their journey any more than our salvation is the completion of our maturity in Christ. The unfaithful spouse was repentant and committed to restoration. The betrayed spouse understood the risk and battle of forgiveness while also being committed to restoration. This is what allowed the gospel narrative to reframe their struggle without minimizing the difficulty ahead.

Read Revelation 19:6-10. In light of the case study above, reflect on the phrase "it was granted to her [the bride of Christ, the church] to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure (v. 8)." These clothes were not hers by right, but clothes washed clean by the sacrificial blood of the Groom. Notice the response that the Groom gives to the apostle John in this passage. The Groom treats His ransomed bride without any sense of servitude for His kindness (v. 10). Christ took the risk of love, lost the gamble, and completely changed the game by His victory.

Question: What are the "wise risks of love" that are currently in front of you? As you answer this question do not get caught looking weeks/months into the future or trying to answer that "what if" questions of pessimism.

Summary Reflection: As you have worked through this chapter what would you say are the most important aspects of your story that you are beginning to see differently?

Encouragement Focus (GOSPEL STORY):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Have I been able to avoid feeling guilty or as if God is now only concerned with how I'm responding as I have allowed God to reinterpret key elements life after learning of my spouse's sexual sin?
- Am I able to identify the specific times in my life when I most need to allow these new interpretations to penetrate my thinking, emotions, and choices?

Step 7

“What Is ‘Forward’ and How Do I Move There?”

IDENTIFY GOALS that allow me to combat the impact of my suffering.

**“I can now see that innocence and powerlessness are not the same thing.
I used to think ‘it was not my fault;’ was the same as ‘there is nothing I can do.’**

My old suffering story came with a way of life that I lived.

**The new story, identity, and beliefs that come with the gospel
allow me to actively live differently without giving into the old false shame or regret.**

I can change [describe how] without a sense of condemnation [describe why].”

Memorize: I Peter 4:1-2 (ESV), “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Arm yourselves” – Whenever we suffer we must actively engage and change our natural way of thinking.
- “Suffered... cease from sin” – A key part of overcoming sin in a fallen, broken world is learning to suffer well.
- “The rest of the time” – Identifying goals is a steps that pivots from processing the past to preparing for the future.
- “No longer for human passions” – Suffering enflames our passions. This is not wrong but is a source of temptation.
- “For the will of God” – In the midst of suffering it can be very tempting to seek relief more than the will of God.

Teaching Notes

“Prolonged pain indicates the degree of the hurt or injury, not the presence or absence of forgiveness. When pain comes to the surface, it reveals how severe the results of sin are; it does not mean that forgiveness has not occurred. Pain and forgiveness are different yet interrelated. Pain can continue after forgiveness (p. 60).” Earl & Sandy Wilson, et al in *Restoring the Fallen*

“Equally deceptive and harmful is a commitment to making sure your spouse now becomes the person you always wanted him or her to be (p. 49)... Trusting him again was not just about him being trustworthy; it was also about me recognizing there’d be times my trust would be required (p. 178).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

“Whatever your [self-protective] style of relating, it probably seems to work for you. But beneath the pretenses, you’ve made a commitment that you will never be hurt again if you can help it. This commitment conflicts with the commitment to love (p. 107).” Harry Schaumburg in *False Intimacy*

“The next step—if and when both are ready—is to recommit yourselves to the marriage covenant and to explore the marital problems that existed prior to the infidelity. The affair did not arise in a vacuum; good marriages seldom beget adultery (p. 18).” Robert Jones in *After Adultery*

“The one involved in the affair is relieved to be beyond the secrecy and guilt and is rediscovering some of the reasons for the original attraction to the partner. The one cheated on, after dealing with anger and betrayal, is excited not to have lost a mate... The problem with the honeymoon is that it can sweep issues under the rug, which can later come back to haunt the marriage (p. 352).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

“If you’ve just let loose on your spouse, this is a good time for you to call a break. And when you’ve cooled down, go to your spouse and apologize. Apologize for whatever you said or did that did not help the healing process. We don’t believe you need to apologize for the feelings—those are real and true—but you do need to say you’re sorry for the way you handled them at the particular moment (p. 155)... The other aspect of transparent honesty Mona had to accept was the fact that in the end, she would have to entrust Gary to God and place herself in a position of vulnerability (p. 187).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

Embedded Study

To this point we have emphasized knowing facts, understanding impact, and processing well over "doing." A spouse's sexual sin creates a context of grief and trauma. These affects are often overlooked in the name of "figuring out what to do." When this happens the offended spouse is left feeling like no one "gets it" and as if all actions are only Band-Aid fixes, moral manipulation, or shifting responsibility. Hopefully the road we have traveled has alleviated the fear of this step.

But in this step, we will begin to focus upon responding. Grieving losses and processing trauma would be incomplete without direction for the future. Step 7 will primarily assume that your spouse has been cooperative with their role in the restoration process outlined here and in *False Love*. However, even if your spouse is uncooperative, Step 7 is still applicable, although it would be applied in your personal journey towards healthy rather than a marital journey towards restoration.

It is possible that as you read through this step, you may become defensive and think, "Why should I do that? I am the one who was sinned against. This is not fair. My spouse has no right to ask that of me." You will likely be right. Fairness has no way of creating restoration after sin. Restoration, even mere freedom from bitterness, is always built upon a foundation of grace that is "unfair." If these emotions do arise, it would be wise to review through the work you did in Steps 4-6 to help you process those reactions.

In this steps the kind of goals, actions, or decisions that you will need to make are discussed in four sections.

1. Forgiveness: What It Is and Is Not
2. Trust: A Wise Journey
3. Communicating About the Whole Journey
4. The Divorce Decision

Forgiveness: What It Is and Is Not

What is the first thing you need to "do" with all you have learned, understood, and processed to this point? Forgive. Before now forgiveness would probably have been only a well-intentioned promise. When we forgive we absorb the cost of someone else's sin. But forgiveness should not be a blank check or it easily becomes foolish enablement or willful naivety. Jesus knew the cost of saying the words "Your sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:48) or "Neither do I condemn you" (John 8:11). Wise forgiveness, especially when it potentially leads to restoration, knows the cost of the check it writes.

Read Matthew 18:21-35. Notice that precise amounts are given for what is forgiven. Part of the benefit of Steps 2-4 was that you could know what you are forgiving. Too often a passage like this is used to imply that because the offenses against us are small compared to our offenses against God (which is true) that all offenses against us are small (which is false). In reaction to that logic we often resist forgiveness because the act of forgiving seems to minimize the offense. The act of saying, "I forgive you," assumes the statement, "You wronged me in a way that should not be overlooked or minimized." It should also include the assumption, "I am only able to assume the debt of your sin against me because God has assumed my debt against Him and promised to cover whatever losses I incur by forgiving others."

"The fact is, what your spouse has done against you and God may be inexcusable, but it is not unforgiveable (p. 30)." Mike Summers in *Help! My Spouse Has Been Unfaithful*

So what is forgiveness? Forgiveness is the choice to no longer require someone to receive the punishment that their sin deserves. Forgiveness is an act of faith that trusts that the penalty for sin was sufficiently paid by Christ on the cross or will be paid by the sinner in Hell. Forgiveness is a willingness to treat the offender as gracious wisdom would allow given the offender's response to their sin.

"Forgiveness is not a human function. You may have to begin by asking God to give you the desire to be obedient. There's no sense in pretending (p. 170)." Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

Forgiveness vs. Restoration: These terms are distinct but have significant overlap. All restoration is rooted in forgiveness, but not all forgiveness will result in restoration. In the discussion below the tone of forgiveness implies a movement towards restoration. However, if your spouse is unrepentant of his/her sin, then your personal recovery may involve applying these principles without the particular applications made towards restoration.

Gary and Mona Shriver in their book *Unfaithful* describe five things that forgiveness is not (p.165-166; modified, bold text only). As you read these use them to calm the fears of "I could never forgive because..." You will likely find that many of the things you say you could not do are not actually what forgiveness requires.

- **Forgiveness is not containing or restraining hurt and anger.** If this is how we conceive of forgiveness, then forgiveness becomes a synonym for being fake. Forgiveness becomes a form of self-imposed silencing rather than other-minded expression of grace. With this bad definition of forgiveness, we resist godly self-control in the name of resisting hypocritical forgiveness.

"There are a couple of principles that can help you deal with unresolved anger. Don't allow your anger to control you. If we are out of control verbally or physically, we are in sin. And the truth is that no real work gets done in that atmosphere... Additionally, it is important to understand that processing and venting are two different things (p. 152)." Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

Forgiveness is what allows us to express hurt as hurt rather than hurt as anger. Even after forgiveness the hurt still hurts. It is just that after forgiveness the penalty for that hurt which anger tries to generate has already been relinquished by the forgiver. When you forgive you are not making a commitment not to hurt. You are making a commitment about what you will do with hurt when it flares.

- **Forgiveness is not letting someone off the hook.** Forgiveness is the complete opposite of saying, "That's okay." If the action being forgiven were "okay" then no forgiveness would be needed. Forgiveness is not the same as saying, "This is finished. Nothing more needs to be said about this." Forgiveness is the start of restoration not the culmination. When God forgives us He does not assume we are a "finished product." God remains active in our life to remove the sin He forgave. Similarly, when you forgive your spouse that is the beginning of restoring the marriage to what God intended it to be and which may involve continued dealing with fall out of his/her sin.

"Forgiveness is an important part of recovering from adultery, but forgiveness isn't God's way of 'dropping the subject' (p. 18)." Winston Smith in *Help! My Spouse Committed Adultery*

- **Forgiveness is not an excuse.** Forgiveness does not reclassify the offense from a sin to a mistake. Mistakes are excused. Sins are forgiven. Sometimes we resist forgiving because we do not want to ratify this perceived downgrade in the significance of the offense. Forgiveness is not a downgrade. Forgiveness inherently classifies an offense at the top level of wrongness.

On the opposite side of making an excuse for your spouse's sin, is over personalizing his/her sin. While your spouse's sin was absolutely *against* you, it may or may not have been *about* you. As you seek to express forgiveness by not dwelling on your spouse's sin, you may have to battle against validating each way your imagination can conceive that your spouse's sin was "meant" to harm or insult you.

- **Forgiveness is not forgetting or some kind of sentimental amnesia.** Forgiveness is not the culmination of a journey but the commitment to complete a journey. Forgiving does not require a rush of warm emotions towards your spouse that are consistently stronger than the emotions of hurt you feel towards his/her sin. This conception would make forgiveness a state of being to achieve rather than a promise being given.

A naïve-amnesia view of forgiveness implies that your spouse's struggle with lust is over and that any future offense can/should be responded to without reference to past/forgiven sexual sin. Forgiveness does mean that you will allow unclear facts to be examined before making accusations and that progress would be considered in determining how to respond to a relapse. The social network each of you have built while working through *False Love* and *True Betrayal*, should allow for these assessments to be made in a wise, healthy manner.

So what does forgiveness mean you are committing to do with your memories, fears, and imagination? Forgiveness does not add anything new to how you respond to your memories, fears, and imagination that wisdom did not already advise before you forgave. The patient honesty that was outlined in Step 2-6 is the kind of response you should give. Forgiveness is not a commitment to become non-emotional ; but honoringly emotional.

- **Forgiveness is not trust or reconciliation.** The next section will talk about the process of restoring trust. But, for the moment, know that forgiving and trusting or forgiving and saying things are "back to normal," are not the same thing. If you feel like you have to be "there yet" in order to forgive, then this belief will impair both your ability to forgive and progress towards restoring the marriage.

Read Ephesians 4:31-32. This passage describes where you should be at this stage in the process. There should be a commitment to put away "all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander (v. 31)." Forgiveness is when you make this commitment, not the declaration of its completion. After reading this section on forgiveness in light of the journey you have been on, how do you understand the phrase "forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (v. 32)"

differently? What is different in how you view your forgiveness from God? What is different about what you believe God is asking of you towards others?

Trust: A Wise Journey

"Either you trust me or you don't," is the epitome of a manipulative statement (whether the person making the statement is being intentionally manipulative or just despairingly desperate). It is all-or-nothing foolishness. It tries to microwave restoration. Trust is something develops.

