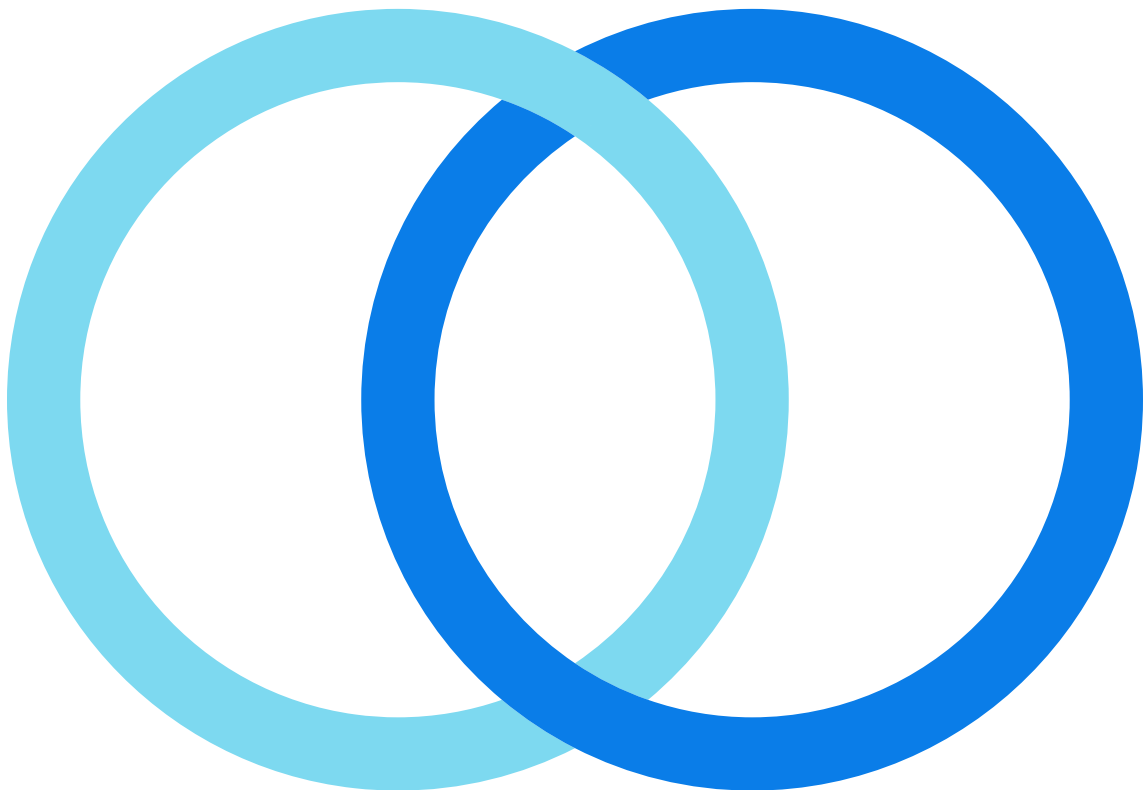


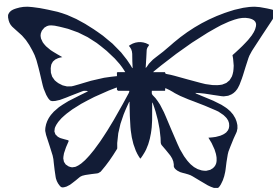
EQUIPPING THE COUNSELOR
VIDEO SERIES **STUDY GUIDE**

ABC  RES

Caring for Marriages

Jonathan D. Holmes





ASSOCIATION *of*
BIBLICAL COUNSELORS

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Session 1— Foundations of Marriage Counseling

Understanding Scripture's Storyline of Marriage

CREATION

Genesis 1:26-28: Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Genesis 2:18: Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

From these opening verses in Genesis, we discover several important principles for marriage:

1. Adam and Eve are created beings: Gen. 1:26
2. Adam and Eve are dependent beings: Gen. 1:26-27
3. Adam and Eve are gendered beings: Gen. 1:27¹
4. Adam and Eve are relational beings: Gen. 2:18-25
 - a. *Jennifer Wilkin:* Unless woman is made to help man, the mission of God does not move forward.²
5. Adam and Eve are sexual beings: Gen. 2:19-25

1 Herman Bavinck: God is the creator of the human being, and simultaneously also the Inaugurator of sex and of sexual difference. This difference did not result from sin; it existed from the very beginning, it has its basis in creation, it is a revelation of God's will and sovereignty, and is therefore wise and holy and good. Therefore, no one may misconstrue or despise this sexual difference, either within one's own identity or in that of another person. It has been willed by God and grounded in nature.

2 <https://twitter.com/juliermasson/status/1112725032902553600>

Genesis 2:19–25: Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.”

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

FALL

Genesis 3:8–13: And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

Immediately the effects of the Fall come into sharp focus:

- Relationship with God is fractured
- Relationship with self is damaged
- Relationship with each other is destroyed
- Relationship with creation is complicated: vss. 17-19

REDEMPTION

Genesis 3:15

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel!”

CONSUMMATION

Matthew 22:23–33: The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.' Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. So too the second and third, down to the seventh. After them all, the woman died. In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her!"

But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living." And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

Greg Lanier: For married Christians, there is also comfort in taking seriously "till death do us part." Marriage between one man and one woman is a beautiful gift of God, but it cannot bear the weight of serving as your ultimate end. Attempting to make it do so will lead to frustration, bitterness, and dissolution—or the idolatry of spouse- or child-worship. Such is the misstep of our age.³

Because we know marriage is not eternal, it teaches us something about how we value and treasure it. We live in marriage, but we don't live for marriage. Marriages point forward and prepare us for a greater reality.

