After The Affair: Is There Any Hope?

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How Far Should I Compromise?

The Challenge of Confronting Narcissism and Selfishness

How to Change Your Marriage

What Do I Need to Change? : Priorities

Trying to Get Your Spouse Back

Timing On Getting Them Back

Avoiding the Divorce Option

The Wrong Questions

What's So Bad About Adultery?

Is It Too Late

Hurt People Hurt People
Introduction

It still tears me up emotionally when a tearful spouse comes up to me when their marriage is in crisis and in a broken voice asks, “Is there any hope?” Even after years of counseling experience the question does not get any easier to answer. When I was younger, I often wanted to give those of you asking such questions hope and encouragement. I have seen some ‘hopeless’ situations turn around, and I have also seen some marriages that had great potential crash and burn.

This book addresses the question of “Is there any hope?” with direction as to what you can do to start making changes in your marriage. Although I could try to give you encouragement in dealing with your situation, the kind of hope you need is the kind of hope that you create by making changes in your marriage. When you create hope through changes in your action and attitude, then you have something that no outside person can provide. This is the kind of hope that can make a difference. So rather than me give you false hope or discourage you, the best option for you may be to create hope in your own marriage.

The direction and instruction will give you a place to start. Rather than wandering around lost as to what can be done or where to start, you can have direction. Change that makes a difference often begins with you. Your marriage may need many more changes, depending on what led up to the affair. This volume will give you a place to start. It is designed for you spouses who want to make changes, but are unsure as to where you can start. You know that your marriage needs help but need a place to begin.
Is There Any Hope?

You may have waited until the damage done to your marriage is massive before deciding to work your relationship. After the spirit of oneness and tenderness is destroyed, you wonder if you can ever get that back, wondering if you can return to earlier days in your relationship. You may even find yourself saying “I want things the way they were”. Yet, while longing for the earlier days of your marriage relationship, you delay doing anything to improve your relationship until the pain increases to a level you can no longer tolerate. There are many reasons and excuses for delaying. At this point, it is more important to take action, rather than look for explanations or make excuses. Excuses are not going to improve your marriage. Blaming will not improve the relationship either. No matter how in the wrong or sinful the cheater is, piling on more blame is not going to make it better.

When you wait until the pain becomes unbearable, the problems facing you will be large and feel insurmountable. At that point, you will feel the pain plus the whole sense of being overwhelmed.

The time when you need to take action is when there is distance in the relationship, not when the pain becomes unbearable. The choice of using pain as their barometer of action rather than the emotional distance in their relationship is often a fatal one. It is important in responding to the issues to act when your spouse pulls away rather than after people take action like an affair to make that distance permanent. The longer there is distance between the two of you, the greater the likelihood that it will become permanent. Since we often have a way of adjusting to changes in our lives, you and your spouse may have made so many adjustments that distance is now ‘normal’ for your marriage.

Typically when you ask "Is there any hope?", you probably have waited until the pain is intense and unbearable. The level of pain finally reached the level where you ask for help from someone outside of your marriage. If you are like most of those asking that question, you are wanting a magic cure that will 'zap' your marriage back to the earlier days. Deciding to wait until the pain became unbearable is part of the problem that got your marriage where it is at. Rather than asking such questions, you need to be at work correcting how you relate to your spouse. You will need to change your behavior and your attitude. It is best to start with changing you and your behavior towards your spouse, since changing your attitude will take longer and require more from you.
How Far Should I Compromise?

You want to meet the cheater half-way and try to work with them, but how far should you go? Can you welcome the lover into your home and give them a hug? Can you be okay with the lover attending the office Christmas party or your child’s school play? Accepting and accommodating the lover is never a good compromise. Wanting your spouse back and having them commit to an exclusive and exclusionary relationship where there is only you and them is not asking too much. Wanting the exclusionary relationship where there is no room for any lovers or love interests outside of each other is the starting point. You need to have a committed one man-one woman relationship. Anything else is a freak of nature. Like a two headed cat or calf with six legs, when you make accommodations of additional lovers you are creating monstrous freaks. In your attempt to compromise, you become a Dr. Frankenstein. The problem with creating a monster is that you are limited to either being a caretaker of the monster or being eaten by the monster. You become nothing more than a plaything for the freak.

