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Restoring Your Broken Marriage

Healing after Adultery

Robert D. Jones



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You probably picked up this booklet because adultery has jolted your marriage or the marriage of a family member or friend. You knew these things happened to others; you just never expected them to happen to you.

Let me assure you that you are not alone. Infidelity is more common than you might imagine. Be it an illicit kiss or full sexual union, even Christians have violated their vows to forsake all others and cling only to their spouse.

Maybe you're the offended partner.¹ You've felt many of the common responses:

- Anger: "I hate my spouse for what he did." Or "I despise the woman he slept with."
- Despair, hopelessness: "I'll never get over this. My life is over."
- Fear: "What's going to happen next? What do I do now?"
- Jealousy: "I can't believe he picked her over me."
- Regret, guilt: "I know I've failed; I drove him into her arms."
- Relief: "I suspected it; I'm glad it's out. We've been living a lie too long."
- Revenge: "I'll get him for this. I'll hire the best attorney...."
- Embarrassment, shame: "How can I face my family? What will my church say?"

Or maybe you're the offender, and you're having your own struggles (with little permission to feel or express them):

- Guilt: "I have sinned; I really blew it this time."
- Anger: "If she had been a better wife, this wouldn't have happened." Or "I can't believe my buddy told on me."
- Fear: "What will my wife do to me? Will she forgive me, or is this the end? What will my church and family do?"
- Despair, suicide: "I see no way out. My life is over. I may as well end it."
- Relief: "Deep down I'm glad I got caught. I've been living a lie. Now it's over."
- Embarrassment, shame: "How will I face anyone ever again? I need to move away."

Did you notice the overlap in the two lists? Crises like this reveal the core struggles in every human heart. At the end of the day, every one of us—offender, offended, or caring helper—needs the same Redeemer to minister to our particular battles.

The Starting Point: The God of Hope

Where do we begin to deal biblically with this marital crisis?

Ask God to help you believe his promises. No matter how well you know your Bible, in the coming days you will need fresh servings of daily bread. Don't rest on past grace. Believe that God wants to meet you now in new ways.

We don't know whether the writer of Psalm 46 envisioned an actual earthquake, an enemy invasion, or some other tragedy. But his imagery captures the devastation many spouses feel when they discover their partner's unfaithfulness:

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. (vv.1–3)

This was Lisa's experience.² "I fell apart when I found out what Tim had done. The bottom of my life suddenly dropped out, and I was free-falling into the darkness." Max put it more starkly: "Sara was my life. And now my life is over."

What is our hope? God has spoken: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (v. 1). God's presence and power are yours in the midst of adultery's wreckage. He is right there, smack in the middle of

your life, to help you (v. 5). Twice the psalm bursts forth with hope and assurance: “The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress” (vv. 7, 11). He is present. He is powerful. He cares.

In Genesis 50 Joseph, a victim of multiple betrayals, grasped God’s hope as he declared to his offenders, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good...” (50:20). The apostle Paul assures suffering Christians that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him,” a good he defines as making us like Jesus Christ (Romans 8:28–29).

Whatever the action or intention of an unfaithful spouse, God has a life-changing agenda for you, a positive, redemptive purpose in this situation.

What if you are the adulterer? Is there hope for you? Hosea’s marriage in Hosea 1—3 is an adulterous union that was restored by grace. As the observant reader learns, Hosea’s unfaithful partner is a picture of our own spiritual infidelity against our husband, Jesus Christ. The Bible abounds with promises of God’s forgiveness.³

More than this, the God who forgives can also restore. Listen to his promise to those he exiled into a foreign land because of their sin: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11; see also Joel 2:12–13, 25). God

offers prosperity, safety, hope, and a future to a once-unfaithful people.

In other words, you have a *Redeemer*. God promises you hope and help in Jesus to rebuild your life. He loves *you* and has a glorious plan for *your* life, even if your spouse never forsakes his infidelity or never forgives yours.

Commit yourself to pleasing God by believing and following Jesus, regardless of your spouse's commitments. The challenge is simple yet piercing: Whether you are the offender or the offended, do you want to follow Jesus more than anything, even more than restoring your marriage? Is God your highest aim?

I don't pretend that faith and obedience are easy for you right now, especially if your spouse is not seeking to please God. If your spouse doesn't seem to follow Jesus, or not in the proper way with the proper pace or passion, you will be tempted to give up your own pursuit of Jesus. "If he is not going to work on it, or even go with me to a counselor, what's the use of even trying? Why should I be the only one to try?"

Or worse, you may become proud and self-righteous. "I may not be perfect, but at least I'm willing to work on it, which is more than I can say about him." Even the offender is in danger here: "Yeah, I messed up, but at least I am the one [read, the superior one] willing to work on things."

God's answer, whether you are the offender or the offended, is that you should believe and follow Jesus right now, because he is worthy, without such subtle bargaining with God. The Christian recognizes that "Christ's love compels us...that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Corinthians 5:14–15). You can't make your faith and obedience conditional on your partner's response. Do it in response to the compelling love of the One who died and rose for you.

Here's how I explain it in an opening counseling session:

If you [looking at the offended wife] seek to believe and follow Jesus according to the biblical counsel I give you, I can guarantee that you will become a more godly woman, wife, and (if she has children) mom. But I can guarantee you *nothing* about your marriage.

If you [turning to the offending husband] seek to believe and follow Jesus according to the biblical counsel I give you, I can guarantee that you will become a more godly man, husband, and (if he has children) dad. But I can guarantee you *nothing* about your marriage.

But if *both* of you [turning to both partners] seek to follow Christ, I *can* guarantee something about your marriage, that you two together will have a godly, growing, fulfilling marriage.

Do you believe that? Jesus can not only restore your marriage but also make it stronger than it was before. We don't want to merely revert to the pre-infidelity state of your marriage. In Christ, God provides something better.

Here's why: our God delights in making broken things better than they were. Like a severed steel joint made strong by the welding process, the Redeemer can weld your severed marriage into something sturdy. The lives of many "welded" couples attest to this. The God of new birth, new life, and new beginnings offers something more than restoration; he offers transformation.

Recognize common enemies of the welding process:

- Competing counsel from friends and family. Expect to hear advice. Assume their motives are good; don't assume their advice is biblical.
- Gossip. Be careful with whom you discuss the infidelity. Go first to your pastor or a biblical counselor to get counsel on who needs to know and what you should say.

- **Rash decisions.** Seek biblical counsel right away—before you move out, visit an attorney, or confront your spouse’s “lover.” A hasty decision may complicate the problem, hinder any restoration efforts, and bring later regrets.
- **Despair, cynicism.** It’s easy to give up or to conclude, “Rebuilding the marriage may be an option for others but not for us.” Beware of the unbelief and the sinister arrogance that views your situation as somehow beyond God’s mighty grace.