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE	SECULAR MARRIAGE
Marriage is for God's glory	Marriage is about my personal happiness and fulfillment
Marriage struggles are rooted in our sinfulness and brokenness as human beings	My spouse is the problem
Marriages need Jesus Christ	Marriages need my spouse to be a better person
Marriage is not forever, but serves a purpose here on earth	Marriage is whatever you want it to be: temporary and therefore dispensable or permanent and therefore the most important thing in life

³ Greg Lanier, "Marriage is Built to End," April 5, 2018, The Gospel Coalition, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/marriage-built-to-end/>. Accessed 7 January 2019.

Four thoughts for application:

1. If you don't know what marriage is for, how do you know what to aim for in marriage counseling?
2. If you don't know what the core problem in marriage is, you'll always be looking for the fruit, and miss the roots.
3. If you don't know what makes marriages work, you'll be a servant to whatever works/pragmatic.
4. If you don't know that marriage isn't forever, you'll sink all your happiness and meaning into it.

What then is the goal of marriage counseling?

To help husbands and wives live lives that bring glory to God and build one another up in Christ, so that their marriage tells a compelling story of the Gospel.

SESSION 1 NOTES

Foundations of Marriage Counseling

Session 2— Setting Up Your Sessions

PRE-SESSION

- Take stock of your spiritual life. How are you doing? Are you counseling out of an abiding relationship with God?
- Remind yourself of your role
- Look over PDI thoroughly and carefully
- Be clear in your communication
- Lauren Whitman on awareness of the following realities:¹
 - Something hurts.
 - Pursuing counseling is not fun or easy.
 - I do not know this person.
 - I want the counselee to leave feeling hopeful and encouraged because something truly good has begun.
- *Lauren Whitman*: We do not invite people to enter into a preformulated program when they come to counseling. Instead, we want to respond to the actual needs on the ground. To do that, we must get to know this individual. We must reject our own tendencies to generalize and make assumptions about people.²

INITIAL SESSION

- *Randy Patten*: How you start a counseling case influences how you finish.³
- Handle the housekeeping items:
 - *Redeemer Counseling Services*: It is important to foster and maintain emotional safety in couples counseling, so from the very first session, it is a good idea to set ground rules. For example, one ground rule could be that each partner must listen to the other talk without interrupting, correcting or talking over each other. Then as part of setting the ground rules we can make it explicit that we as counselors may need to interrupt the conversation any time this behavior occurs to reestablish calm and safety in the room and facilitate a safe and productive discussion.

1 Lauren Whitman, *A Biblical Counseling Process: Guidance for the Beginning, Middle, and End*, (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021), 18.

2 Whitman, 8.

3 Bob Kellemen and Jeff Forrey, eds., *Scripture and Counseling: God's Word for Life in a Broken World*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 382.

- Build rapport and lay the groundwork for a relationship of trust
 - *Lauren Whitman*: Empathy is an outworking of love and it says, “I see you and that you are struggling. I am committed to not standing far off from you, just as Christ does not stand far from you. I will work hard to understand you, your experience, and your perspective because I want to know you.”⁴
 - Hear their story (practice active listening)
 - Ask good questions
 - *Mike Emlet*: The goal of hearing a patient’s story is not to assemble a list of details but to discern the medical plotline(s) that best explain and account for those details.⁵
 - *Edward T. Welch*: With more questions comes less empathy. It feels more like an interrogation than a conversation.⁶
- Leave them with a robust understanding of biblical hope
 - Do not neglect to leave them with biblical hope
- Be clear on what happens next

POST SESSION

- Logistics
- Reflection
- Proactive

SECOND SESSION AND BEYOND

Lauren Whitman: Reviewing notes are useful as I prepare for upcoming sessions. Reviewing notes is also a way to honor the investment the person is making by coming to counseling. People feel cared for as they see you have remembered details of what they shared with you. Remembering is a way to build trust because people see you stewarding what they previously shared with you.⁷

WHEN NOT TO DO MARRIAGE COUNSELING

- Abuse
- Addiction
- Adultery
- Apathy (severe)

4 Whitman, 13.

5 Michael R. Emlet, *CrossTalk: Where Life and Scripture Meet*, (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2009), 66.

6 Edward T. Welch, “Questions About Questions,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2-10.

7 Whitman, 32.

SESSION 2 NOTES

Setting Up Your Sessions

Session 3— Helping Couples with Communication

How do we begin to orient ourselves to the issue of communication in marriage?

Communication problems:

ARE THEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Paul David Tripp, War of Words: Words are powerful, important, significant. It was meant to be that way. When we speak, it must be with the realization that God has given our words significance. He has ordained for them to be important. Words were significant at Creation and at the Fall. They are significant to redemption. God has given words value.

ARE HEART PROBLEMS

ARE IDENTITY PROBLEMS

LEAD TO RELATIONAL PROBLEMS

Helping couples understand the role that expectations play in our communication:

1. Unsaid expectations become unmet expectations.
2. Unmet expectations quickly become pre-meditated resentments.

NURTURE

Family of origin: Understanding the kind of family each spouse came from is helpful (not determinative) in understanding their current expectations. Spouses come from a variety of traditions and backgrounds:¹