So what would be a compromise? Compromise may be you agreeing to call the lover by name rather than considering them a non-person or “the dirty whore/whore monger”. That kind of compromise will help your talks be more productive rather than character assassination sessions. It will allow the two of you to talk about your relationship rather than either attacking and defending the reputation of the lover, or arguing over what constitutes sex.

A way you can remember the danger of compromising in this area is to pronounce the word Ak-commode-dating. When you look at the situation, you will have a reaction of “Ack!” as in something repulsive like you would find in a commode. When you accommodate the cheater, you end up staying in the commode situation, while they continue dating. So when you are tempted to accommodate, remember that you are really “Ack-commode-dating”.

There is room for compromise, there is NO room for accommodation when it comes to recovering your marriage. Since compromises often occur within the context of conflicts, there are some issues you will need to be aware of. When you are in ‘conflict mode’ with the cheater, there will come a time that you need to set boundaries. When you set a boundary, you need to stick by it. Waffling on setting boundaries is one of the ways that you may find yourself compromising.

If you set boundaries that you are not willing to back up, you will come across as making threats that you do not intend to follow through on. It sends the message that you do not mean what you say, and that they can ignore you and your boundaries. Setting no boundaries is often interpreted as you giving passive approval of what the cheater is doing. Doing nothing is a sure way to make sure that you get more of what you have been getting.

There are many areas and ways to set boundaries. You can set limits on giving them until a certain point in time (e.g. a date on the calendar), a certain behavior (e.g. when you do
this, it is over), or an attitude. Once the limit is set, the cheater will often test it. At that point you will be faced with the challenge of whether you are willing to follow through on what you said.

Cheaters need consistency and dependability. When you waffle on your limits, you are not being dependable. For that reason, you need to be careful what your consequence to breaking the limit is. If you threaten divorce, that is often your big gun and after it is used, you have no further options. With that in mind, you may need to use other consequences, such as “changing the locks, removing them from your will, cutting them off from bank accounts, etc.” before you resort to the divorce threat.

When in conflict mode, you will also need to give up on the idea that “If I choose my words right, they will understand”. When the cheater is deep into the affair, they will not respond to well-chosen words. When they are deep into the affair, they only understand pain. Pain makes things real and is needed to wake them up to reality. The reality of pain is one of the reasons that you need to follow through on limits. They often live in a reality where limits are made to be tested and are always changing. When they are living in that reality, you become one person who does not change, who does not morph into accommodating their whims. They are used to a lover who bends to their whims. If you bend in that manner as well, then their whole world and your whole world becomes one fluid, wild merry-go-round.

Cheaters are often smooth talkers. They often know what to say in order to get into someone’s pants and into their heart. When you are married to them, it is hard to tell when they are giving you a line and when they are sincere. Since they often know what to say, they make repentance sound heart felt, when their heart was not in it. You may have even been burned by their repentance. So how can you know if the cheater is truly repentant?

The five signs of being truly repentant that I look for include the following:

1. **Look at their actions.** Have they taken steps to show change or is it limited to talking?

2. **Genuine repentance includes a willingness to make things right.** Is the cheater willing to make things right?

3. **Genuine repentance also includes an admission that what they did was wrong.** This includes accepting responsibility for what they did without deflecting matters by blaming you. Blaming is often indicative of them not assuming responsibility for their choices and actions.

4. **Listen to your gut.** Your gut will alert to when things just don’t feel right. You gut is also more important than your heart during this time. Your heart can be easily tricked. Although it sounds romantic to ‘follow your heart’, that kind of thinking started the affair in the first place.
5. **Genuine repentance acknowledges your pain along with their actions.** They recognize the cause and effect of how what they did impacted you.

When these five things are not present, you are likely looking at a cheater weaseling out of things rather than being truly repentant.
The Challenge of Confronting Narcissism and Selfishness

Those of you who live with narcissists are familiar with the challenges of confronting them. Sure, it is easy to complain, bring something to their attention or tell them what they are doing is wrong, yet getting them to listen and accept what you said is tough. They often take confrontations personally. Since narcissists get so wrapped up with their lovers, anything you say about the lover will be taken as a personal attack on them. When they feel attacked on a personal level, they attack back on a personal level. The narcissists have a way with words where they leave you feeling wounded after any attempt to confront them. They can turn a simple confrontation into a major blow-up. Part of the reason for that is how they are so connected with the lover. In their mind, they and the lover are one. You may even hear them use terms like ‘we’ and ‘us’ when discussing the lover. The use of such terms is a clear indicator of the bonding that has taken place. Since a threefold cord is not quickly broken, the narcissist find strength in their bonding with the lover, even if it is only in their own minds. They draw strength from that bonding. They believe that they are a team, united in opposition to you.