A Progression of Trust

The ten step progression below begins with a relationship at its most trust-broken point. Not all marriages that experience betrayal will start at step one. As you read through this progression two key questions to ask are, "Where was I at the darkest point after learning of my spouse's sin?" and "Where am I now?" The progress you have already made should be a source of encouragement for the journey ahead.

The goal for this section is to help you see that even if you currently think, "I could never be at a 'ten' of trust again," that there are many practical steps that can and should be taken between where you are and a "ten." You and your spouse may find that there are aspects of trust that you were weak at prior to betrayal (due to personality, personal history, etc...). In these cases, examining this material will serve the dual purpose of marital restoration and marital enrichment.

Movement through this progression will be a dance between your spouse's efforts at change and your willingness to take relational risks. Your spouse's growth alone will not create trust without your willingness to take a relational risk. Your willingness to a relational risk alone without your spouse's growth will not produce lasting trust. The dance may not be one step by your spouse followed by one step by you. But unless both of you are moving you're not dancing.

1. **Require Third Party Mediation:** At this level of trust-brokenness you do not feel safe (at least emotionally) to be with your spouse without someone else present. The high end of this level might sound like, "You can go to counseling, but I'm not going with you. I'll go separately and tell the counselor my side of the story." At this stage, trust is built as you hear your spouse be honest with another person and receive correction/instruction from that person. You still doubt your spouse is being honest, but you begin to see that your spouse is not a total liar who is so committed to his/her lies that he/she cannot hear an objective third party. As your spouse cooperates, you begin to trust your spouse vicariously through the trust that you build for the third party (usually a counselor).
2. **Listen and Require Validation:** Now you are willing to talk with your spouse in a one-on-one conversation, but you are skeptical of most everything he/she says. You don't believe your spouse. You believe facts. If your spouse has facts to back up with he/she says you will trust that much and little more. This is a tedious way to communicate, but feels necessary in order to avoid pain greater than the inconvenience. Any statement that is not factual (i.e., future promise, interpretation of event, expression of feeling, etc...) is viewed as deceptive, unsafe, manipulative, or insulting. As a pattern of validated facts emerge, you begin to trust that there is some commitment to live in reality that exceeds your spouse's desire for personal expediency.
3. **Listen and Require Less Validation:** Listening to your spouse now feels like less work. The rate at which you are searching for questions and processing information as you listen is decreasing. Giving the "benefit of the doubt" for things you are uncertain about is still feels dangerous. Statement that are incomplete or slanted too positively are assumed to be intentional deceit and creates a trust regression. As your spouse's statements prove to be majority accurate, the practical necessities of life create an increasing reliance upon your spouse. Each time you notice this happening you may still feel highly cautious.
4. **Rely on Spouse Functionally:** Whether separated or in the same house, you begin to "do life together again." A process of basic life tasks (i.e., formal or informal budgeting, scheduling, transporting children, etc...) begins to be created or reinstated. This level of trust within a marriage feels very much like "living as roommates." The dissatisfying nature of this arrangement can often discourage continued growth (i.e., "I don't want to stay married out of a sense of duty"), but this discouragement should be decreased by understanding where it falls in the process of trust restoration.
5. **Share Facts:** As you functionally "do life" with your spouse, there is the opportunity for you to begin to share more of you again. To this point you have been receiving information much more than giving information. At this stage you begin the process of "giving yourself" to your spouse again. You allow yourself to be known at a factual level. Questions from your spouse that start with "Why" or "How come" are still met with defensiveness. During

this stage questions that start with “Would you” become more comfortable as you allow your spouse to influence the “facts” (i.e., schedule) of your life again.

6. **Share Beliefs:** As you become more comfortable sharing facts, that naturally leads into sharing what you think about those facts. Conversations become more meaningful as you share more of what you like, dislike, agree with, disagree with, and want from the events of life. You can now talk about the way you believe things “should” be without a tone of judgment, sadness, or guilt overpowering the conversation. As you share your beliefs, you feel more understood and appreciated. At this stage, you and your spouse may have to relearn (or learn for the first time) how to have different opinions or perspectives while protecting the unity of the marriage.
7. **Share Feelings:** Up until this stage emotions have likely been “thrust at” or “shown to” more than “shared with” your spouse. At this level of trust you are willing to receive support, encouragement or shared participation in your emotions. An aspect of the “one flesh” relationship is returning (Gen. 2:24). You are beginning to experience your burden being reduced and your joys multiplied as you share them with your spouse. The marriage is beginning to feel like a blessing again.
8. **Rely on Spouse Emotionally:** Now you find yourself able to relax when he/she is away. You are able to believe your spouse is transparent and sincere when he/she tells you about their day or shares with you how he/she is feeling. It is now the exception to the rule when suspicions arise within you about your spouse’s motives.
9. **Allow Spouse to Care for You:** Allowing your spouse to express affection has lost a sense of “invasion” or being “unclean.” When your spouse wants to serve you, you no longer think he/she is doing an act of penance or cynically question what he/she will want in return later. Your spouse’s efforts to bless you can be received as blessings rather than being treated as riddles to be solved or dangerous weights on the “scales of justice” that will be used to pressure you later. You can savor the sweetness of love without bracing for a bitter aftertaste.
10. **Relax and Feel Safer with Spouse than Apart:** This is trust restored. Your spouse’s presence has become an anchor of security rather than a pull towards insecurity. Your spouse’s presence reduces stress in troubling circumstances. You find yourself instinctively drawn to your spouse when something is difficult, upsetting, or confusing. Even when he/she doesn’t have the answer, their presence is its own form of relief and comfort.

Trust and Ultimatums or Time Tables: There is intentionally no pacing guide for this trust progression. In this regard, growing in trust requires trust. It is an act of faith not to say, “I’ll give it three months and if we’re not at level seven, then I don’t think there’s any hope for us.” That kind of time-pressured environment stifles the growth of trust. Ultimatums are even more ineffective. When you try to make a deal (i.e., “Unless you stop [blank] or tell me [blank], then I am not moving to the next level of trust”) you undermine actual trust being built (i.e., “You only did that, because I made you”). *Your goal in reading this progression is merely to gain an understanding of where you are what is next in the development of trust.* Efforts at artificially accelerating the process will ultimately do more harm than good.

“Threats or ultimatums haven’t worked in the past and learning newer ways to handle situations that use to confuse you is difficult in the beginning. By pacing your responses, you allow yourself time to gain perspective in an objective way, which distances you from personalizing the behaviors and empowers you to act in more effective ways. The addict acts out because of difficulty in relating to life in a responsible and adult fashion—not because of who you are (p. 71).” Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

Trust and Sex

Physical intimacy was intentionally left out of the progression of trust. By the end of the progression it should be obvious that all of the marriage relationship is intimate, not just the physical act of sex. But how and when physical intimacy re-emerges will be different for every couple. Being able to communicate about the awkwardness and frustration of sex will be one of the subjects that goes through the progression of sharing facts, sharing beliefs, sharing feelings, relying on each other emotionally, and allowing your spouse to care for you.

When trust has been damaged to the more foundational levels, it is common for couples to initially have sex in the early stages, but then realize they do not have an overall level of trust to support that level of closeness. That is a normal reaction to an abnormal marital circumstance.

“We found out from our experience and that of the couples in our groups that tears during intimate moments are common... This can be a priceless opportunity for the infidel to reaffirm the choice of their marriage partner and not their affair partner (p. 133).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

As you and your spouse navigate this difficult terrain, do not view it as a problem to solve or a race to finish as quickly as possible. Restoring trust that will support the intimacy of sex is an investment. Remember those things that can bring the most pleasure can also create the most pain if handled clumsily. As contradictory as it sounds, *patience is the best accelerator of intimate restoration*.

Read James 5:7-12. In this passage James intertwines the subjects of patience and trust. He starts with a repeated emphasis on patience. His central illustration is that of a farmer waiting on his crops to grow (v. 7). If the farmer impatiently paws at the soil in which he planted the seed, the seed will never become a plant. The same is true of the seed of trust and the fruit of sex. Interestingly, James moves from this discussion of patience directly into a command to be remain completely honest (v. 12). When we are not getting what we want, we are tempted to become dishonest or manipulative in order to get it. Heed James warning as you allow the harvest of trust and intimacy to grow.

Communicating About the Whole Marriage

If forgiveness lays the foundation for trust, then trust opens the door to talk about marriage. Since the preliminary assessment in Step 2, very little has been said about the condition of the marriage before sexual sin had its affects. There was growth each of you needed to experience personally before marriage enrichment could be productively engaged. Now it is time to grow past where you were “before.”

It is beyond the scope of *True Betrayal* to provide what is needed for holistic marital enrichment. The differences in couples and breadth of subjects make this an impossible task for half of a chapter. But what can be done (and what has already begun) is to lay a foundation for marital enrichment that will allow the efforts you put into improving your marriage to be more effective than they could have ever been before. The two of you should be more realistic about where/who you are and more deeply rooted in the gospel than you have ever been before.

In this section, we will look at common obstacles that interfere with a healthy transition from marital restoration to marital enrichment. This is a change of mindset that can be difficult or unsettling if you do not understand that a significant transition is taking place and what this transition entails. Most of these transition difficulties have to do with *talking about old problems in a new context after a prolonged strain*.

Old Problems

Begin by reviewing the marriage assessment you did in Step 2. Get a different color pen and remark items where you see the pre-sexual sin marriage differently than you did a few weeks or months ago. Ask your spouse do the same. Talking about this will be an important time in your continued trust building, but it is important.

Where do the two of you agree that the marriage was weak or underdeveloped?

“Adultery is more likely to happen when a marriage is already weak. You should not take responsibility for your spouse’s sin, but you may need to examine yourself and acknowledge how you contributed to weaknesses in your marriage (p. 16).” Winston Smith in *Help! My Spouse Committed Adultery*

Exercise: As you prepare to examine where the two of you may disagree, who bears responsibility your marriage’s various weaknesses, and what should be done to strengthen these areas, answer these four questions given by Mark Laaser for couples healing after sexual sin (*Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*, p. 184):

1. Define the ideal couple.
2. Which ideals that you described are realistic?
3. Which ideals that you described can be restored?
4. Which ideals that you described can be achieved with help?

What areas of marriage need to be addressed first in the marital enrichment process? (List and rank the top three)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

New Context

Hopefully, you found a greater ability to openly discuss these pre-existing problems with your spouse. If not, then you may need to look at where you are on the trust progression and resume these conversations once each of you are at the “share feelings” or “rely on spouse emotionally” level of trust. Until that time, continuing in some form of counseling or mentoring relationship is advised.

Once you can discuss the old problems without defensiveness, it is important to realize that you are discussing them in a new context. You are not trying to fix “what was” as if restoration required time traveling. What is worked on “now” must be worked on “in the present tense.” However, you are acknowledging that many (not all) of your marriage instincts will fall back into what you knew before (i.e., personal habits, scheduling patterns, laziness, control, etc...) unless you jointly commit to changing those patterns.

Read Mark 2:21-22. Both you and your spouse have been through an intensive process of allowing the gospel to transform your struggles with sin and suffering. You are each “new” people living in an “old” marriage. The truths that you have embraced personally have not been thought through jointly. What God has done in your personal lives should give you hope for how much He wants to transform your marriage and how good it will be when He does. But that work is just beginning. As you examine the old problems of the marriage, remember that you are approaching them from the new context of personally transformed lives.

Read Colossians 3:5-10. This passage vividly portrays how God changes people. Both the “old self” and the “new self” are alive and active in us. This should be a sober reminder that the “old problems” will not just go away because of the work God has been doing in the two of you personally. Each of you will have to continue learn what it looks like to live out of the new work that God has been doing in you in the context of your marriage.

After a Prolonged Strain

Marital enrichment has to correct more than the “old problems” of the marriage. During the strain of going through the marital restoration process, most couples pick up some bad habits (in addition to many good ones). When trust is low and defensiveness is high we don’t communicate well. There are parts of our recovery from which we need to recover.

“One habit in particular was extremely destructive. Whenever Gary felt like Mona didn’t want him sexually, he would withdraw emotionally in an attempt to ‘give her space and an opportunity to want him’ Mona would perceive his withdrawal as his not wanting her and would then withdraw herself ‘until he wanted her again.’ Of course, as time went on, we both would end up feeling increasingly unwanted by the other and hurt because of it. Every word and action seemed to underscore this belief (p. 103).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

What unhealthy patterns of conflict emerged between the discovery of sexual sin until now? (sarcasm, shaming, etc...)