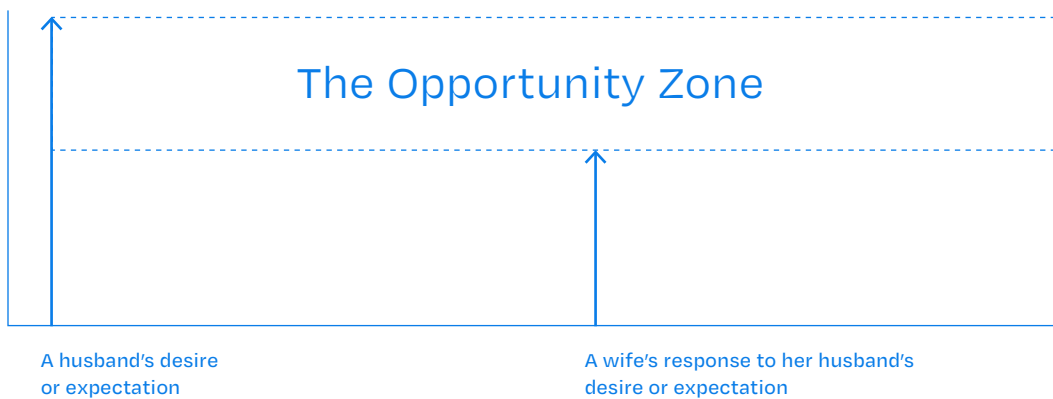
SPOUSE A	SPOUSE B
Small, nuclear family	Large, extended family
A family who was punctual	A family who ran late
Conflict heavy	Suppressed conflict
Dinner on the go	Dinner with the family
Clean, neat, and organized	Messy, chaotic, and disorganized
Father was a spiritual leader	Father was absent
Mother was submissive	Mother ran the home

¹ Brad Hambrick, "Mapping Out Your Marriage Story" <http://bradhambrick.com/marriagestory/>.

NATURE

Personality, disposition, preferences: It is also helpful to understand that each spouse has a unique personality and disposition which influences their desires and expectations. These personality traits are not issues of sin necessarily, but part of the way their humanity expresses itself:²

SPOUSE A	SPOUSE B
Introvert	Extrovert
Timely and punctual	Runs late
Adventurous and spontaneous	Safe and routine
Free spirited	Cautious
Spender	Saver
Optimistic	Pessimistic
Pets	No Pets
Beaches	Cities
Fiction	Non-Fiction
Action Movies	Rom-Coms



2 Brad Hambrick has a helpful worksheet to help couples assess these differences: "Celebrating Our Non-Moral Marital Differences", <http://bradhambrick.com/celebrating-non-moral-marital-differences/>.

Helping couples honor relational commitments:

TO COMMUNICATE ACCORDING TO BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

TO BE GOOD LISTENERS³

Lauren Whitman: Empathy is an outworking of love and it says, "I see you and that you are struggling. I am committed to not standing far off from you, just as Christ does not stand far from you. I will work hard to understand you, your experience, and your perspective because I want to know you."⁴

TO SAY SOMETHING GOOD ABOUT THE OTHER SPOUSE

- Redeemer Counseling Tools, "Cultivating a Culture of Appreciation in Marriage"
- Sam Crabtree, *Practicing Affirmation*

TO LOOK INWARD BEFORE LOOKING OUTWARD

³ Adam McHugh has a helpful article on "How to Be a Bad Listener" <https://www.quietrev.com/be-a-bad-listener/>.

⁴ Whitman, 13.

TO STAY AWAY FROM COMMUNICATION GRENADES

- Grenades of hate
 - Global grenades
 - Catastrophic grenades
 - Generalizing grenades
-
-
-
-

Lauren Whitman: Here is a universal rule for marriage counselors: don't allow couples to speak to each other in absolutes. We know that when couples use words like always, never, and only to describe each other's behavior or to express a complaint, it will not help to resolve their conflict. These words exaggerate and overgeneralize in a way that provokes a spouse to defensiveness. Instead of considering and talking about their spouse's concern, an accused spouse will be tempted to prove that they are not always guilty of this or that behavior.⁵

⁵ Lauren Whitman, "Speaking Truth in Marital Conflict," June 13, 2022, [CCEF.org, https://www.ccef.org/speaking-truth-in-marital-conflict/](https://www.ccef.org/speaking-truth-in-marital-conflict/). Accessed 15 February 2023.

SESSION 3 NOTES

Helping Couples with Communication

Session 4— Handling Conflict in Marriage

Understanding Conflict

THE PATHOLOGY OF INNER CONFLICT

In James 4:1-3, James reminds us that long before there is ever a war outside of yourselves, there is a war going on inside of yourselves.

[1] What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? [2] You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. [3] You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

THERE IS A WAR OUTSIDE BECAUSE THERE IS A WAR GOING ON INSIDE

James begins his diagnosis by taking us on an internal tour (eg. X-RAY) of what happens inside of us during conflict. He tells us that at the root of our broken relationships are unmet desires or expectations.

- You desire and do not have → so you murder
- You covet and cannot obtain → so you fight and quarrel
- You do not have → because you do not ask
- You ask → do not receive
- You ask wrongly → to spend it on your passions

Alec Motyer: James chooses the vocabulary of war to express controversies and quarrels, animosities and bad feeling among Christians, not because there is no other way of saying it, but because there is no other way of expressing the horror of it.

Addressing Conflict in Marriage

- Have a plan for addressing conflict in marriage
- Identify and know your default in conflict
- Identify the real problem
- Understand the role of expectations in marital conflict

- Pay attention to your posture, timing, and tone
 - What is your posture in conflict? How do you stand?
 - What's the timing of your conflict? When do you do conflict?
 - *Proverbs 15:23*: To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!
 - *Proverbs 25:11*: A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.
 - *Proverbs 25:20*: Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda.
 - *Proverbs 27:14*: Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing.
- How's your tone in conflict? How do you sound?
 - Proverbs 11:12: Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent.
 - Proverbs 12:18: There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.
 - Proverbs 16:21–24:

The wise of heart is called discerning,
and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.
Good sense is a fountain of life to him who has it,
but the instruction of fools is folly.
The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious
and adds persuasiveness to his lips.
Gracious words are like a honeycomb,
sweetness to the soul and health to the body.
- Describe not judge what is going on
- Practice soft startups vs. harsh startups
- Use an emotion wheel to help you articulate your feelings/emotions