Those of you dealing with a cheater who is extremely selfish and those of you dealing with a cheater who is Narcissistic share a lot in common. Selfishness and Narcissism are often both sides of the same coin. The Narcissist label often gives their selfishness a clinical sound, but it all boils down to selfishness. So when you are up against a Narcissist having an affair, what can you expect?

First, you need to accept that they have trouble having healthy relationships. Their relationship with you was not healthy and their relationship with the lover is unhealthy. If you assume that the one with you is unhealthy and the affair is wonderful, you assume wrong. They do not get healthier as they jump from relationship to relationship. They carry the same patterns of taking rather than giving to all their relationships. You also have to accept that at their core, the narcissist has self-hatred. That self-hatred is where all their destructiveness comes from. They often attack or destroy anything or anyone who exposes them and reminds them of their vulnerability. That destructive tendency makes it hard for you or anyone else to get close to them. The closer you get, the more vulnerable they are and the more destructive they will be toward you.

That means that you are not going crazy. The Narcissist really does get more destructive as you get closer to them. That also means that you will have to overcome your own discouragement as you work on the relationship. They will throw up roadblocks designed to frustrate you. Those roadblocks are about protecting themselves from the threat of vulnerability.
How to Change Your Marriage: Steps Toward Rebuilding Trust

You want your spouse to change, and they want you to change. Although the both of you want changes in the relationship, you may not know where to start. The best place to start is with ‘trust’. As humans we often do not like to take risks in situations we can not trust. Wanting your spouse to make changes in a marriage where there is no trust is unrealistic. In order to bring about changes, you have to create more trust in the relationship.

Creating trust begins with you doing things different. You will have to show them that they can trust you. You have to show them that they can talk to you and that it will be safe to open up. If you have a history or arguing, blowing up or blaming, they learned that you are not safe. In order to start building the trust, create more safety.

Here are some practical ways to start creating the needed safety in your marriage:

- **Have fun with each other.** Many times, couples have forgotten how to have fun. When two people do not enjoy each others company, it makes it difficult to work together, much less trust each other. You need to do something fun with your spouse. In doing something fun it needs to be something the two of you like. If only you like it, the experience may leave your spouse feeling like you are being selfish again. People feel safer with those who they enjoy being with. If your spouse does not enjoy your company, this is a place to start.

- **Do some new things with each other.** Many times, there is a special openness in relationships when couples do things for the first time. When both of you do something that neither one of you has done before, then neither one has the edge. You are doing something ‘together’ rather than one of you being the teacher and the other being the student. With it being a new experience, that neither of you has done before, it creates a ‘primacy experience’. Such first time experiences tend to stick with us.

- **Value each other’s secrets.** Even when you are mad, do not share the secrets your spouse has shared with you. When they realize that you may be upset with them, yet you value their confidences, it provides a place to start rebuilding trust. This includes keeping secrets, along with sharing secret items with your spouse. When you open up about your life, including the embarrassing, shameful events with only them, it shows them that you trust them and value them. This also means not shaming them with information that you know about them. In the midst of fights and arguments, you will have to be careful what you tell them and not use their secrets against them. Holding a person’s secret against them in order to pressure them or manipulate them is a form of blackmail. It may get you what you want, yet destroy trust in the process.

Valuing each other’s secrets also means not spreading their business with friends and family members. You may be hurting and looking for support, yet telling the wrong people about the affair and your marriage problems can damage trust.
If you have violated secrets, you will need to apologize for it and ask their forgiveness. It could be that some of the harsh feelings between the two of you go back to you mishandling secrets. You may have not considered what they shared with you as sensitive as it was to them. Although you may not have intentionally violated their confidences, there is a possibility that you did so out of ignorance. Valuing their secrets is a way of showing them that you value them.