What destructive personal habits emerged between the discovering of sexual sin until now? (over working, eating, etc...)

The Divorce Decision

There are two groups of people who likely had a very hard time reading this chapter: (1) those whose spouse is still committed to his/her sin and (2) those who are themselves resistant to the notion of forgiving, growing in trust, or examining the marriage for restoration. If you do not find yourself in one of these two groups, you can skip this section.

However, others of you cannot avoid this question. You are faced with a choice to either (A) remain in an unhappy marriage trusting that God can change your heart, your spouse’s heart, or both; or (B) pursue divorce. In Step 1, we cited secular resources (meaning they did not contain the Christian “bias” of believing marriage is sacred covenant) that advised not considering divorce until you had gone through a time of personal recovery and marriage assessment. If you have worked through these materials, that type of work has been done. Assuming there are not other emotionally traumatic events occurring in your life, you are likely in a place to make this decision.

There are two scenarios in which the choice to accept divorce is clear. First, your spouse has chosen his/her adultery partner and has initiated a divorce. Second, your spouse is unwilling to live in a marriage where sexual sin is absent and

abandons the marriage for his/her “freedom.” In either case, you are morally free before God to accept the choice of your spouse without any sense of condemnation (1 Cor. 7:12-16).

There two more difficult scenarios in which choices are less clear. First, what if my spouse has not committed physical adultery, but refuses to quit or continually gives into the sexual sin; pornography or emotional affairs?

Read Matthew 5:21-30. The question surrounding pornography, emotional affairs, and divorce is, “Does Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:27-30 allow habitual lust to qualify as ground for divorce under the adultery clause of Matthew 19:1-12?” Looking at the Sermon on the Mount as a whole, we would have to conclude that if Jesus was intending to permit the legal consequence of divorce for lust, then Jesus was also intending to allow the legal consequence of capital punishment for degrading outbursts of anger (v. 22). It is not contextually feasible that Jesus wanted to address the legal consequences of heart sins. Jesus was telling us how seriously to take sin and at what level to battle sin.

The spouse whose partner is perpetually or defiantly engaging pornography or sexual sin would have two options.

- Chose to live with his/her spouse without participating in their sin and seek to win them back to God through his/her example of godly character and selfless love (1 Pet. 3:1-7).
- Be separated from his/her spouse for the purpose of reinforcing the seriousness of their sexual sin, but not seek divorce. If this option is chosen at this stage in the process, you should (a) be prepared for an indefinite separation and (b) have a clear expectation for what would end the separation. This option is not recommended without consultation of your church elders or pastoral staff. In this option, many of the same factors need to be considered as those weighed when an abused spouse is leaving for safety - bradhambrick.com/safetyplan.

Second, what if my spouse is repentant and I have tried to work through my hurts, but find it more painful than I am willing to bear to remain married? In this case we might ask, “Is there a ‘statute of limitations’ on the divorce clause of Matthew 19? Does my biblical freedom to choose divorce ever expire?” We are now asking a question to which Scripture does not speak directly. There is no reason to assume that the divorce clause expires. With that said, the partner who believes his/her pain is too great to remain married would have two options.

- Choose to remain married and continue to pray that God would bring a level of healing and restoration to his/her pain that the marriage could be an enjoyable relationship.
- Choose to pursue divorce with the liberty that Scripture provides. If this option is chosen, then it is recommended based upon Mark 10:1-12 that neither spouse should think, “I am getting out of this marriage so I can get a fresh start in a new marriage.”

Encouragement Focus (IDENTIFY GOALS):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Have you made a commitment to forgive and assessed where you currently are in the progression of trust?
- Have you made a thorough and accurate assessment of where the marriage was and its “new context”?
- Prepare: Are you caring for yourself in the six ways listed under “Care for Yourself Physically” in chapter one?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- _____
- _____

Step 8

“Living a Life Not Defined by what I’m Overcoming”

PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me.

**“Some of the pain related to my spouse’s sin remains [describe] but it defines me less and less.
But I am also experiencing more of what God has for me.
I never knew life could include [list of experiences] again.
I see now that God was not withholding these things from me, nor were they forfeited.
I am learning to enjoy them without guilt, fear, or guardedness.
I have come to realize that ‘healthy’ means more than the absence of pain or sorrow.
I am learning to trust and enjoy God in the rise and fall of my circumstances.”**

Memorize: Romans 5:3-5 (ESV), “More than that, we rejoice in our suffering, knowing that that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through this Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Rejoice” – If you read the passage carefully, you’ll see we actually rejoice in the fruit of suffering; not the pain.
- “Endurance... character... hope” – Hopefully this captures well the journey you have been on in this study.
- “Shame” – God is faithful to not only redeem the suffering but remove the shame associated with suffering.
- “God’s love” – The perfect love of a perfect God enables us to live with imperfect love of an imperfect spouse.
- “Holy Spirit” – This seal (2 Cor. 1:22) of God’s permanent covenant provides the security for all earthy covenants.

Teaching Notes

“Even with all these complex factors, God’s healing grace abounds. If both partners are committed to restoring the marriage, they almost always succeed. The trauma often creates a deeper and more realistic intimacy with better boundaries in place. Greater maturity grows out of the crisis they have weathered (p. 351).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

“That night happened in 1993 [book published in 2005]. We can now say with absolute sincerity that we have fully healed from the adultery. Our marriage is strong and mutually satisfying. We have love and trust (p. 27).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

“One of the tests for an intimate relationship is answering the question, Can I be most myself in your presence? Can I be creative, funny, vulnerable, productive, strong, weak, flamboyant, shy or even smart? Can I couple any of those words with sex and romance? Can I be tough, forgiving, generous, spiritual, intuitive, graceful, clumsy, lazy, self-indulgent and disciplined? Do I feel equal, successful, attractive, encouraged, trusted and believed? Can I be fully as competent as I can be and not have my partner disappear? Do I feel challenged? Can I be accountable and hold my partner accountable? Is it OK to make a mistake? Does our time together really seem to matter (p. 66)?” Stephanie Carnes in *Mending a Shattered Heart*

“Forgiveness is a direction you are taking. Keep walking towards it (p. 173).” Gary & Mona Shriver in *Unfaithful*

Embedded Study

At this stage in the journey it can feel like scary relief not to be actively dealing with a problem or to be constantly taming powerful emotions. After a season being perpetually "on" guard, "on" the lookout, and having to be "on" top of things, it can be unsettling to be able to be "off." That is what you should begin to experience more and more of in this step; becoming comfortable getting to be "off" again.

Until we are comfortable being "off" duty, we are living in the hyper-vigilant effects of our spouse's sin. Hyper-vigilance is a common response to a majorly disruptive event like the betrayal of a spouse. In this step we will look at three things.

1. **Indicators of a New Normal** – These items are indicators that your personal recovery and marital restoration (if possible) are nearing a healthy resolution. Remember the conclusion of marital restoration is the beginning of marital enrichment.
2. **Piecing Together Your New Story** – This is the final step in the narrative portion of personal recovery. While your emotions may still rise and fall, at this point the processing of those fluctuations will be a rehearsing of previous steps rather than beginning a new process.
3. **Preparing for Transition** – Part of the scary relief of the perseverance step is moving from a formal study in formal helping relationships back to normal life and discipleship. This section will help you prepare for that transition and minimize the unsettling effects of your marriage "being alone" again (which should not be "alone," but only relying upon your small group instead of a counseling relationship).

Indicators of a New Normal

Resist the urge to read the ten items below as a "to do" list. These are things that "return" as you process your experience in a healthy way more than they are "retrieved" by a set of actions steps. As you read through the list, mark with an asterisk (*) those things you are already experiencing. Let this be an encouragement to you of God's faithfulness to bring about those things that you may not yet be experiencing. Ask those in your support network to pray for the items that you are unable to mark.

Not included in this list, but very relevant, are the latter stages of trust development from Step 7. You can include those items from the trust development that begin with the verbs share, rely, and relax on this list (numbers 4-10).

1. **Energy Level Returns to Normal:** The trauma of learning about your spouse's sexual sin wreaks havoc on your energy levels. Fear and anger create artificial spikes of energy and then may leave you wiped out for hours or days. Depression and a sense of hopelessness can sap your motivation and make it feel like you're walking through tar. But then realizing what you've neglected while depressed gives you a jolt of energy as you try to catch up on the "rest of life." As you reach the new normal, these fluctuates should become less intense and less frequent.

Read Isaiah 40:27-31. You have likely felt disregarded by God (v. 27) and this added to the exhaustion (v. 30), but you have waited faithfully for God and are experiencing His renewal (v. 31). It is after journeys like your that we realize how much our energy level is a gift from God. We so often take it for granted as "ours" but even in our prime (v. 30) we can be wasted away by life without God or life that does not follow His design.

2. **Decision Making Becomes Easier:** If your spouse's sexual sin was public knowledge, you had to try to make choices with a chorus of varying opinions giving you advice. If your spouse's sexual sin was private, you had to try to make decisions without anyone knowing what you were really facing. Each interaction with your spouse caused you to question whether you were being too strong or too lenient. Day-to-day decisions were made without much thought because your hurt-fear-anger was occupying the majority of your cognitive "air time." Now that the rhythms of life are returning daily and unique choices are getting their normal "weight" again.

Read Isaiah 46:3-4. It is in the reality of this passage that clear and wise decision making exists. During a life trauma we gain a first person experience of God's promises, "I will carry you... I will bear... I will save (v. 4)" and realize how much this has been happening since our birth (v. 3) and since the day we learned of our spouse's sin. This reality provides the stability of God's care and the direction of God's glory necessary for good decision making. Further, having come to this knowledge through suffering, we know ourselves better and are able to make decisions more clearly within the passions with which God created us (Psalm 37:4).

3. **Appetite and Sleep Cycle Return to Normal:** After learning of a spouse's sexual sin food and sleep either become sources of escapist comfort or forms of self-care neglected because the perpetual effects of being upset.

Even when we experienced these basic necessities of life we are unable to enjoy them. God’s daily graces of care and provision were transformed into distractions or illusions during our time of trauma. Now we can begin to enjoy them again as God intended them to be; daily reminders of His love.

Read Psalm 4:6-8. During times of trauma we are the ones who ask the question of verse six. Now we bear the testimony of verses seven and eight. We see that enjoying a good meal and the ability to enjoy good sleep are very God-dependent blessings. We can now savor them for what they were meant to be all along. Verses seven and eight would be good passages to memorize and use in your prayers before meals and before bed.

4. **Sense of Humor Returns:** Too often after a spouse’s sexual sin our sense of humor becomes tainted with cynicism and sarcasm. We laugh *at* hope and joy instead of *with* hope and joy. Our new normal must not carry with it the skepticism of jaded humor if it is going to be healthy. A sense of humor filled with honor is an indication that God’s redemption is taking deep roots in our life.

Read Ephesians 4:29. We should not forget that this verse applies to jokes as much as it applies to our arguments. One of the ways that we speak in a way that “is good for building up” is through a sense of humor that honors the person we are speaking to and reveals that we have hope for the future.

5. **Play Together as a Couple:** Repentance and recovery are rewarding but they aren’t fun. The hard work of marital restoration can be taxing on the marriage in ways that are distinct from the damage done by the original sin. Spending weeks and months rooting out sin and processing pain means that same time is not spent enjoying one another. This negatively affects the marriage. During repentance and recovery playfulness feels out of place (most often because it is). As you enter your new normal, playfulness should be returning and it is good to embrace it without guilt.

Read Zephaniah 3:14-20. This is a picture of how God responds to his bride when their relationship is restored. If one thing stands out in this passage, it is that this is a joyous occasion. Both God and His bride are enjoying themselves in spite of the shameful experience they’ve been through (v. 19). Playfulness is vulnerable, but God models the height of vulnerability in a restored relationship as He places His reputation back into the hands of His once wayward bride, Israel (v. 20).