Angry	Sad	Upset	Mis- understood	Unloved	Unheard	Defensive
Blamed	Cornered	Bullied	Taken advantage of	Controlled	Manipulated	Disliked
Unappreciated	Unaffirmed	Stupid	Ignored	Indifferent	Unsafe	Tense
Powerless	Stubborn	Exhausted	Hounded	Foolish	Overwhelmed	Tired
Shocked	Dismayed	Guilty	Embarrassed	Ashamed	Lonely	Alienated
Remorseful	Sorrowful	Abandoned	Rage	Discounted	Frustrated	Indignant

- Consider alternative possibilities (cf. Matt. 7:1; Ps. 19:12-13; Ps. 139:23-24)
 - I could be wrong and not know it.
 - I don't have all the information.
 - My tone could be miscommunicating my intent.
- Distinguish between compromise vs. consensus
- Look at your conflict, and see if you can notice any patterns
- Know that there's always hope in conflict (it's not a bad thing)

Lauren Whitman: Seeing the Spirit's work in our partner doesn't mean we ignore real issues or problems. Husbands and wives should speak about concerns in order to hold one another accountable and to invest in the health and growth of one another. But it does mean we expect to find ways God is showing up in our spouse's life. And that means we must speak in a way that reflects that reality.¹

¹ Lauren Whitman, "Speaking Truth in Marital Conflict," June 13, 2022, [CCEF.org, https://www.ccef.org/speaking-truth-in-marital-conflict/](https://www.ccef.org/speaking-truth-in-marital-conflict/). Accessed 15 February 2023.

SESSION 4 NOTES

Handling Conflict in Marriage

Session 5— Addressing Sexual Sin in Marriage

When pornography is initially discovered or disclosed, what do we do?

INITIAL PRIORITIES FOR THE STRUGGLER¹

Darby Strickland, *“How to Discern True Repentance When Serious Sin Has Occurred”*, *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 2020, 34:3, 30-47.

INITIAL PRIORITIES FOR THE STRUGGLER’S SPOUSE

Darby Strickland: The moment at which you discover your husband’s use of pornography, your world turns upside down. You feel shock, disgust, and despair. Your head spins. Many women fear approaching their husbands about their discovery or consider it wrong for a wife to confront her husband. Some women feel safer ignoring it. Others take the opposite approach and engage with anger, and their elevated response becomes the focus rather than their spouse’s sin.

1 Darby Strickland, *“How to Discern True Repentance When Serious Sin Has Occurred”*, *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 2020, 34:3, 30-47.

Cindy Beall: Encourage them to grieve. They have experienced a death. The death of a dream, a commitment, a trusting marriage. They are in immense pain and, honestly, the last thing they want to do is feel the pain. But they must. In order to heal through the paralyzing agony they are living in, they must grieve. They must ache, weep, and lament. Tell them this is part of the journey. If they try to go around the pain and ignore it altogether, it will be waiting for them on the other side. This is not fun but absolutely necessary.²

Navigating disclosure and confession

WHAT IS DISCLOSURE AND CONFESSION?

Disclosure: The revealing of evidence and facts regarding prior deception or secrecy in the marriage.³

- “Full disclosure” means that the addict volunteers the truth about his or her acting out. The addict shares the nature of the behavior, meaning the broad categories such as viewing pornography, engaging in other Internet sexual activity, patronizing strip clubs, masturbating compulsively, or crossing the flesh line by having affairs, one-night stands, anonymous sex, visiting prostitutes, etc. The addict should provide a timeline of the acting out and disclose financial and other consequences. The addict must also provide the identity of any acting out partners that the partner knows.⁴

Confession: Acknowledgement of personal wrongdoing, intentions, attitudes, motives, and heart issues that led to breaking trust in marriage.⁵

- *Alasdair Groves:* Confessing sexual sin is an act of love, an unequivocal declaration that you prioritize what is best for your life partner over what is comfortable for you. It is a gift that provides crucial information about what needs repair in the one relationship in which your spouse has invested their entire life. It opens a door to profound deepening in your marriage through repentance and forgiveness. It protects your spouse from walking in ignorance into the sudden shame, shock, and chaos that will come if your sin is suddenly exposed.⁶

2 Cindy Beal, “How to help the spouse who stays in marriage after an affair,” Care Leader, May 11, 2016. <https://www.careleader.org/help-spouse-stays-marriage-affair/>. Accessed 22 November 2017.

3 Ellen Dean, *Marriage Trust Builders: A Practical and Biblical Guide for Strengthening and Restoring Trust in Marriage*, (Bloomington, IN: West Bow Press, 2018), 40.

4 Bethesda Workshops, “Disclosure”, <https://www.bethesdaworkshops.org/for-professionals/disclosure/>. Accessed 15 March 2023.

5 Ellen Dean, *Marriage Trust Builders: A Practical and Biblical Guide for Strengthening and Restoring Trust in Marriage*, (Bloomington, IN: West Bow Press, 2018), 40.

6 J. Alasdair Groves, “What Should I Tell My Spouse About My Sexual Sin?”, *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 2022, 36:3, 40.

WHO SHOULD RECIEVE THE STRUGGLER'S CONFESSION AND DISCLOSURE?

HOW MUCH SHOULD BE CONFESSED AND DISCLOSED TO MY SPOUSE?

"Full disclosure does not mean telling graphic sexual details, which is often information the partner insists on. Specific details are rarely necessary and more often harmful. That kind of information feeds the partner's obsession and further erodes her sense of self."⁷

Ellen Dean: The hurting spouse, not the unfaithful spouse, needs to be the one who decides how much should be disclosed. Unfolding information and all that has transpired is a meticulous job and takes diligence. When facts begin to surface, the tendency is to gloss over some and get through the process as rapidly as possible.⁸

WHY SHOULD I DISCLOSE AND CONFESS TO MY SPOUSE?