Valuing secrets also includes the embarrassing stories and photos you have of them. Showing or sharing these items with others can damage trust. If you have handled such items callously or made fun of these things, there is some damage control you need to take care of. Just asking for forgiveness in such matters is only a start. They will need to see that you regret having done, not just regret getting caught. Those photos and stories are part of them. Mishandling those items shows a disregard for them and their secrets. This is not the time to use such things as threats or a way to control them.

-Spend time with each other. It is hard to rebuild trust if you do not spend time with each other. You need to spend time talking and just being with each other. Often, you may have isolated yourself from the very person that you need in your life. You need to spend time talking and being with each other. If you have been too busy or too occupied, they may believe that you do not have time for them.

Spending time with your spouse includes phone time. You will need to allow them to call you when they need to instead of only at your convenience. Even if you have a job where your ability to accept calls is limited, making time for their calls is important. You also need to make their calls the priority. When your spouse feels like they need to stand in line or ‘take a number’ in order to talk to you, they realize that they are not a priority in your life.

You will also need to spend time sharing meals with your spouse. Having a meal together is not the same as the both of you eating meals in separate locations of the same house. Sharing meals together is a way of having a relationship. With increasing frequency more couples do not eat together. If you want to have more trust, there will have to be time that the two of you share. You will also need to strive for quality AND quantity. If you have made quality time more important that the quantity of time you have with your spouse, you may have set yourself up for a fall. Your spouse needs both. In terms of amount of time the ideal goal is 20 or more hours a week with them.

Time is important in that with the more time we spend with someone, the more comfortable we become with them. Sensitive topics are often brought up when a couple has enough time with each other. When there is not enough time, then the crisis items are typically what garners the attention. Those things that need immediate attention, while relationship related issues are often pushed aside until there is ‘more time’ to deal with them. By spending more time with your spouse you create opportunities for the two of you to talk.
If you are in a situation where the two of you are not together, you will need to give them access to your time. You will need to send a message to them that you will always make time for them. They will test you on this. That means that when they want time with you and it is inconvenient, you will need to do your best to make the time, whether it is dropping by at two or three in the morning or calling at an inconvenient time. Not making time for them is a way of shutting them out. You need to be doing the opposite. You need to invite them in, including spreading the welcome mat and always answering their calls.

-Make room for your spouse. During the rebuilding, there is often some uncertainty concerning where the relationship stands. The uncertainty about where the relationship stands often creates confusion. The danger with confusion is that a confused mind always says ‘no’. If you want there to be hope in your marriage, you will need to reduce any confusion or uncertainty. Relationships need a sound foundation. Sound foundations provide a base on which to build. When there is no soundness in the foundation of the relationship there is little to build upon.

One way to improve the foundation of your marriage is making room for your spouse. This means you will need to make space for them. No one wants to be around where they are not needed or valued. Besides being needed and valued, they will need to feel that there is a place for them in your life.

It will be important to make your message clear and unambiguous. In the event you want them back, make room for them. Make space in your schedule for them and make space in the home for them as well. This means that you will need to allow them space in your home in terms of both time and place.

In making space for them, you will need to allow them space in the kitchen, space in the bedroom and perhaps space in other parts of your home as well. That may mean that you need to allow them to have more say in how the home is decorated. It may mean that you need to allow them more space in the diet the two of you share. It may mean that you need to allow their things to have space. If you tend to devalue their things or break them, it sends a message that you do not care about them. It shows them that you are unwilling to make place for them in your life or home. In order to turn the situation around, you will need to allow their things to have space. You will also need to value their things as if they were your own. That also means that you will need to avoid disparaging remarks about their things or space.

This also means giving them space in the bathroom, closets and drawers. Giving space in those areas also means that you respect them and do not rifle through them. Disrespect can be shown in many ways. Showing disrespect for their personal spaces is a way of sending a message to your spouse that you do not respect them either.

Although you want them back you will need to make sure that what you say and what you are doing in regards to their space are in agreement. If you make all kinds of verbal promises and then make no room for them, the messages cancel out each other. Giving them space may mean that you allow them to hang that photo or picture that is important
to them rather than only hanging and displaying things that are important to you. The decorations of a home are not just about aesthetics, they are also a statement about what is important and valued to those living in the home. Refusing to allow them to hang pictures of children or people you do not like sends the message of conditional love, in that you only want parts of them back. You are not welcoming all of them back. (It is never appropriate for them to have pictures of the lover displayed. Refusing to allow photos of the lover is entirely understandable).