6. **Begin Making Plans for the Future:** Planning requires a degree of “reasonable certainty.” The lies that surround sexual sin removed this reasonable certainty as much as (if not more than) the sexual sin itself. You spent a good deal of time trying to relearn your past; preparing for the future was a luxury you felt unprepared to engage. Now “reasonable certainty” has returned and you are humble enough to embrace it for what it is. The pride of an assumed tomorrow which makes sin today seem less dangerous is gone. But the hope of a good tomorrow makes the possibility of planning an enjoyable exercise in affirming your commitment to the marriage.

Read Proverbs 12:20. This verse contrasts deceit and planning peace. Your context is unique for understanding this proverb. You are coming out of experiencing the impact of deceit and walking into the joy that comes from being able to plan for peace. Praise God for where you are in this journey, and pray to Him for the wisdom and protection to stay on this “straight and narrow” journey (Matt. 7:13-14).

7. **Memory Triggers Are Less Intense:** You may still hate every scene in a movie, book, or television show that romanticizes sexual sin, but the hatred can begin to become a moral hatred instead of a hatred of self-defense. You may still get uneasy when your spouse comes home late or talks about wasting time on the computer, but these are now feelings that “belong to you” instead of “you belonging to them.” Life feels less like it is booby-trapped with emotional landmines waiting to take your feet out from under you. You notice when things do bother you as being odd, instead of being struck by when something doesn’t bother you.

Read Philippians 3:12-16. This passage is often misapplied. Paul is not laying out a principle of forgetting the past or living in denial. In Philippians 4:9 Paul asks this church to remember how he handled his unpleasant experiences of anxiety while with them. In Philippians 4:12 Paul remembers being “brought low” and being hungry or in need. The principle is simply that the pain of our past should not become a mental block to pursuing the mission of our future. At this stage in the process you should begin to sense that turning of perspective within your own heart.

8. **View Members of the Same Sex Normally:** Sexual sin doesn’t just affect your spouse’s view of the opposite sex (sinful attraction) but it also affects your view of members of your gender (marital threat). You realize you were competing for your spouse’s attention and affection even when you didn’t realize it, so for a time every member of your gender may have felt like a competitor. This can be one of the slower aspects of the new, healthy

normal to emerge. But as your marriage heals you will begin to rest in the fact that attention and affection are things your spouse must “give” not things you are required to “win.”

Read 1 Timothy 5:1-2. This passage is usually used to teach us to honor our elders or express purity towards all people (both are correct applications). But in light of your circumstances it is also instructive about how to view the members of your own gender who may create insecurity for you. For your marriage to be healthy, both you and your spouse must learn to view members of your gender as family (sexually irrelevant – “in all purity”).

9. **Willing to Consider Using Your Experience to Help Others:** This is a huge marker of change in the “new normal.” Up until now life has been about hiding (pre-sin exposure) and healing (post-sin exposure). Those seem like the opposite of “sharing for the benefit of others.” This is you transitioning from the helpee role to the helper role; not on the basis of your expertise, but your experience. Humbly telling your story of God’s faithfulness can be a source of hope for those who have lost all sense of hope and wonder if their life has become too dark to know the blessing of light again. In Step 9 you will go through several brainstorming exercises to help you consider what expressions this might take.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-5. Can you remember thinking, “I wish I knew someone who had been through this, seen their marriage restored, and would talk to me about it?” Before taking that question further, notice the time lapse implied in this passage. God comforts us. He is our Father of mercies and the God of all comfort in any affliction we face. Pause: with no time table for how long this part of the process lasts. Resume: so that we can testify to God’s comfort to others in whatever affliction they face. The pause is essential to the comfort. If we think God has put us “on the clock” to get “a return on His comfort investment” in us, then we would not feel like we had much comfort to offer. Once we experience God’s patience before the “so that” (v. 4) we begin to share abundantly in Christ’s comfort (v. 5).

10. **Pervading Sense of God’s Goodness and Faithfulness:** Pain has a way of making God feel far away. Even Jesus experienced this sense of God’s absence during great pain (Matt. 27:46). The wisdom pain brings is that it shows us that God was near and active even in our darkest hour. Our capacity for confidence in God is greatly expanded once we see God never left. This knowledge of God’s faithfulness can now have a perspective changing influence upon future problems that we face.

Read Psalm 34:18-22. Read these verses as your testimony. The Psalms are meant to be “songs of worship” that capture the story of God’s people and celebrate God’s unchanging character and His activity in our lives. Allow the memory of how you would have doubted these verses to make their truth even sweeter and more sure as you worship God with them now.

Piecing Together Your New Story

At this point in your journey, with the new normal settling in, you are at a place to see your story come together to a single, meaningful narrative again. This does not mean deciphering the “reason” for what your marriage has been through, but to understand the pieces of your experience as parts of the larger story of God’s redemption.

Return to the five questions you examined in Step 6. Use the chart below to reflect on how the larger narrative in which you process your suffering has changed. In the left column summarize how you would have answered each question before this study. You will likely complete the entirety of the left column before reflecting on how you are approaching each question now; which is what you put in the right column. This should provide you with a better sense for how your larger life-narrative has changed.

If there are particular truths, experiences, or practices that have been most helpful to reinforce the kind of narrative change represented in each question also record those. This will allow journaling to remind you not only of “what” God has taught you but “how” he has made these lessons come to life and persevere in your thoughts-habits.

| Before This Study | Now |
|-------------------------|-----|
| I. Who Am I Now? | |
| | |

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 2. Who Is My Spouse Now? | |
| | |
| 3. Who and Where Is God? | |
| | |
| 4. What Is Sin? | |
| | |
| 5. Is Love Worth Pain? | |
| | |

Preparing for Transition

This third section of Step 8 may feel like a change of pace. That is because it no longer has the past as its focal point. This section asks the question, “What should my life begin to look like now that it’s not focused on personal recovery and marital restoration?”

Make sure you are in a small group. Trust takes time. The baton of trust will soon be passed from your G4 Group, mentor, or counselor to the more regular ministries of the Body of Christ. The primary location in which this occurs is small groups. The lessons (cognitive and emotional) that God has taught you in the course of this study have been enhanced, protected, and applied largely because of the relationships in which you learned them. The same thing is true for the next (and all other) lessons that God has for you.

This is why it is wise for you to begin getting plugged into a general small group if you are not already. If you need help identifying which small group would be a good fit for you, talk with your G4 group leader, mentor, or a church pastor.

Learn accountability and encouragement on a broader scale. Walking through this material with someone else may be the first time you have experienced ongoing, Christian accountability and encouragement. Accountability is not just for life-dominating struggles. It is part of God’s definition of “healthy.” People who do not have relationships in which they are honest about their struggles, seeking accountability and encouragement are people who are becoming “unhealthy.”

As you move from a G4 Group or mentor relationship focused primarily upon responding to your spouse’s sin to a general small group, you may wonder what accountability and encouragement will look like now. The seven points below are meant to guide you in the kind of relationships you are looking to form with your small group.

- I. **Voluntary** – Accountability is not something you have; it is something you do – you make yourself accountable. You must disclose in order to benefit from the relationship. Hopefully, the positive experience you have had going through *True Betrayal* will encourage you to remain transparent and vulnerable.

2. **Trusted** – The other person(s) is someone you trust, admire their character, and believe has good judgment. You are encouraged to join a small group now so that you can build this trust before graduating from your G4 group.
3. **Mutual** – Relationships that are one-sided tend to be short-lived. In the small group you will hear the weaknesses and struggles of others as you share your own. You will help carry their burdens as they help carry your burdens (Gal. 6:1-2).
4. **Scheduled** – Accountability that is not scheduled tends to fade. This is why small groups that meet on a weekly basis are an ideal place for accountability to occur. Everyone knows when to meet and has a shared expectation for how the accountability conversations will begin.
5. **Relational** – We want spiritual growth to become a lifestyle not an event. This means that we invite accountability to be a part of our regular conversations not just something that we do at a weekly meeting. It should mean that there are times when we are “doing accountability” and don’t realize it.
6. **Comprehensive** – Accountability that exclusively fixates on one subject tends to become repetitive and fade. It also tends to reduce “success” to trusting God in a single area of life.
7. **Encouraging** – Too often the word “accountability” carries the connotation of “sin hunt.” When that is the case accountability is only perceived to be “working” when it is negative. However, accountability that lasts should celebrate growth in character as fervently as it works on slips in character. This means asking each other questions about discouragement in addition to questions about temptations.

Have a plan for future study. We walk forward. We drift backwards. For some time now you have been a part of an intentional, structured process. If you leave that structure without a continued plan for deepening your understanding and application of Scripture to the struggles of life, you will regress. Ephesians 5:15-16 calls us to intentionality because of a recognition that time minus direction equals decay not healing.

This entire study has been filled with devotional Bible studies. If you have not been taking the time to read the passages and reflect on the devotional thoughts / questions that accompany them, consider using those as a guide for daily Bible reading. This will be a way to reinforce what you’ve learned in this study and further solidify the biblical basis.

Another recommended resource would be the seminar “Finding Your Identity, Security, and Confidence in Christ” (bradhambrick.com/identity) as a tool to help you solidify your progress.

Make a formal transition plan. Write out your transition plan. List the things that need to be in place before you “graduate” from your G4 group or mentor relationship. List the important practices you have begun in this study that you will need to maintain. Write out what the “yellow flags” (don’t wait for the red ones) would be that you should address seriously if they appear.

Review your plan with your G4 group or mentor. Get their input on what needs to be added to the plan. In consultation with them, decide what aspects from that list need to be brought into the accountability conversation with your new small group before you graduate.

Encouragement Focus (PERSEVERE):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Have you demonstrated a significant number of the “new normal” characteristics?
- Am I beginning to be able to talk about my recent life events with God as the main character in my story?
- Prepare: Are you caring for yourself in the six ways listed under “Care for Yourself Physically” in chapter one?

With each step, we advise you to confide at least one new element of your suffering to your encouragement partner.

- _____
- _____

Step 9

“Dreaming and Pursuing Dreams Again”

STEWARD all of my life for God’s glory.

**“God has shown me great grace; grace greater than my pain.
I am learning what it means to live out of my new identity in Christ.
That has pushed me to ask the question,
‘How can I be a conduit of God’s grace to others?’
As I have sought God, examined my life, and consulted with fellow believers,
I believe this [describe] is what it looks like for me to steward God’s grace now.”**

Memorize: I Peter 4:19 (ESV), “Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Those who suffer” – This passage will apply to every person many times in the course of their life.
- “God’s will” – Hopefully, at this stage in your journey, you can read this without hearing it as God’s punishment.
- “Entrust their souls” – Life is a choice between entrusting our souls to God or seeking to protect ourselves.
- “To a faithful Creator” – If you made it to this point in the study, you have many evidences of God’s faithfulness.
- “While doing good” – Without a returning sense of purpose, suffering would drain our vitality for engaging life.

Teaching Notes

To “steward” something means to use it for God’s intended purpose. It is important to remember that what is being stewarded is the life of the group member in general, not the sin specifically.

Being a living testimony to the transforming power of God’s grace can feel exposing. We must be willing, when appropriate, to share what God has done on our behalf. For many who experience suffering, this will be difficult; not because they are unappreciative, but because sharing God’s grace also means sharing their suffering.

Vulnerability is the willingness to take the risk of allowing any event, belief, preference, interest, or emotion of your life to be “on the table” when it is useful to glorify God by encouraging a fellow believer, allowing a fellow believer to encourage you, or evangelizing an unbeliever. It is this disposition that breathes the life of authenticity into relationships and allows them to be mutually enjoyable, enriching, and character shaping.

“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside of Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell (p. 169).” C.S. Lewis in *The Four Loves*

Embedded Study

It would be easy to want this study, like this season of your life, to just be over. But this study, like your life, has at least one more chapter (and several appendices) left. When you put a great deal of effort, as you undoubtedly have, into getting past something, it can be easy to forget that there is something next. The fact that God has brought you to this point should be evidence enough that He has more in store for you and more to do through you.

In Step 9 you will be doing most of the writing, because it is your life that is being stewarded for the glory of God. No one else could write this chapter but you. What you will be given is nine questions that walk you through a life assessment to determine where God wants you to serve now and where He may want to prepare you to serve in the future.

Read Luke 11:24-26. This is a terrifying warning about comforting suffering when that comfort does not result in serving God's purposes with your life. Comfort alone does not satisfy the human heart. In the absence of mission, life becomes purposeless. This lack of purpose is often experienced as a form of depression. When depression sets in after we have done all we know to do in processing a trauma, we truly begin to believe that there is no hope. If we lose hope, then the last state truly is worse than the first.