Alasdair Groves: Your goal in what you do or don't say to your husband or wife about your sexual sin must be their good, not your comfort. It's not about protecting your image by putting a nice spin on things. Nor is it about soothing your conscience by pouring out every detail. It is about doing your best to tell them what they need to know. So, you must be willing to tell your spouse absolutely anything. Literally anything. There are no sins, secrets, or details you get to withhold from them because you "shouldn't have to tell them about that."⁹

7 Bethesda Workshops, "Disclosure", <https://www.bethesdaworkshops.org/for-professionals/disclosure/>. Accessed 15 March 2023.

8 Ellen Dean, *Marriage Trust Builders: A Practical and Biblical Guide for Strengthening and Restoring Trust in Marriage*, (Bloomington, IN: West Bow Press, 2018), 40

9 J. Alasdair Groves, "What Should I Tell My Spouse About My Sexual Sin?", *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 2022, 36:3, 43

Redeemer Counseling Services: Often the injured partner is compelled to know every detail of the infidelity. Honesty is important, however, anything that will cause undue hurt to the injured spouse, such as the minute details of the sexual activity may do more harm than good, since it can trigger additional flashbacks.

RESOURCES:

- *Dave Dunham*, [“What Not to Confess to Your Spouse”](#) [Blog post]
- *Dave Dunham*, [“How to Confess Temptation to Your Spouse”](#) [Blog post]
- *Alasdair Groves*, [“What Should I Tell My Spouse About My Sexual Sin?”](#) [Journal article]
- *Ed Welch*, [“Disclose or be exposed”](#) [Blog post]
- *David Powlison & Cecelia Bernhardt*, [“How specific should I be in confessing sin?”](#) [Podcast]

Questions to ask when sexual sin is disclosed/discovered

BIG PICTURE QUESTIONS

- Tell me about yourself. Help me get to know you.
- Tell me about how you came to faith?
- Give me an idea of your spiritual life? Involvement in your local church?
- Where else in your life do you struggle?

INITIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Okay, tell me what's going on. How long has this been going on?
- How did everything come out? (Discovered? Confession? Forced?)
- Be specific about the extent of your usage of pornography.
- What exactly are you involved in?¹⁰
 - Online chatrooms
 - 1-900/800 phone sex operators
 - Solicitation of people/prostitutes
 - Dating/hook-up apps
 - Strip clubs and massage parlors
 - Erotic fiction
 - Sexting
 - TV/cable-based pornography

¹⁰ One might hesitate to be this specific, but in my experience with both men and women, “pornography” as a category is much too broad of a term to use in counseling. Consider how viewing pornography online differs from soliciting random hook-ups on Craig’s List. I’ve had men and women confess to additional instances listed above with the caveat of, “Oh I thought you meant just online porn.” Also, the counselor/pastor needs to think carefully about the setting in which these questions are asked. Is the wife present? If so, how much detail should be shared?

- Print media (pornographic magazines)
- Other: Is there anything I have not mentioned which might fall into this category?
- Did the pornography involve minors?
 - *Darby Strickland:* In addition, possession of child pornography is a crime that must be reported. If you come across it, do not send images to yourself for proof. Find someone who can support you as you make this report—perhaps a knowledgeable pastor or trusted friend. The effects of child porn use are alarming, so you will need to think about protecting your own children. To report child pornography, visit www.cybertipline.com or call 1-800-843-5678.¹¹
- Tell me a little bit about your history with pornography.
- Were you involved physically with another person? If so, have you been checked for an STD? Have you been intimate with your spouse since then? If so, has he/she been checked and evaluated?
- Have you spoken to your spouse about this? (If they're not coming in together)

FOCUSED QUESTIONS TO ASK IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE INDIVIDUAL'S PORNOGRAPHY USE

- From your vantage point, how did we get here?
- Describe your interaction/engagement with pornography?
- When was the first time you were exposed to pornography?
- Take me through a situation where you're tempted and give in to looking at pornography? What happens?
- Have you noticed a particular cycle or pattern that you tend to follow?
- What kind of emotions and feelings do you experience post-interaction?
- Do you go through any "atonement-style" exercises?
- Tell me about guilt and shame. How do those factor into your story?
- Who else knows about this struggle?
- Do you have any sort of meaningful accountability?
- How have you tried before in the past to overcome this sin?
- What works, and what doesn't work?
- What advice or counsel have you received in the past regarding this struggle?

¹¹ Darby Strickland, "8 Steps to Prepare Before Confronting Your Husband's Use of Pornography", February 2, 2023, [CCEF.org](https://www.ccef.org), <https://www.ccef.org/8-steps-to-prepare-before-confronting-your-husbands-use-of-pornography/>. Accessed 15 March 2023.

HELPING THE WIFE (OR HUSBAND)¹²

- Don't forget there is another person who has been deeply impacted and affected in the discovery of sexual sin

- Consider their safety

- *Darby Strickland:* There is a correlation between pornography and domestic abuse, including sexual abuse. If you are a domestic abuse victim or feel yourself to be at risk, plan for your safety before confronting your spouse. Getting help for the abuse before you confront your spouse about his use of pornography might be best.¹³

- Never blame the spouse for their spouse's sexual sin

- Brad Hambrick, ["Will a Better Sex Life Keep Porn At Bay?"](#)
- Brad Hambrick, ["Initiating and Declining Sex In Marriage Need Not Be Awkward or Upsetting"](#)

¹² Separate counseling for the spouse is something I like to offer in cases where sexual sin has occurred. Often the issues being discussed with the offending spouse are graphic and sensitive in nature. Additionally, if the spouse who has been offended is the wife, a same-gender counselor can be a wise and helpful choice in marriage cases such as this.