-Self-care Improvements

You may also need to improve your self-care. Although on finding out about the affair you may let yourself ‘go to pot’, getting your spouse back will take doing the opposite. You will need to improve yourself.

Self-improvement is not about making yourself sexier or making yourself look like the lover or smell like the lover. It is not about dressing more seductively or wearing more revealing clothing. Confusing such steps as self-care can make your problem worse. Taking steps to improve your seductiveness or accentuate your sexuality may only direct your spouse to sexual or physical attributes. When you direct their attention to such attributes, you are not attracting them to you. You may be training them to be attracted to such attributes in others, which will make regaining their heart more difficult.

Self-improvement does include taking batter care of yourself. This includes taking baths, brushing your teeth and improving how you dress. There are many spouses who do not address the simple self-care items and then wonder why their spouse does not want to come back to them. If you are sloppy and do not pick up after yourself or your home, you may be pushing your spouse away. They may not enjoy any time spent with you. If you make the time they spend with you unpleasant, it defeats the work of making time for them. Improving yourself starts with daily brushing your teeth, combing your hair and dressing in clean clothes. If you are doing these things, then you can move on to the next step of loosing some weight, following your physicians recommendations for diet or some other way of taking better physical care of yourself.

Self-care may also include doing something about habits that your spouse finds offensive or unpleasant. Taking steps to reduce smoking, chewing or drinking may be needed at this point. Although there are plenty of songs extolling drinking and smoking, if you want your spouse back, you may need to change these habits. You may enjoy your habits, yet those very habits may be keeping your spouse an arms’ length distance from getting close to you or enjoying your company.

Once you have changed your behavior to where you show them that you want them back, that they are important to you and that you are making accommodation for them, then you can start on making the emotional changes. The physical changes discussed above only start showing your spouse that you want a safe environment. Once there are physical changes, you can begin creating an emotionally safe environment.
-Resolve to let go of the past. Letting go does not mean that you never talk about the affair or what happened. Cheaters often want you to ‘drop it’ and never bring it up again. In this step, you see your spouse for who they are now, and accept that. This means you do not re-fight past fights or view them in terms of who they were or what they did wrong. You give up what is often called ‘museum trips’ where you keep a tally of what they ‘owe’ you or you ‘owe’ them. When such tallies are kept, you will find yourself stuck permanently in the past, and unable to move forward.

You have gone through the pains of digging through the events of the affair. Rather, both of you need to work things out to make things better. Continually bringing up the past, often leads to discouraging the efforts of your spouse to work out your marriage and make things better. They want a sense of hope, including a hope of a new future. When you continue pigeonholing them in terms of past wrongs, they have no future and have no hope.

You can not change what has happened. You can change how you look at it. You can change the meanings that you attach to the affair and other events in the past. That means you will need to let go of the strong attachment of the affair with condemnation. Yes, they made a bad choice. Yet it is not up to you to play the role of their conscience and remind them of what they did over and over. No one enjoys being around people who not only remind them of their failures, but drill it into their heads on a daily basis.

What they did was wrong. In order to start the emotional trust, they will need to believe that you trust them, and that you are willing to see them in a new light. You will have to separate who they are from what they did. Rather than viewing them and the affair as one and the same, you will have to sever that connection. They will need to feel that you see them for who they are rather than in view of their failures. In order to see them for who they are, you will have to separate who they are or their being, from what they did or their behavior. One writer talks about Being and Doing. When you can separate the two, then you can work on forgiving them (or their Being). What they did (behavior) remains unacceptable and hence, un forgiveable. The topic of forgiveness will be addressed in greater detail later. At this point of starting to build emotional trust, you are doing well to separate them from their affair.

-Spend spiritual time with each other. In the aftermath of an affair, each of you needs healing. Your relationship needs healing. As part of the healing, you will need to become aware of what your spiritual needs are and what your spouses needs are. Spending spiritual time with each other is one way to discover and work on finding ways of meeting those needs.