Read Ephesians 2:8-10. In *True Betrayal* we have traveled through the gospel (v. 8-9) to good works (v. 10). The nine steps are merely the gospel in slow motion. Then nine steps show us God's general pattern for redeeming and restoring our suffering. We are not exiting the gospel in order to do good works, but cultivating the fruit of the gospel. Paul says that there are "good works" that "God prepared" for every believer and that these should define our daily lives ("that we should walk in them") (v. 10). There are answers to the questions you will be asked next. You have the confidence that comes from the promises of Scripture that God has a design for your life and wants you to know what it is.

As you read through and answer the next nine questions below, remember God's patience and timing. There will be some aspects of God's design that you can engage in immediately. But there may also be ways you want to serve God that will require you to be more mature or be equipped before you are prepared to fulfill them. The main thing is to begin to have a vision for life that involves being God's servant and actively engaging that vision where you are currently equipped.

1. Am I willing to commit my life to whatever God asks of me? This is a "do not pass go" question. If your answer is "no," it will bias the answers you give to each subsequent question. Do not get lost in guilt or pretend that it is "yes." Rather, identify the obstacle. What aspect of your suffering story (Step 4) makes this sacrifice seem too risky?

Are there specific things you believe God is asking of you? Be sure to record your thoughts on this question before reflecting on the subsequent questions.

2. What roles has God placed me in? The first part of being a good steward of one's life is to fulfill one's primary roles with excellence. When Paul says in Ephesians 5:17 that we are to "understand what the will of the Lord is," he goes on to describe God's design for each of our major life roles (spouse, parent, child, and worker in 5:22-6:9).

3. What are my spiritual gifts? Stewarding your life for the glory of God involves utilizing the spiritual gifts God has given you. God gives spiritual gifts that coincide with the calling He places on each individual's life. Read Romans 12:1-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:1-30. If you need further assistance discerning this, talk to a pastor about taking a spiritual gifts inventory.

4. For what group of people (age, struggle, career, ethnic, etc...) am I burdened? From God's earliest covenant with people His intention was to bless us that we might be a blessing to others (Gen 12:2). By investing your life in those you have a burden for, it allows you to be other-minded and find joy in it.

5. What am I passionate about? At this point in the stewardship evaluation, you can begin to see Psalm 37:4 fulfilled in your life. There is a level of vulnerability involved in being passionate again, but allow yourself to express faith in God through this vulnerability and pursue the life He has for you.

6. With what talents or abilities has God blessed me? These need not be spiritual gifts. Read the amazing description of abilities God gave Bezalel and how he used those abilities to serve God (Exodus 31:1-11). Think through the skills and expertise you have accumulated in your life.

7. What are my unique life experiences? Both pleasant and unpleasant experiences should be listed. We are sometimes tempted to think that God can only use the good or spiritual experiences of our lives. God is glad to use our successes (Matt. 5:16), but God also delights in displaying His grace by transforming our suffering from flaming darts of Satan meant for our destruction to bridges of ministry carrying many people to life in Christ (2 Cor. 1:3-5).

8. Where do my talents and passions match up with the needs in my church and community? We should seek to steward our lives in cooperation with our local church. God’s way of blessing and maturing those we serve is through the Body of Christ, the church. By identifying where your gifts, burdens, passions, and abilities fit within or expanding your church’s ministries, you are maximizing the impact your service can have on those you are seeking to bless and protecting yourself from discouragement through isolation.

9. How would God have me bring these things together to glorify Him? This is not a new question, but a summary question. Look back over what you have written. Talk about it with your Christian friends, family, mentor, or pastors. Dedicate a time to prayerfully ask God to give you a sense of direction. Then begin serving as a way to steward your life for God’s glory.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” Matthew 5:7

Encouragement Focus (STEWARDSHIP):

With each step, we will provide questions you should invite another person to ask you openly so they can know and encourage you in the process of grieving your loss or pain.

- Are there necessary changes you have omitted that would make it unwise for you to finish this study?
- Have you demonstrated a significant number of the “new normal” characteristics evidencing readiness to finish?
- Prepare: Are you caring for yourself in the six ways listed under “Care for Yourself Physically” in chapter one?

Appendix A

How to Conduct an Intervention for Sexual Sin

An intervention is a group confrontation that is often used as a last resort when an individual is consumed by a life-dominating struggle but will not admit the sin is present. For the purposes of this study, the life-dominating struggle would be either adultery or pornography.

Before an intervention is conducted you should have already confronted the sexual sin in your spouse's life in multiple one-on-one conversations (Matt. 18:15). In most cases, it is advisable that friends, small group leader, or pastor would have already initiated conversations with the offending spouse about the sexual sin.

If your spouse is unrepentant or will not acknowledge concrete facts, then an intervention is modern language for one way the second step of church discipline (Matt. 18:16) can be expressed. Even if your spouse is not a Christian or not a member of a church this step can be taken, but it would not be a part of any formal church process.

“The group intervention then follows the same process as the one-to-one intervention... Each participant expresses care and concern, provides evidence, articulates the impact of the sexual behaviors have had on them personally, defines boundaries, establishes consequences, and offers help. If the sex addict resists all these steps, those involved must not associate with that person. A spouse should take steps to separate from the addict, friends should refuse to socialize with the addict, and the church should bar the addict from participating in the Lord's Supper. Shunning a person is intensely painful for everyone, but it is the most caring thing to do, and the most honest (p. 145).” Mark Laaser in *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*

What follows is a process to walk you through the before, during, and after of staging an intervention.

Step One: Gather Your Facts

You only want to confront your spouse with your most solid evidence. If you mix weak and strong evidence, your spouse will pick apart the weak evidence and feel like he/she has discredited the entire case. You should assume that your spouse will be defensive. If there was reason to believe he/she would be cooperative, then the intervention would not be needed.

Step Two: Meet with a Counselor

Present your evidence and seek confirmation that this is a situation that warrants an intervention. The counselor should also be able to provide you with a list of best-fit church-based, local, and national resources that will become an important part of the action plan you propose to your spouse at the intervention.

Step Three: Recruit the Intervention Team

These people should be people that your spouse trusts and respects. They should also be people who would be involved in the restoration process when/if the sin is openly acknowledged. This team can consist of two to five people other than you. Children still living in the home should not be on this team. A member of your small group and pastoral staff should be on this team if possible.

The recruitment process would involve either a phone call or face-to-face meeting in which you say to each prospective team member, “I appreciate your friendship with my spouse and me. I am sorry to have to say that my spouse is trapped in sexual sin. I have spoken with a counselor and we assessed that an intervention is a wise next step. I am asking if you would be a part of that process. It would involve a planning meeting, an intervention meeting, a commitment to be a part of my spouse's follow up accountability team, and praying diligently for the entire process.”

During this conversation it is good to provide a copy of this appendix to help familiarize the prospective intervention team member with what has been and will be done.

Step Four: Plan the Intervention

This requires getting the intervention team together, although most of the material can be outlined before the meeting. The purpose of the planning meeting is to inform the team of what an intervention is, providing the evidence you have substantiating the need for the intervention, explaining their role, and rehearsing the meeting.

The intervention should have a written agenda which states when each person will speak and the purpose of their speaking. Each person should have a copy of the written agenda during the intervention meeting. The plan for the intervention meeting should include:

Similar resources available at www.bradhambrick.com

- **Place and Time for the Intervention:** At the end of the planning meeting everyone should know when and where the intervention will occur. Arrangements needs to be made for seating that accommodates everyone who will be present so that details do not become a points of distraction or discredit the purpose of the meeting.
- **Plan to Get Spouse to the Intervention:** The main criteria for determining the place for the intervention are: (1) where can you get the offending spouse come without suspicion, and (2) where can there be enough privacy that social awkwardness does not drown out the message of the meeting. The spouse’s home is usually a natural place for this to occur. Arrangements would need to be made for the children to be away and for the driveway not to be filled with cars.
- **Clearly Defined Plan to Begin Recovery:** After consulting with the counselor, you want to have a plan in place that the sinning spouse can enact immediately. This may help determine when the intervention is planned. If part of the plan involves attending a recovery group and the group meets on Thursday nights at 7:00, then the intervention should be on Thursday night at 6:00 with one of the intervention team members prepared to attend the first meeting with the offending spouse.

If part of the plan involves meeting with a counselor, then an appointment should already be scheduled within 24 hours of the intervention and the intake forms ready to be signed.

An intervention should not end with a statement like, “I’ll think about it.” An intervention is a decisive call to action. Anything less than a full commitment to the proposed recovery plan should result in the enactment of predetermined consequences (next point).

- **Clearly Defined Consequences if Uncooperative:** The intervention team is not just there to be a positive peer pressure influence on the offending spouse. They are also there to make sure, if needed, the consequences for non-compliance are communicated clearly and followed through upon.

Similar to the recovery plan, the ability to enact the consequences of non-compliance needs to be ready to be enacted immediately. If the consequences are separation, then the offending spouse’s bags need to be packed and a visitation schedule with the children prepared. If the consequences involve informing an employer, advancing church discipline, or other communication-based consequences, then the letter needs to already be written.

The presence of the team is there to communicate that these consequences are not the emotional reaction of a spurned spouse, but the reasoned response of a collection of people who care about the spouse and want him/her to be free from his/her sin.

- **Schedule for Who Will Speak and When:** The meeting needs to run smoothly and should not last more than 30 minutes. The offending spouse should not feel invited to speak until the end of the meeting. Pauses between pieces of the intervention will invite the spouse to begin to rebuttal each thing that is said.

When the offending spouse comes into the room a designated person (preferably the offended spouse, if he/she is composed enough to do so effectively) should greet him/her and say:

“I am sorry that it is necessary to surprise you like this. I have tried to talk to you in person about [blank; pornography or adultery] but you would not hear me. It is a problem that cannot be ignored. We want to address it with you. Please sit. When we are finished we will give you an opportunity to respond.”

After explaining the purpose for the meeting there are three things that would need to occur:

- a. **Give Evidence that There Is a Problem:** Walk through the financial records, phone records, internet history, e-mail exchanges, testimony from people at work, or other pieces of evidence that reveals there is a problem. If there are verifiable consequences that the offending spouse or family have experienced as a result of the sexual sin, those should be given as well.

This is not a time to talk about how hurtful or offensive the sexual sin has been. It is not a time to talk about what the influence on the children will be if the sin continues. Those are subjective things (true, but subjective) that can be dismissed by a hard-hearted person as “you being sensitive” or “you blowing things out of proportion.” Those things can only be effectively discussed once repentance has occurred.

- b. **Each Person Share:** Each person present takes turn expressing their care for the offending spouse and that the facts point to an immediate need for change. Each of these sharing times should be brief; two to

five minutes. It can be reiterated that those in the intervention are not taking sides with the offended spouse as the “innocent spouse.” Marital enrichment may need to be done, but after covenant-breaking sin is forsaken and marital restoration has been done.

The core message of these statements are, “We love you too much to be silent. The situation is too serious to be passive. We are here to call you to acknowledge the truth, repent, and take steps to be restored to God and your marriage.”

- c. **Call for a Decision:** The meeting ends with a presentation of the team’s proposed recovery plan and consequences if that plan is rejected. Both the recovery plan and consequences should be articulated with clear visual evidence that both are prepared to be enacted. It is at this point that the offending spouse is invited to speak in response to the questions, “Is what we’re saying true? If so, which of the options we’ve discussed will you choose?”

Step Five: Rehearse Intervention, Assess Motives, and Pray

At the end of the intervention planning meeting, it is wise to walk through the meeting so that the team members will be familiar with the rhythm of the meeting. For most people this will be their first intervention and creating comfort with the process is important to effectively conduct the intervention.

Once everyone knows what is involved there are two things each member should do in preparation for the intervention. First, each member should commit to pray for the offending spouse and the intervention meeting. Strategies and meetings don’t change hearts. That is God’s work, so an intervention should be prayed for fervently. Second, each member should assess his/her motives. Mark Laaser give four areas of personal assessment in preparation for a personal confrontation, but also apply well to a group intervention.