¹³ Darby Strickland, "8 Steps to Prepare Before Confronting Your Husband's Use of Pornography", February 2, 2023, CCEF.org, <https://www.ccef.org/8-steps-to-prepare-before-confronting-your-husbands-use-of-pornography/>. Accessed 15 March 2023.

- Help them navigate their desire to “know everything”

- *Darby Strickland*: God does not want you to be a detective spying on your spouse. Simply ask God to reveal to you what you need to know. God hates sin and loves your spouse more than you do. Trust that he will bring important details into the light.¹⁴

- Help them know that sexual sin comes from the heart

- Understand what is within their control, and what is not.

- Rely and meditate on the promises of God
 - God sees everything (Proverbs 15:3)
 - God knows everything (Psalm 139:1-2)
 - God will bring all things to light in his timing (1 Corinthians 4:5)
 - God will hold every person accountable (Romans 14:12)

¹⁴ Darby Strickland, “8 Steps to Prepare Before Confronting Your Husband’s Use of Pornography”, February 2, 2023, CCEF.org, <https://www.ccef.org/8-steps-to-prepare-before-confronting-your-husbands-use-of-pornography/>. Accessed 15 March 2023.

- Understand what accountability can do and what it can't do
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- Alasdair Groves, ["Redeeming Accountability: When Sinners Walk Together"](#)
 - Brad Hambrick, ["5 Questions I Wish My Accountability Partner Would Ask Me"](#)
 - Brad Hambrick, ["7 Marks of Enduring Accountability Relationships"](#)
 - Deepak Reju & Jonathan Holmes, [*Rescue Skills: Essential Skills for Restoring the Sexually Broken*](#) (cf. ch. 7)
- Help them build a network of support and friendship
 - *Darby Strickland*: If talking about your husband's sin with another person feels like a betrayal or causes you shame, you do not have to share the details. Simply tell your friend or pastor that you are wrestling with a serious issue in your marriage and need prayer and support.¹⁵

¹⁵ Darby Strickland, "8 Steps to Prepare Before Confronting Your Husband's Use of Pornography", February 2, 2023, CCEF.org, <https://www.ccef.org/8-steps-to-prepare-before-confronting-your-husbands-use-of-pornography/>. Accessed 15 March 2023.

SESSION 5 NOTES

Addressing Sexual Sin in Marriage

Session 6— Understanding Forgiveness in Marriage

Paul Tripp: I cannot think of a more essential ingredient in marriage than forgiveness.¹

Tim Keller: Forgiveness is at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian.²

9 Common Myths About Forgiveness

1. I don't need to forgive to have a good marriage.
2. Forgiveness is something that only happens once.
3. Apologizing is the same thing as asking for forgiveness.³
4. Forgiving means forgetting.
5. I need to learn to forgive myself.

HB Charles: To claim that I have been forgiven by God but I cannot forgive myself betrays that I do not understand, believe, or appreciate the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a sinister attempt of the Enemy to get us to depend upon our own righteousness, rather than the grace of God.⁴

6. I do not need to forgive if they are not repentant.

Paul Tripp: Forgiveness is a vertical commitment that is followed by a horizontal transaction.⁵

7. Forgiveness is the same thing as reconciliation (establishment of trust)

1 Paul David Tripp, *What Did You Expect?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishers, 2010. 86.

2 Keller, 1.

3 For more on this topic, I'd recommend Robert Jones booklet, "I Just Can't Forgive Myself" (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000).

4 H.B. Charles, "How Can I Forgive Myself?", <https://www.hbcharlesjr.com/2017/07/17/how-can-i-forgive-myself/>. Accessed August 25, 2017.

5 Paul David Tripp, *What Did You Expect? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 92.

Tim Keller: Forgiveness means a willingness to try to reestablish trust, but that reestablishment is always a process.⁶

8. Forgiveness erases consequences.
9. Forgiveness is a feeling or should be easy.⁷

Tim Keller: Forgiveness, then, is granted before it is felt.⁸

Brad Hambrick: If we demand the benefits of forgiveness before we take the risk of forgiveness, we become trapped at the crucial point.⁹

Cultivating a Culture of Forgiveness

GOD'S FORGIVENESS IS BOTH OUR MOTIVE AND OUR MODEL [POWER & PLAN]

Timothy Keller: Both the power and the model for [forgiveness] is, of course, the gospel. Christ died for us while we were his enemies. That action is not only the paradigm for us, but the thought of it becomes our power to follow through.¹⁰

Every time a couple practices forgiveness they re-enact the gospel story. From the smallest and most seemingly inconsequential scenarios, every story of forgiveness is a chance to re-tell and embody a story of redemption.

Walter Wangerin Jr: When Christ is the single most solid reality upon which you stand; when in faith you find the source of your own life in him; when you yourself do dwell within his loving mercy and his forgiveness, then you are empowered to forgive your spouse, infinitely. Christ is the well from which to draw the water for your thirsty wife or husband. But this must be remembered: only as you know Jesus' limitless forgiveness for you are you able limitlessly to share forgiveness with your spouse.

KNOW THAT FORGIVENESS IS COSTLY

Brad Hambrick: Similarly, forgiveness is a God-sized action that when written into our life pushes at the edges of our humanity to such a degree that it is sometimes deathly painful.¹¹

6 Timothy Keller, "Serving Each Other Through Forgiveness and Reconciliation", Redeemer City to City, 4. In fact, the reestablishment of trust to quickly can often enable the other person to continue to sin against the spouse.