When there is a spiritual oneness, then emotional oneness is easier to accomplish. Try to find common spiritual ground. Pray together, go to a religious site together, meditate with each other, discuss spiritual matters with each other, or read spiritual material together. The more the two of you share and do things together, there greater the sense of spiritual one-ness will develop.
Your ideas of what constitutes spiritual things may differ. Spiritual is more than the religious teachings of various religions. It also includes matters such as beauty, truth, honesty, vulnerability, support, caring, hoping for the best, overcoming discouragement, overcoming fears and many other items. Finding out what your values are in each of these areas and finding ways of helping each other is part of the spiritual one-ness I am referring to. Spiritual time is time spent practicing, seeking, meditating on or discussing these areas.

These things can serve to unite the two of you on a level that was not there before. You need a common goal, and such actions can provide it. When your spouses senses that you want to see them for who they are and want to understand what their needs are, they will feel safe. Rather than dreading that you are like so many others who only want something out of them, they will sense that you care for them and want to get to know them.
What Do I Need to Change? Priorities

Noticing how you and your spouse deal with the affair provides startling insights into your values and priorities. You will discover what is really important to you and to your spouse. One area where your values come out concerns who or what you go to for comfort. When you found out about the affair, where or who did you go to first? That first choice says a great deal about what or who you select as your source of comfort. It also reveals what your values truly are. This same observation applies to the cheater as well. In understanding them, you may have to consider not only what their source of comfort was, but also what kept them from coming to you. It is always easier to attack the lover than to look at what obstacles prevented them from coming to you.

Many times there are two or more sets of values in play. There is the one that you espouse because it sounds respectable. This is the one you often state in public. The other one is the set of values that you actually live by. Where do you go or what do you do for your source of comfort and strength? Surprisingly many people set up appointments with Dr. Turning Leaf, Drs. Ernest & Julio Gallo, Dr. Jack Daniels or some other variation of physician in a bottle. A big part of understanding affairs involves understanding the payoffs behind the behaviors. Going to Dr. Jack Daniels may not sound respectable, but if that is your first choice, you may have to get honest with yourself about your priorities.

When there is a discrepancy between what you say and what you do, action is needed. Likewise if there are discrepancies between what the cheater says and does, that needs to be dealt with as well. Although faults are easier to find with the cheater, you need to start with yourself. They will be looking to see if you are just talking the talk or if you are walking the walk. If you have been living with a big discrepancy for a while, they know it. They know what values and priorities you have actually lived by.

When you make a conscious effort and progress in honestly dealing with those discrepancies, your spouse will see it. Rather than tell them about the changes you are making, when they see changes, your message will be stronger. What you do communicates more to them than what you say.

This means that when you tell them that your marriage is a priority, they will want to see it. Telling them marriage is a priority, followed by you leaving on a hunting trip or watching a football game sends a confused message about priorities. In such cases, your spouse will hear what you say, yet listen to what you do. They will take to heart your actions more than your words at this point.

If you are one of those who have two sets of values, you may need to readjust priorities in dealing with the affair. Although the affair may be over, there is still a lot of work to do on priorities in your marriage. If you are wanting to punish the cheater while all the time talking about saving your marriage, your spouse likely reacts to the punishment rather than hear what you are telling them about saving things. You do not punish someone that you are trying to save.
If your marriage relationship is truly a top priority, then you need ‘relationship vitamins’. You need to be around comforting people. That means that you need to observe and discuss relationships, learning what it takes to make them work. When you are around friends or in public, start paying attention to relationships. You may think that you know all that you need to about relationships. That kind of pride leads to conflicts. At this point, you need to be open to learning some new ways of doing things.

Reading books about relationships often helps, yet you may not be a reader. Even if you are a reader, being able to pull useful information and lessons from such books can be a challenge. For the books to be useful, you will need to be able to find take away items that you can use and put into use right away. If you are a person who is easily bored or bogged down with such books, there are other options.

Another source of useful information is learning from others directly. Observe how couples treat each other. Notice how they look at each other. Be willing to ask people how they solve conflicts with their spouse. After asking how they do things, listen for what terms they use in referring to their spouse and their tone of voice. Their actions will tell you a great deal about the relationship. When they are in public with their spouse notice how much time they spend looking at their spouse, how they look at them and how they show affection to each other. Your spouse has different needs, yet what you learn from other couples will provide you with a place to start.