“If you are thinking of confronting a sex addict alone, you first need to take stock of yourself. Consider these four questions: (1) Are you able to confront the addict with a spirit of love and gentleness?... (2) Are you in a codependent relationship with the addict?... (3) Is your own conscience clear in this area?... (4) Will you be able to follow through on the intervention? (p. 141)” Mark Laaser in *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*

Step Six: Conduct the Intervention

By this point you simply need the courage to follow through. An intervention is highly uncomfortable for everyone involved. No one feels qualified. It is common to second guess whether every appeal that could have been made has been made or if the recovery plan and consequences for non-compliance are too strict / lenient. But you got to this point through the collective counsel of both professionals and friends with prayer. As long as the evidence of sin is strong, then it is wise to move forward in spite of the second guessing that naturally arise from any social interaction this awkward.

Step Seven: Follow Through Based upon Spouse’s Response

Plans live and die more on their execution than their preparation. If the offending spouse does repent, then it is essential that the intervention team serve as accountability and encouragement during the time when the recovery plan is being enacted. With a repentant response, the couple should be encouraged to work through *False Love* and *True Betrayal* as part of their restoration process.

If the offending spouse does not repent, then it is equally essential that the intervention team support the offended spouse in implementing the consequences. In this situation the offended spouse will be facing intense emotions of rejection, anger, guilt, and fear. The intervention team should care for the offended spouse as he/she experiences these waves of emotions. At the same time, the team should regularly contact the offending spouse to remind him/her of their prayers and to encourage him/her to embrace the proposed recovery plan.

For a comparable version of an intervention plan for addiction see bradhambrick.com/intervention.

Appendix B

How to Talk to Children When Sexual Sin Affects the Family

Written by Caroline Von Helm, M.A. and Brad Hambrick, Th.M.

When sexual sin invades the life of a family, every member of that family is affected. Not only is the impact large, but the impact is also unique upon each individual family member. The most innocent of the victims, and the ones who frequently received the least quality or quantity of care, are the children.

Children, young and old, need both *honesty* and *hope* during and after the crisis. The facts, which should be age-appropriately honest, need to be delivered in a way that is clear and as hopeful as the situation allows. As parents (both offended and offending parent), our instinct is most often to shield our children from this hurtful reality and to try to make things "less painful" for them.

"Less painful" is an appropriate goal as long as it does not come at the cost of being truthful or leaves a void for legitimate questions a child may have about his/her family, home, and future. If "less painful" compromises the child's age-appropriate ability to know the truth or being able to anticipate the future (at least to the degree that is possible), then "less painful" creates more harm than it alleviates pain.

Case Study:

The following case study is a fictitious example of a family of six walking through the process of a mother slowly finding out that her husband is committing adultery with a co-worker. It is meant to help you apply the recommendations that follow, by having an example that is less personal than your current situation.

Caitlyn is three years old. She stays at home with her mom most days, enjoys being outside, and loves reading stories with her dad. She has older siblings who go to school. Caleb is six and in the first grade, Kayla is eleven and just entering middle school, and Jacob is fourteen and starting high school. From the outside, all looks good for this family.

They are active at church, have a small group that they love. The children are involved in sports, drama, and other extracurricular activities. Dad works hard to support his family financially. They look like your typical American family; the kind that you would want to have over for dinner.

Behind closed doors things are quite different. Dad is critical, and emotionally absent most of the time. He will do what is asked, but rarely seems excited and does not initiate family time or individual activities with the children. He asks the standard questions about grades, school, and friends; but seems uninterested beyond those topics.

Mom does her best to compensate for Dad's lack of involvement by over-involvement. She tries to make sure they have everything they need... and want. This creates tension between her and dad, because they can never get ahead financially. For this and other reasons, Mom and Dad neither value time with each other.

The most recent tension has been created because mom found some emails from Dad to a co-worker that to her seem flirtatious and inappropriate. Dad quickly minimized them and then proceeded to berate mom for looking at his personal things and not trusting him.

Over the course of the next few months, mom continues to see emails, and eventually text messages that confirmed her suspicion that Dad was having an affair. After multiple attempts at confrontation and many arguments, dad admitted to his actions. Mom was devastated, Dad was angry, *and the children were confused.*

What Does the Family Do Now?

The scenario above is meant to serve as a framework for discerning how to discuss sexual sin by a parent with children. There are many things to keep in mind as you prepare for this type of conversation. The points below are meant to orient you to how these situations affect a child, appropriate expectations of a child when he/she first learns of the sexual sin, expectations after learning of the sexual sin, and the type of assistance a child needs to process this information.

1. An event of this magnitude and the subsequent parental conflict / absence / distraction can be traumatic for the children involved, even adult children.
2. If your child has not reached puberty and/or has no knowledge of or exposure to sex, your conversations about what has happened should not describe what happened in sexual language.
3. As children age and develop sexually, they may ask questions about things that have happened during this time. Answering these questions in age-appropriate ways is an important part of helping them process the grief.

4. Your child’s feelings may be more or less intense than the feelings of the offended spouse. Both parents need to accept whatever feelings surface, help the child to name those feelings, and understand how those feelings relate to the changes in their life, home, and family.
5. If a traumatic experience happens to children who are pre-school age or above, they will remember it and may need to process those memories at later developmental stages as they are able to comprehend more of their personal-family history.
6. Most children will not process (healthily assimilate into their life story) their emotions about a traumatic event until they feel safe enough to do it. Once you and your spouse have reached a “better” place and feel as if you are “moving on,” that may be when the children decide to process their own feelings. This will feel like it drags out the healing process for the parents, but you cannot rush your children through their process any more than the offending spouse could be rushed to repentance and the offended spouse rushed to forgiveness.
7. The biggest “damage” that has been done is undermining the child’s sense of security and definition of love. This is true regardless the age of the child. The care and aftercare for a child should focus upon providing a healthy sense of security and balanced expression of love.
8. When it comes to having the “what’s going on” talk, the ideal situation would be for both parents and a neutral third person to talk to the children together.
9. The content of the “what’s going on” talk should be decided before the talking to the child. If an agreement cannot be reached, then wait until an agreement can be reached. The time period that passes should be as short as possible, waiting more than four to six weeks becomes very confusing for the children.
10. There may have to be more than one conversation depending on the age differences in your children. If your children are in the same developmental range, then one conversation can be had with all family members present.

If your children are at different age / developmental stages do not try to talk to everyone at the same time. But do make sure that what you say to everyone is as consistent in content and language as age-appropriateness will allow. Older children should be told if there are things their younger siblings do not know, and do not need to know at the current time.

11. Make sure there is someone in your children’s lives who will be their support. This is especially important for the older children and even children who are out of the house who often get overlooked in this process.
12. If the sexual sin is not resulting in lifestyle changes (i.e., parental separation, legal action, job loss, pregnancy, etc.) seek counsel about what to disclose to your children. All the information your children may need is that you and your spouse have encountered problems because of hurtful choices by a parent, and that Mom and Dad are trying to make things better.
13. Encourage children to ask questions as they have them. It is unreasonable and unhealthy to expect children to formulate their questions at the “information meeting.” When you give them the freedom to ask questions, it is wise to also tell them you don’t have all the answers and that there may be some things that will stay between mom and dad.
14. Remember that children will process at a slower pace and may ask questions years after the occurrence. Being prepared for this prevents the emotional processing of your children from setting you back or giving you reason to be unforgiving. A negative emotional response by the parents to a child’s question, is a factor that reinforces the common false belief that the child has some responsibility for what happened in the marriage.
15. Guard yourself from feeling the need to “make up” for what is happening in your family. Neither gifts nor penance will make up for the offense or alleviate the impact. If anything they will teach a distorted view of the gospel, repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and family. Patiently submitting to the reconciliation process is the most helpful thing for your children (when possible). Only God can heal the hurt in your children not imbalanced love.

If the sexual sin is resulting in a lifestyle change, then consider the following:

Birth through Five Years

While you may think that at these ages children are not be able to tell something is going on, children are very perceptive at reading emotional changes in their environment. If mom is always crying, dad is always angry, or there is bickering and fighting, children in this age group can tell. They may become more “needy,” experience developmental delays, or regression in already learned skills as expressions of how changes in the home environment are affecting them.

The goal for parents is to be both authentic (fake calm when you think the child is looking is not enough) and reassuring. Although your spouse may have had an affair, you still have to be a parent. You cannot spend days crying, angry, or searching for more/new information. If restraining these behaviors is hard for you, ask for help. Take time to see a counselor or ask a friend to work through these True Betrayal materials with you.

No conversations should be had with your preschooler unless a decision is made for the offending spouse to leave for an extended or indefinite period of time. If spouses are staying together and no one is moving out, then preschool children do not need to know what has happened. Later in their life (as adults or older teens) there may be an appropriate time to share what God has done or what happened, but preschool children have no way of comprehending what you would tell them. *The main goal at this age is to provide consistency, love, and safety.* This is their greatest need. Leaning on friends and trusted caregivers will be important during this time.

If the offending parent leaves the house and the child is between two and five years old, you should give some explanation as to where the parent is going. The most optimal plan would be for this conversation to be factual and done together with a third party present. The person leaving should be the primary one speaking and communicate the following information:

“I am going to stay with (**location** – the child will need to know because it can cause more anxiety to say he or she is just “going away”) for (**duration** – it is important to tell the child the duration so they know an ending point. If a time period cannot be determined, then be honest and tell them you don’t know how long). I know it will be hard for you to be away from me, so I will come see you (give **visitation plan**).”

Notice in this conversation, you did not give the preschooler the answer to the “why” question. Most will ask, but some may not. Do not try to answer the “why” question for preschoolers unless they ask since it is hard for them to spontaneously transition to abstract thinking, especially in an emotionally powerful setting.

When they do ask “Why?” the offending parent should tell them:

“I made some choices that I should not have made, and when we make bad choices that really hurt people we need to give the person we hurt time and space. So, I am going to (location) to give Mommy/Daddy some space.”
[Reiterate your love for them and that you will miss them.]

There will be tears, shock, and an inability to comprehend what you are saying. Their brains are not developed for this type of transition. They do not have the life experience to grasp what it means or know what to do when a parent is absent for punitive reasons (“punishment” is the category they have to comprehend a marriage “time out”). Be patient. Prepare for tantrums and disruptions to their sleeping and eating patterns.

The experience of children (at any of the ages discussed) will look a lot like grief, because they are grieving the loss of what they have known as “normal.” For this reason the parenting tips and family devotion appendix will be an adaptation to the “Taking the Journey of Grief with Hope” seminar from the same G4 series.

If the parents stay together, then keeping preschooler’s routine as normal as possible is vitally important. Enrolling in programs like Mother’s Day Out or preschool for a couple of days a week may allow the offended parents time to work through what has happened.

The offended spouse will often say to the offending spouse, “Your relationship with your child is your relationship. I’m not getting in the middle of it.” This is a deadly message to send your child. Children have not yet learned the intricacies of relationships; they have not learned to talk about their feelings.

As a parent, the offended spouse must model the journey of forgiveness. This includes encouraging the child to express their feelings and telling the offending parent what they are thinking. You are not responsible for the other parent’s behavior, but you can teach your child in the midst of this difficult time how to handle conflict and express emotions healthily.

It is important to think about what you are teaching your child through modeling at this time. Children will learn more about emotions, reconciliations, and relationships from what they see you do with/towards your spouse than what you “teach” them during this time.

Elementary Age Children

At each stage in the developmental discussion, all of the previous material should be considered still relevant unless the next maturation level material says something contradictory.

Elementary age children are more verbal and have more cognitive ability than preschoolers, but they should not have sexual knowledge or understanding yet. Unless you want to explain sex to them, you still do not reveal the nature of the conflict.

When talking with your elementary aged child about what has happened, it is wise to say things like:

- "Mom/Dad made choices that hurt me."
- "Mom and Dad are working on making our marriage better."
- "Mom/Dad is working on forgiving..."
- "Mom/Dad is working on building trust with...."

Children at this age will ask lots of questions, like "What did you do? Are you getting divorced? Do you still love Mom/Dad?" Be honest where you can, but when the answer to their question is not age-appropriate or is undecided it is appropriate to say, "Some of what happens between Mom and Dad is not beneficial for you to know," or, "Those are things you can know when you are older."