7 Adams notes in general that, "All day long, in order to be responsible to God and others, I must do many things against my feelings." (Adams, 23)

8 Keller, 2.

9 Brad Hambrick, "Emotions and Forgiveness", February 22, 2013. <http://bradhambrick.com/emotions-and-forgiveness/>. Accessed August 25, 2017.

10 Keller, Romans for You, New Relationship: Friends and Enemies, 215.

11 <http://bradhambrick.com/lewisoforgiveness-2/>.

MAKE A PLAN

- Read and meditate on Scripture
 - Psalm 139:23-24
 - Psalm 32
 - Psalm 51
 - Matthew 5:21-26
 - Matthew 18:15-35
 - Ephesians 4:17-32
 - Hebrews 10:1-18
 - James 4:7-10

- Read Tim Keller article, ["Serving Each Other Through Forgiveness and Reconciliation"](#)
- Set a time for the conversation
- Make two lists:
- Structure for the actual conversation:
- Commit to the 4 Promises of Forgiveness¹²
 - a. "I will not dwell on this incident."
 - b. "I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you."
 - c. "I will not talk to others about this incident."
 - d. "I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship"

J.C. Ryle: Do we know what it is to be of a forgiving spirit? Can we look over the injuries that we receive from time to time in this evil world? Can we pass over a transgression and pardon an offence? If not, where is our Christianity? If not, why should we wonder that our souls do not prosper? Let us resolve to amend our ways in this matter. Let us determine by God's grace to forgive, even as we hope to be forgiven. This is the nearest approach we can make to the mind of Christ Jesus. This is the character which is most suitable to a poor sinful child of Adam. God's free forgiveness of sins is our highest privilege in this world. God's free forgiveness will be our only title to eternal life in the world to come. Then let us be forgiving during the few years that we are here upon earth.¹³

¹² Peacemaker Ministries has excellent resources and tools on their website for issues related to conflict resolution and forgiveness. Four Promises of Forgiveness, <http://peacemaker.net/project/four-promises-of-forgiveness/>. Accessed August 27, 2017

¹³ J.C. Ryle, Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospel, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2012), 189.

SESSION 6 NOTES

Understanding Forgiveness in Marriage

Session 7A— Rebuilding Trust in Marriage

- Remind yourself of God's trustworthiness

- Define trust—spectrum
 - *Brad Hambrick: "Trust as a Proportional Virtue"*
 - *Brad Hambrick: It is good (i.e., wise) to trust someone in proportion to their trustworthiness. It is foolish or naïve to trust someone more than they are trustworthy. It does not represent Christ well to that person and gives them a falsely positive assessment of their life choices. When we treat the virtue of trust (proportional) like the virtue of honesty (absolute), we rush restoration.¹*
- Trust is the result of trustworthy actions.

- *Josh Squires: "...trust is built when we observe actions that let us know another person is for me, even when it costs them. Notice the two components to that description: one person doing; the other person recognizing. Both are equally necessary to build or rebuild trust. Conversely, when they are lacking, mistrust begins to build."*

¹ Brad Hambrick, "Trust as a Proportional Virtue," April 23, 2020, [bradhambrick.com](http://bradhambrick.com/forgiveness13/), <http://bradhambrick.com/forgiveness13/>. Accessed 21 February 2021.

- Questions to consider when seeking to rebuild trust
 - What is the story I'm telling myself?
 - Is my mistrust coming from something that is actually happening in the present, or is it related to my past?
 - Am I doing my best to practice Christian love and truth in this relationship?
 - Will I be easily offended and hard to please, or easily pleased and hard to offend?
 - Narrative gap illustration

DIAGRAM 1: HUSBAND'S PERSPECTIVE

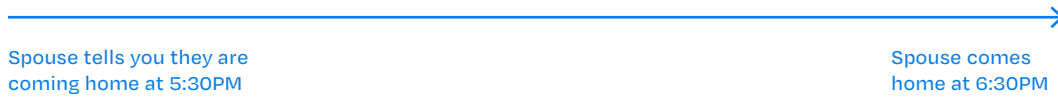
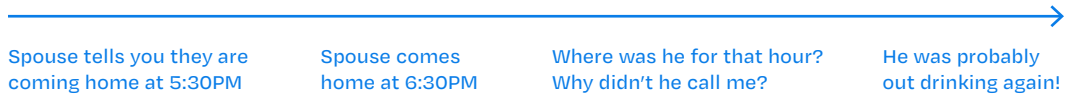


DIAGRAM 2: WIFE'S PERSPECTIVE



- Terry Gaspard: "What To Do When You Don't Trust Each Other"
- Practice non-defensive listening:

SESSION 7A NOTES

Rebuilding Trust in Marriage

Session 7B— Practicing Attunement in Marriage

ATTUNE model¹

AWARENESS

TURNING TOWARD

TOLERANCE OF NEGATIVE EMOTION

Brad Hambrick, "Growing in Negative Emotional Tolerance"

1 <https://fooksmichnya.associates/attune-6-steps-to-building-a-great-relationship/>.

UNDERSTANDING

NON-DEFENSIVE RESPONSES

EMPATHY

SESSION 7B NOTES

Practicing Attunement in Marriage

Session 7C— Addressing Adultery in Marriage

Gary Shriver, co-author of *Unfaithful: Hope and Healing After Adultery*, explains his descent into the storm of adultery,

I never really thought I was a prime candidate for adultery. I was committed to our marriage, and I didn't think I was what you would call "high risk." So how did I get here? The best description I ever heard was "baby steps." I let myself get into an intimate friendship with another female.¹

Initial Steps in Counseling

THE AFFAIR MUST END

- No meeting up of any kind.²
- No electronic communication of any kind including texting, calling, emailing, online chatrooms, Facebook Messenger, or any other social media.³
- No third-party communication. Occasionally, some will continue to work around accountability measures put in place by communicating through a co-worker or friend.
- No contact that does not get disclosed to your spouse immediately, i.e. you randomly see or run into the person at a restaurant, a store or a local place of business. When this happens, it is best to be upfront with your spouse and let them know regardless of whether or not there was communication or

1 Gary and Mona Shriver, *Unfaithful: Hope and Healing After Adultery*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook Publishing, 2009), 45.