During this time, you need friends to help you face the relationship concerns rather than ways of escaping the realities of relationship responsibilities. Consider whether your friends encourage you to forget about your spouse or do they encourage you to take action steps that will improve your marriage? A great majority of friends often take sides. You need someone who wants what is best for your marriage rather than take sides in matters. Part of the reason they take sides goes back to how you presented information about the affair to them. They may have sensed that you wanted them to take your side rather than listen in terms of what your marriage needs or what has to change.
Trying to Get Your Spouse Back

You love your spouse deeply and you’ve been happily enjoying your life together. When all of a sudden, like the coming of a burglar at night, an intruder comes into your marriage and suddenly things change. It seems like they will never be the same way it was before. Like the thief who stole valuables from your home, the precious love and attention of your spouse has been taken away from you.

Even if you have recovered from the affair, the uneasiness that it could happen again leaves its scar on your heart. In some cases, the recovery may take months or years. If you are in the midst of dealing with the affair, the shock of having lost something valuable rattles people to their core. The security and safety or your home is suddenly gone. You are no longer secure in your position as spouse. In some cases, you may find yourself feeling insecure about the world and your religious beliefs as well.

You will need to talk with each other and about the affair. You will need to address what happened from each of your perspectives and what the affair means. This is a tall order. Being able to tell your side is easy enough, but listening to your spouse tell their side without interrupting them or attacking them will stretch you out of your comfort zone. Although you will tempted to scream “Liar!” or “Bullshit!” to what they tell you, saying such things is counterproductive. Since you want them to open up, not shut down or give you a version of events that has been doctored to where you can handle hearing what they tell you.

You may not be a person who uses foul language or sexually explicit talk, yet when an affair happens, the feelings and hurts run deep. You may find many words, thoughts and images you never would have imagined going through your head. Words may come out that there are no nice or pleasant ways of expressing. That same phenomena is happening with your spouse as well. That means you will have to listen to them in terms of the hurt that they are expressing rather than trying to police their language.

If you feel that you are not ready to talk and listen to your spouse about the affair, you may need to wait until you have such a talk. If you tell your spouse you want to talk with them and end up preaching at them, scolding them or telling them off rather than talking with them, do not be surprised if communication shuts down. When you do things to shut down communication or dominate things with your version, the communication will suffer. You may consider yourself a ‘good communicator’ based on your ability to express yourself, yet you are unable to let other people talk without interrupting or correcting them. In such cases, your communication is not what is well developed. Instead it is your self-expression that is well developed.

Your spouse will feel safer if they can talk without being interrupted or corrected. If you do interrupt them, limit your questions to items that you need clarified. If you are actually correcting them, yet calling it clarification, you are fooling yourself. Remember you want
to create an environment where there is trust. You want them to trust you, which means they can talk freely without being interrupted or attacked by you.

People are attracted to those who are interested in them, especially when they are accepted unconditionally. Although you may have issues with acceptance, you can do your best to help them feel safe. When they feel safe, there is a greater likelihood that they will talk to you. One of the main reasons spouses do not talk is that it is not safe to talk. By making it safe to talk and showing interest in what they have to say, you are doing your part.

In terms of getting your spouse back, they will need to return emotionally to you before they return physically. When there is distance in a marriage, the emotional space occurs prior to them physically leaving. People are not drawn to places where they will be attacked or not feel safe. I often use the term, “put out the welcome mat” in order to convey the idea that you have to make them feel welcome to come back.

Timing on Getting Them Back

You may need some time between when you find out about the affair and when the two of you talk about the affair. Having such a talk too soon may lead to issues being addressed prematurely. You need some idea of what you are struggling with in terms of what bothered you most about the affair, and what changes are needed in your marriage. If you are too angry or too hurt to listen to them, you will want to put off talking until you can hear them out. Bear in mind some cheaters want to have the talk sooner than later so that they can ‘unload’ their burden, then consider the matter ‘dealt with’. It is unrealistic to either drag it on over years or to expect everything to be sorted out with one or two talks. Both extremes are damaging to your marriage.