Reassurance of your love for them is important during and after each of these conversations. Pointing them towards God and prayer is essential. Pray with your child after these conversations. But when you do pray speak in ways that express where they are, not trying to "teach" them what or how to think instead of talking to God on their behalf.

These conversations are a great opportunity to talk about how even parents may let them down, but God that is faithful and will not let them down. If the decision is made that the offending spouse is going to leave the home for a time period, then a conversation much like you had with your two to five year old will be necessary.

Middle / High School Children

By this age, children are becoming sexually aware and likely know what sex is. You as their parents may have already had "the talk" with them. If this is the case, then being factually honest about the sexual sin is appropriate. You would rather your child hear your confession from you than from someone else.

If the sin is adultery or an emotional affair, you should not give details about the sexual relationship. They may want to know how long the affair went on, and it is important to tell them. They may ask questions about the other woman or man: what they look like, if they have children, how old their children are, and similar questions. These are the details that are important for pre-teens and teens. It is appropriate to answer these questions.

The biggest thing that children in these age categories will be thinking about is "How does this affect my life?" They are at an egocentric time period in life so their fear is that somehow their standard or norm of living will be altered.

The other tendency for children at this age will be for them to take on the role of protector for the offended spouse. It is vitally important to not let the child do this. It will be tempting to want a "team" against the offender, but in the long run will only do more damage that has to be worked through.

If the situation extends and children are not kept informed as to the general things that are happening in the restoration process, some children may begin to defend or excuse behaviors of the offending parent. Most times this happens is a child's attempt to just want things "back to normal", or because they feel sorry for the parent that has had to leave. Affirming your child's care for that parent, validating the "hardness" of the situation, and reassuring them that you both love them is what is needed. Do not try to get them on a side, give them time and space to continue processing their own feelings, ask if they have questions, and provide the freedom to appropriately share what they are experiencing.

Adult Children

Sometimes children who have moved out of the house are thought to be unaffected. This is not true. Children, regardless of their age, will feel like their basis of security is shaken when their parents' marriage is traumatized or dissolved.

Adult children may feel like all that they knew growing up was false. They will question if the offending parent was really who they thought they were, and may even question the validity of marriage. The disclosure of sexual sin can be used as an excuse to turn from God and how they were raised.

It is vitally important for children in this age group to have an adult who knows them and is aware of the situation to reach out to them and check on them regularly. Unless someone reaches out to them, they are forced to process things alone and without the benefit of seeing what their parents are going through. An objective opinion, not just what their mom and dad are saying, will be an important part of them processing these changes in their home of origin.

When the Children Find Out First

What do you do if your child comes to you because they saw a parent looking at things on the internet, or flirting with someone in public? In this situation, it is important for the offended spouse to assure the child of the following things:

1. They did the right thing by coming to you.
2. You will do your best to find out what happened.
3. Once you do have an answer, plan a time for both parents to talk with the children.
4. Continue to validate that they did the right thing in speaking up, they are not in trouble, and they did not get anyone else in trouble (witnesses don't cause problems; they only observe them).

If a child is in the position of witnessing the sexual sin and then reports it, it is very likely they will feel responsible for the disruption in the family which ensues. They will need consistent reassurance that they did not cause the disruption. Ideally, this reassurance should come from both parents as well as the adult individual identified as supporter of the children.

Appendix C RECOMMENDED READINGS

This appendix contains resources believed to have high compatibility with the counseling theory and practice with the False Love study. Many other books were referenced in the False Love study which are not recommended here. These authors and books are respected for their experience in working with sexual sin and care for the people who struggle in this way, but in order to provide a concise, usable recommended reading list their differences were deemed significant enough to omit from this list.

***Unfaithful: Hope and Healing After Infidelity* by Gary and Mona Shriver:** Using their own story of recovery as compelling and relatable backdrop, the Shriver's have written an immensely valuable book for couples pursuing restoration after adultery (also valuable for couples recovering from emotional affairs or serial pornography usage).

***How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong* by Leslie Vernick:** While this book does not directly address sexual sin, it offers practical biblical guidance for one of the most perplexing questions in the midst of marital restoration.

***After Adultery (booklet)* by Robert Jones:** This booklet provides concise direction for both the offended and offending spouse in the time "after adultery" when it often feels least clear what can or should be done.

***Help! My Spouse Committed Adultery* by Winston Smith:** This booklet speaks directly to the offended spouse and provides biblical guidance and comfort in the midst of the painful experience of learning your spouse has been unfaithful.

***When His Secret Sin Breaks Your Heart* by Kathy Gallagher:** From her experience of leading Pure Life Ministries residential program for sexual addiction, Kathy provides letters she has written to the women whose husbands are bound in sexual sin. The letters do not provide any background on the people receiving the letters so it can be hard to apply or know the context for some of the advice given.

***Mending a Shattered Heart* edited by Stephanie Carnes:** A secular book that has to be read with discernment, it provides a background of experience and practical guidance in areas that Christian books are just beginning to address.

***Restoring the Fallen* by Earl & Sandy Wilson, et al:** Based upon the restoration of Earl and Sandy's marriage this book provides a model for high church involvement during the restoration of marriages that are in crisis.

***Choosing Forgiveness* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss:** After a spouse has sinned against God and you sexually, forgiveness is both necessary and difficult. This book provides solid biblical teaching and guidance on choosing to forgive.

***A Celebration of Sex* by Doug Rosenau:** The book is a general Christian resource for an enjoyable marital sex life, but it has useful chapters dedicated to restoring intimacy after adultery and after sexual addiction.

***The Emotionally Destructive Relationship* by Leslie Vernick:** Sexual sin can sometimes be an indicator of a much broader destructive pattern in marriage. If this is the case, then Vernick's book may be more important for you to read than one of these resources on recovering from your spouse's sexual sin.

***Putting Your Past in Its Place* by Stephen Viars:** After a spouse's sexual sin "the past" can be a difficult thing to deal with. This book provides the biblical categories and guidance to help you process this part of your experience.

***When People Are Big and God Is Small* by Edward T. Welch:** After a spouse's sexual sin insecurity is another area that is a common struggle. This book is an invaluable resource for understanding and overcoming insecurity within a biblical worldview.

Appendix D

Parenting Tips & Family Devotions

Parenting Tips Written by Caroline Von Helm and Brad Hambrick
Family Devotions Written by Jason Gaston and Matt Allison

Parenting Tips

No parent wants to think about their son or daughter beginning to experiment with their developing sexuality. This can be as innocent as asking their parents about changes in their bodies or about conversations they hear from friends. Or this experimentation can involve masturbation, pornography, "sexting" (sending pictures and provocative chat over the phone or internet), or intercourse with their boy/girl friend.

As parents of middle school and high school students, it is important to keep in mind that technology has opened up a world to your children that was never available to you. Our culture has desensitized us to sexual messages, images, and content. Prime time television makes "normal" experiences that should not be. So, it is the job of the parents to guard our homes and help teach what a godly "normal" is.

If as a parent you find that your middle school and high school student has engaged in some type of sexual experience, from pornography to sending pictures of themselves to intercourse it is important to keep a few things in mind.

- ❖ *Your initial response is key.* You do not want to under react, so that the impact is not understood, but over reacting can shut doors to good conversations and teachable moments. It is easier to think through your response if you find pornography on the computer history than if you walk in on your child viewing pornography, but your initial response sets the tone for future conversations. If it was reactive (i.e., angry, shaming, condescending, etc.), then you should repent to your child and seek to re-establish a healthy foundation for these conversations.
- ❖ *You will grieve as a result of what you find.* Your emotions will vary from anger to sadness. This is normal. As a parent our children can get stuck in our mind as children who are naive and too young to know about such things. Don't get caught in this pattern of thinking. God gave your children parents in order to walk with them through these aspects of physical and relational maturity.
- ❖ *Make sure you have someone to process your feelings with* about your child's experience. Some of these feelings you will share with them in a constructive way, but it is helpful to first process them with someone else, not your child.
- ❖ *The primary issue that you want to address is not the behavior.* The primary concern is the motivation (i.e., curiosity, insecurity, drive for acceptance, etc...) behind the behavior, the heart. Asking "why" questions, although instinctive, are usually not helpful. "Why" questions typically create a defensive atmosphere and insinuate that these types of experimentation are abnormal. You will lose credibility as a parent.
- ❖ *Begin the discussion with what you found, were told, or observed.* Give your child a chance to give his/her side of the story. If they are denying or not forthright (most are not at this point) stand firm in what you know but do not let anger or an argument to prove your point develop. End this conversation with a statement of the facts, your disappointment and concern, and a promise of another conversation soon.
- ❖ The kind of questions you want to ask (assuming their cooperation) are, "When did you learn about this (i.e., masturbation, pornography, sexting, etc...)? What made it seem appealing? How have you felt about it while you were doing it and then after?" It is best to save the "Who else is involved" questions to the end of the conversation. This is a common point of defensiveness and will shut down other parts of communication.
- ❖ Between the discussion about the revelation and the restrictions give at least 12 to 24 hours. Give your child time to think and process what you told them so far. They may approach you before this. If they do, stop and talk. Do not put them off. If either of you begin to get angry or emotional again, stop the conversation, take a break, and then resume when both are less emotional.
- ❖ When you sit down with your child again, review the facts of what you know and discuss why it is disappointing, unacceptable to God, not appropriate socially, and disrespectful of others and their own person. These may be several smaller conversations rather than one marathon, monologue talk. Restrictions should be discussed at the end. *Explain that the restrictions are there for protection not punishment.* Also explain your expectations regarding modesty, boundaries with the opposite sex, and what they view on the internet.

- ❖ Common boundaries to set would include: installing accountability software on computer and other technologies, removal of technology privileges for a time, restrictions on social activities related to the sexual experimentation, or changes to the acceptable types of dating activities.
- ❖ After you have set the new boundaries, this would be a good time to begin the devotionals included in this seminar and begin focusing on God’s desire for them, forgiveness they can receive and do receive when they repent, and what turning from sin looks like. If your child is open to receiving correction and instruction, this is when the more meaningful conversation about motives and change will typically begin.
- ❖ Common motivations are impulsivity, insecurity, humor, fear of rejection from peer group, boyfriend or girlfriend, or strong sexual desires.
- ❖ Once you feel you have identified the motive(s), begin to discuss what truths you feel they need to understand in order to combat these heart issues.
- ❖ If your child is unwilling to admit what has happened, continue to set the boundaries and expectations. You do not have to have “proof” that you are right to set boundaries. Boundaries can be placed for protection before anything happens.
- ❖ Once restrictions have been in place for a time period, and your child has showed changes in attitude and action, it is appropriate to give back freedoms. *Your goal is to teach your child what to do with freedom and responsibility so that when they are outside of your home they can live responsibly.* If all they have ever known is restriction then when they leave the shelter of your house they will not know what to do with the lack of restriction. You want your child to learn from their mistakes under your guidance and love, not on their own self-guidance. You want them to learn from you how to use technology, watch TV, look at movies, view the opposite sex, and learn about sex. So remain available to talk about these things and continue to initiate conversation at times when you are not responding to something they did wrong.
- ❖ When giving back freedoms, talk with your child again about what happened to put the restrictions in place, what changes you have seen that show you your child may be ready for more freedom, and review the expectations.
- ❖ Pray consistently that God would reveal sin, and allow you, as the parent, to know what is needed, and not allow your child to continue and be able to hide their sin. This may sound trivial, but prayer is an integral part in keeping your home pure. Remaining close to the Lord through prayer will give you insight and understanding that you will not achieve on your own.

Family Devotions

Step One

ADMIT I have a struggle I cannot overcome without God.

Devotion from Genesis 15:1-6 and 16:1-6. Start the conversation by asking your teenager what sin is? Yes, sin is “missing the mark,” “messaging up,” or “things you do that you are not supposed to,” but at its heart, sin is making yourself more important than God. It is choosing what you want regardless of what God says. Then ask, “What is sexual sin?” You might get examples like: adultery, pornography, or homosexuality, but could also be defined as “any way we entertain ourselves with sex – choosing what we want – instead of what God designed for sex.”

Read Genesis 15:1-6. Question: What did God promise Abram? Answer: God promised Abram that he would have a son. Question: How do we think God was going give Abram this son? Answer: Yep, through the gift of sex with his wife Sarai – that’s typically how this kind of thing works! So, in summation, God promised Abram a son, and sex with his wife Sarai was the way that God was going to fulfill that promise.