2 In cases where there are work entanglements between the two parties, I do not remove finding a new place to work off the table. When Jesus speaks of radically dealing with your sin in Matthew 5:29-30, I believe this is one of the practical ways this verse can be put into action. If you work closely with the person you were having an affair with it will continue to put you in the path of temptation on a daily basis. Part of the repentance process entails doing whatever is necessary to live in a way that pleases God (cf. 2 Cor. 7:10-11).

3 "Although I am a fledgling therapist, it has been remarkable to me that every case of married infidelity I have seen has involved some form of indiscretion committed on a phone. I have even spent whole (paid!) sessions helping couples learn how to manage their phones. Called "remote infidelity," this new kind of cheating is wildly popular and, according to some polls, is on the rise.¹ The list of offenses I have seen run the gamut from straight-up pornography usage to phone sex or text message flirting. The discovery of such sins by the offended party is often traumatic and shrouded in deceit and confusion. Although much remote infidelity never actually leads to physical infidelity, the damage that it tends to do is comparable." (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/10/03/back-up-husbands-emotional-affairs-and-the-rise-of-digital-infidelity/?utm_term=.3749aca79f13)

recognition on the part of the other person.

- Getting rid of any gifts, cards, clothing, jewelry, mementos that the other person gave to you.
- There are several helpful resources online which can help you navigate this initial step.⁴

EACH SPOUSE NEEDS TO GET CHECKED FOR STDs

UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DISCLOSURES AND CONFESSION/REPENTANCE

As it relates to adultery, there are additional factors which need to be included during the disclosure and confession phase:

- A basic timeline of the affair (when did it start, duration, when/how did it end),
- who was involved,⁵
- what methods were involved to keep the affair hidden,
- were gifts exchanged, and
- a summary of what happened.⁶

Tim Lane: In conjunction with severing the relationship with the other person, the spouse who has committed adultery must confess what he or she has done. This needs to be done without excuses or justification. Even if the marriage needs work, it

4 Tim Lane: (<https://timlane.org/blog/immediate-actions-to-end-an-affair>); Brad Hambrick (<http://bradhambrick.com/how-to-end-an-extra-marital-relationship-2/>)

5 Most of the time affairs are kept secret and hidden, but on some occasions, others are aware and perhaps even facilitating the infidelity. This needs to be disclosed during the time of confession. A general principle I find helpful in marriage counseling is that you never want someone outside your marriage to have more information about your relationship than your spouse.

6 Alasdair Groves, <https://www.ccef.org/shop/product/what-should-i-tell-my-spouse-about-my-sexual-sin>. David Powlison & Cecelia Bernhardt, <https://www.ccef.org/resources/podcast/how-specific-should-i-be-confessing-sin>.

is unhelpful and unwise to bring up broader issues in this context of confession. If so, it will appear to the spouse who has been betrayed that they somehow are responsible for the affair. When making a confession, it is important to own the sin, tell the spouse that it was wrong and ask them for forgiveness.⁷

DO NOT MAKE ANY BIG DECISIONS IN THE AFTERMATH

Tim Lane: Rebuilding a relationship after infidelity is not easy, but neither is dissolving one, particularly if there are children involved. Regardless of the choice to leave or stay, it is wise to discourage a quick decision when emotions are running high.⁸

HELP THEM WRITE A NEW STORY

PLAN FOR ONGOING TEMPTATION AND BATTLES

Gary and Mona Shriver: You have to admit your vulnerability before you can recognize the need for protective measures.⁹

7 Tim Lane, "Immediate Actions to End An Affair", October 31, 2013. <http://timlane.org/blog/immediate-actions-to-end-an-affair>. Accessed 17 October 2017.

8 Tim Lane, "Adultery: Divorce or Rebuild?", October 29, 2013. <http://timlane.org/blog/adultery-divorce-or-rebuild>. Accessed 17 October 2017.

9 Shriver, 201.

Conclusion

Andreas Köstenberger: Marriage and family are not exempt from the cosmic conflict that is raging between God and his angels on the one hand and Satan and his demons on the other. Because marriage and the family are not merely human conventions or cultural customs but divine institutions, it should be expected that Satan, who seeks to rob God of his glory would attack them. For this reason, too, we must treat marriage and the family not merely in the content of the current cultural crisis but also within the framework of the perennial cosmic conflict that requires a spiritual perspective and skilled engagement of the enemy in spiritual warfare.¹⁰

¹⁰ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, 2nd ed., (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 156. Köstenberger goes on to note that to his knowledge there is not a current volume, resource or book that address the topic of marriage in the context of spiritual warfare. As a result he offers the most robust treatment of the topic I have found on pages 156-165.

SESSION 7C NOTES

Addressing Adultery in Marriage

Resources



BOOKS & RESOURCES

The Company We Keep: In Search of Biblical Friendship

Cruciform Press, 2014

Counsel for Couples: A Biblical and Practical Guide for Marriage Counseling

Zondervan, 2019

Rescue Plan: Charting a Course for Prisoners of Pornography

P&R Publishing, 2021

Rescue Skills: Essential Skills for Restoring the Sexually Broken

P&R Publishing, 2021

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