Read Genesis 16:1-6. Question: Did Abram and Sarai believe in God’s promise? Answer: Well, for a long time they did apparently. Eventually however, they decided they would take God’s good marital gift of sex and use it for what they wanted. Question: Do you think they knew Abram having sex with Sarai’s servant was wrong? Answer: Yeah, of course they did, just look at how Sarai responded in verse five!

So, what does this passage teach us about sexual sin? It teaches us that sexual sin is any time we use sex as a tool to get what we want (pleasure, power, respect, children), instead of believing and trusting in what God says about sex. God has given sex as a beautiful gift that is meant for celebrating the covenant relationship God has given us with our spouse. Make sure to emphasize that sex isn’t bad, or gross, but is incredible when understood and treated the way God treats it.

Devotion from John 3:18-20 and 12:45-47. Whenever we sin, our natural reaction is always to cover it up. Whether we are ashamed of what we’ve done, don’t want to face the consequences, or don’t want to be forced to stop, our natural inclination is to lie, hide, cover up, change the subject; anything but tell the truth.

Read John 3:18-20. Light is truth. Light is believing in the gospel. Question: Why does the passage say that people stay in darkness? Answer: Verse 19 tells us that it is because they love the darkness and verse 20 tells us that people don’t want their evil exposed.

But... if we want to stay in the darkness because we love our evil deeds, how could we ever get into the light? **Read John 12:45-47.** Question: How do we get into the light? Answer: Only by believing in Jesus and what He’s done for you.

Sexual sin thrives in an environment of secrecy, lies, and darkness. Believe in God’s plan for sex, and God’s plan for you because of how much we see He loves us in the gospel. Believe the gospel, come into the light and admit your sexual sin.

Step Two

ACKNOWLEDGE the breadth and impact of my sin.

Devotion from 2 Samuel 11:1. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said “Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that.” Just like darkness is the absence of light, sexual sin is sex, but without the covenant relationship and blessings that God designed to accompany it, and thus a curse.

In Step 1 we learned the importance to admit and acknowledge our sin, however this can’t just happen one time. Every day is a process of admitting and acknowledging if we want to remain in the light. The great hymnist Robert Robinson wrote these incredibly true words “prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.” Because of sin, our hearts are hard, and even when we’ve admitted this once, it doesn’t keep us from slipping back into darkness. This is why honesty and accountability are so important.

Read 2 Samuel 11:1. Most of us know the story of David and Bathsheba (if not read all of 2 Samuel 11), but a lot of times we skip over this verse. Question: Where was David? Answer: Jerusalem. Question: Where was David supposed to be? Answer: Battle with his troops, because it was the time of year that people went to battle. Question: Why? Answer: We don’t know, but what we do know is that David must not have allowed people in his life that could tell him that he wasn’t doing what he was supposed to.

Our hearts are prone to wander. Our hearts fade toward darkness if left alone. Who is in our life that we are honest with, that knows us, and that we have given the right to confront us and tell us we aren’t where we are supposed to be? Accountability is so important because it provides the light of the Gospel while darkness is lurking and looking for a way in.

Step Three

UNDERSTAND the origin, motive, and history of my sin.

Read Proverbs 5:1-8. People learn in many ways, but one of the most effective is through our own experiences and those of people close to us. In fact, as a parent, one of your primary responsibilities is to “bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). In what better way can we do this by sharing our own experiences, both good and bad?

In this passage a father imparts wisdom to his son, illuminating the inward struggles of his son’s sexual sin. Question: Where do you think the father gained this precious wisdom? Answer: From his own (and other’s) experiences of course. If that is so, what do you think is the best way to train up your child to understand sexual sin? That’s right, not being afraid to share with them how you’ve learned to understand your sexual sin, especially with regards to the “Motive(s) of My Sin” (i.e. boredom, loneliness, stress, frustration, fatigue, etc.). Note: This doesn’t mean going into graphic details, or sharing things that might hurt them if they knew, but it does mean to be real with them, which requires vulnerability.

For instance, here is an example conversation that you could have where you impart wisdom to your child struggling with sexual sin:

Hey son, I was reading through proverbs today and I came across something really interesting. [Read Proverbs 5:1-8] I think it was cool that Solomon talked with his son about important issues like sex and sexual sin. I know I haven’t been the best at leading out in conversations like this, but buddy I love you and just don’t to see you fall into the same sins and patterns that I did. Have you ever thought about why you struggle with ____? I know that for me, I was much more susceptible to falling into temptation when I was stressed out. I learned that was because I used sexual sin as my comforter instead of trusting in God to comfort me.

Everyone knows there is no such thing as a perfect parent, even your kids. Don't pretend to be one, because your kids don't need a perfect parent, they need a parent that needs Jesus just like they do.

Step Four

REPENT TO GOD for how my sin replaced and misrepresented Him.

Devotion from Psalm 51. We've all been to camp of some sorts right? Talk for a second about some of your favorite memories from one of your camps you went to growing up. Here's the reality: We've all been in a camp that's the same. It's the camp of sin. There's only one road out of that camp, and it's Jesus. Repentance is turning from that camp, and running to the better camp, the camp of Jesus.

Repentance is the core of a relationship with God in a world that is broken by sin. So what is repentance? Repentance is change in worship from self to God. When we worship anything but God, we sin. This is exactly what David goes through in Psalm 51; *authentic repentance*.

Take some time right now, as a family, to confess together where you are trusting in the love of things more than the love of God. Now repent as a family. Cling to the goodness of Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit's willingness to "Create a pure heart and renew a steadfast spirit within you!" (Ps. 51:10)

Step Five

CONFESS TO THOSE AFFECTED for harm done and seek to make amends.

Devotion from James 5:15-16. In the movie "Castaway," Tom Hanks is stranded on an island after a plane crash. He makes it "by himself" for a while, but then reality sets in; he's alone. He ends up finding a volleyball that he names *Wilson*. Wilson becomes his best friend. He talks to Wilson, laughs with Wilson, and confesses his hurt to Wilson. He needs Wilson's companionship. That's because it's the way that humanity is wired. We need one another.

James understands this. We need one another for companionship. We need one another for friendship. We need one another for accountability. We need one another for prayer and confession. We need one another for encouragement in our pursuit of the new camp, where Christ is located!

Ask your family who those people are in our lives. We have friends that help us, but who are they? Make sure you reinforce that you, as parents, are those people for one another. No man is an island.

Step Six

RESTRUCTURE MY LIFE to rely on God's grace and Word to transform my life.

Devotion from 2 Timothy 2:22. Using blocks of some sort (or find something you can build a tower with), take just a second and discuss how our life before Christ was about building a tower for our own desires, fulfillments, and pleasures. Now knock it over. Go ahead. Knock it down. That's exactly what happens when we give our life to Christ. That's what happens when we confess sin to Christ. Our kingdom collapses. But here's the good news, God gives us all the tools, and the builder to construct a new tower (life) with new passions, desires, and pleasures.

Our pursuit as believers, as Paul reminds Timothy, should be the desires of Christ. Our old pursuits were for self. A restructure of the heart and its affections is now in line for us as followers of Christ.

This means finding new friends to encourage you in your walk with Christ. This means giving up old habits and replacing them with healthy ones that lead us to Christ. Each step in the process is a new block being built in your life as a follower of Christ.

Step Seven

IMPLEMENT the new structure pervasively with humility and flexibility.

Devotion from 2 Timothy 3:14-17. Pull up a map online (or if you still have a map in the house, grab one of those!) and chose a destination. Ask your child to pick a destination, and then have them determine the best route to get there.

The destination we're all on is to be more like Christ. The reality is that this simply does not happen overnight. It's a process. It's a journey. And it needs a *map*. It needs direction.

We're the same way. We need a plan. We need a direction. We need a map. Spend some time with your child giving some plans, some direction, some steps you guys can begin to take as you seek to measure success in the journey in becoming

more like Christ and fleeing the sinful desires of our flesh. Celebrate the wins you’ve already encountered along the way (we replicate what we celebrate!).

Step Eight

PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me.

Devotion from Hebrews 12:1-2. Ever wonder how someone can run a marathon? Let’s face it. They didn’t just go outside one day and say “Hey! I think I’ll run 26 miles today!” It took time for their endurance to build up. It took time for their body to adjust to the distance. They may have gone outside and run a few sprints, but it’s nothing in comparison to 26 miles. Truth is, the same is true in our walk with Christ. It’s a marathon, not a sprint.

The writer of Hebrews understood this as well. We’re all running a race, and that is the race of life. The race isn’t over until we cross the finish line, where we’ll be with God forever. But the race is tough. There will be times when you want to quit. There will be times when it hurts. There will be times when your faith may be tested. Don’t quit. Fix your eyes on Jesus. He ran the race perfectly for us, and he’s not just waiting at the finish line for us, He’s intricately involved in helping us, growing our endurance, and giving us new desires along the way.

As a family, spend some time thanking Jesus for running that race perfectly. Ask that He would give you perseverance as you seek to run the race He marked out for us.

Step Nine

STEWARDSHIP all of my life for God’s glory.

Devotion from I Timothy 6:11-12. Ask your student what they would do if they found themselves to be surrounded by a pack of wolves, or even just a neighborhood full of mean dogs. Wait for them to explain that they would run away, that they would flee from the animals for their own safety. Press the point to ask them if which direction they would run and when they would stop running.

In the process of becoming more like Christ, there are two big steps. You are called as a Christian to *flee* the life that you have been rescued from, and to *follow* the example placed before us by Christ.

The first half of this new life is fleeing the things that have entangled us, but we cannot stop there. In fact, almost every time that the Bible tells us to flee sin, it also tells you to pursue righteousness simultaneously.

We are called to follow the example of Christ and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, etc... in order to glorify God with our lives. The process of managing this time that God has given us is called Stewardship, and being a good steward of the life that God has given us is one of the clearest ways for us to glorify him. If you continue to run without a definite direction, you’ll never reach anywhere on purpose.

““There is no neutral ground in the universe; every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counter-claimed by Satan” - C.S. Lewis in *Christianity and Culture*

Appendix E

What Do I Do Now?

A plumb line of the Summit counseling ministry is, “We don’t do events; we create resources.” That means you should be asking yourself, “What can or should I do with this information now?”

We have created a series of brief videos that answer that what-now question from several different perspectives. Each of these can be found at:

www.bradhambrick.com/whatnow

Personal Study or Small Group

Question: I’ve been to several of the Summit counseling seminars and notice there appears to be a couple of different kinds. You frequently recommend studying them as a small group or with a friend. That seems like a great idea, but since I haven’t done that before I’m not quite sure how to start something like that. Do you mind giving me guidance?

Pursue Personal Counseling

Question: After attending this seminar I realized I would like to pursue counseling to help me grow in this area. It sounded like there are several different options available. Would you mind explaining to me what those are and how I could connect with the one that best serves me need?

Leveraging My Workplace

Question: I’ve heard rumors that I’m supposed to be able to use the Summit counseling seminars to leverage my workplace for gospel influence. My first impression is that it sounds awkward and intrusive; like I’m telling people they’ve “got issues” or “need help.” But I’m also worried about putting up Christian material that might be offensive to some people who visit my workplace. But I would at least like to hear what you’ve got to say. How would this work?

As a Professional Counselor

Question: I’m a licensed counselor (LPC) and came across the Summit counseling seminars. I’m excited to see the church addressing these kinds of subjects, and I’m curious how you might see someone in my position (or a LCSW or LMFT) using the materials. I can see recommending them to my clients who are open to an overtly Christian aspect to their counseling, but it seems like there could be more uses than just counseling homework. Could you share your thoughts on how those in private practice might use these resources?

Our goal in Summit counseling is to (1) equip the church to care for one another and our community with excellence; (2) provide quality counseling services that allow our people to get involved in the lives of others with confidence – knowing additional, experienced care is available to come alongside them if needed; and (3) create ways for our members and other Christians in our community to leverage their workplace and careers for greater gospel impact in their spheres of influence.

We hope this seminar and these videos give you a vision for how this can happen and stirs a passion in you to be a part of God’s work of redeeming and restoring hurting individuals and families.

www.bradhambrick.com/truebetrayal