In some cases, you may decide to give their relationship some time off and give each other space to think through your marriage and life together. Going through such a relationship hiatus is very difficult. In most cases, such “cool-off” can eventually lead to total breakup. In order for you to rebuild your marriage, you need to look for ways of regaining your spouse’s love and renewing your love for them during such a ‘cool-off’ time. It is much harder to win them back when they are out of the home.

When you express your love to them, you don’t appear to be desperate to get them back. They will see through you if you are just talking a good game. They will want to see your talk backed up with action. Rather than just telling them you love them, show them. You should court your spouse again and show them that the affair is truly over. Show them that your love is there. Show them that you care about them and their feelings, not just your comfort or sexual needs.

Remember that regaining lost trust is a difficult process. It cannot be granted overnight. The years you’ve shared has cemented your relationship together. But an affair can severely damage such trust because an affair is a betrayal that causes deep emotional wounds. Here are some ways on how to get your partner back. Bear in mind each
relationship is unique and may require some special additives. These are general skeleton keys others have used with some success.

**Decide in your heart that you love your partner.** This means that you truly love your spouse. You will need to show them that you are interested in them, not just what you can get out of them. If you want your spouse back, let them know that it is because you are genuinely interested in him/her and enjoy their company. You shouldn’t have any other reason for wanting to get them back. It’s not because of the kids, not because of the money, not because of emotional investments, but rather it is because you love them deeply.

**Pursue them.** Go back to the time that you were still trying to win your spouse’s heart. The roses, the posh restaurants, the flowers and the late night walks. Get on your romantic self and get back to them. By showing you love them; you are bringing the magic back into your relationship. They will want to see your heart. It you talk about giving your heart to them, they will need to see it. Share your emotions, fears, dreams and hopes with your spouse.

**Be patient.** At first, your spouse may resist your advances. They have been burned by past events. They will want to make sure that this is the ‘real thing’. They may test you to see if you are sincere. Do you love him/her or are you just ‘talking a good game’. If you love them, you will need to persist. Recognize that these are tests. Rather than panic about the tests, view them as opportunities to win your spouse back. Show some spirit and show her that you love him/her so much and that you are determined to get them back.

**Invest in your marriage.** If you want your marriage to improve, purchase material that will help your marriage. Purchase books or e-books dealing with improving your marriage or understanding cheating. Purchase other good books that tell you how to strengthen your relationship. You need answers on where and how to improve your marriage and yourself. Spend time with your spouse discussing ways to improve your marriage. When the two of you talk, the more you know, the more options you can suggest. Investing in your marriage always pays dividends. You spent hours and years fighting, shouldn’t you spend time healing rather than hurting?

Investing in your marriage also includes spending time understanding and knowing your spouse. If you tell them you love them, yet know little about them or show little interests in what is important to them, you need to spend time doing your homework. If they are interested in quilting, then you may need to learn some of the basics of quilting or whatever topic is important to them. It may be football, history or music. If you have not been interested in the past, now is the time to start learning about it. If they enjoy an activity that the two of you can do together like cooking, dancing or attending events, you may want to do some of those with them. Your willingness to learn about them is another way of showing them that you love them. They will not likely expect you to love what is important to them as much as they do. When you are willing to try new things outside of your comfort zone, it is an investment in their life.
By investing in their areas of interest, you are making more of a connection with them. The more the two of you have in common, the more you have to talk about and share. This will give you more ‘common ground’ on which to build a relationship and more to talk about.

**Avoiding the Divorce Option**

The specter of divorce haunts many marriages. You may even dread even hearing the word. Just the mention of the word "divorce" often brings with it feelings of failure, rejection and brokenness. Spouses will often make it a point to stress which of them brought up the "D" word. That means that you want to be careful even in mentioning divorce as an option. Once it is discussed, the person who brought it up is often viewed as having suggested it or wanting it. Tammy Wynette's song **D-I-V-O-R-C-E** struck a chord with many couples in addressing the pain associated with just the mention of the word.

Some marriage ceremonies now specifically mention divorce, whereas in previous decades such topics were not mentioned in marriage ceremonies. When divorce is included as part of the marriage ceremony, the statement made about the marriage is one of weakness. Changes in societal mores, religious values and laws have increased the ease and use of the divorce option. With the increased ease and acceptance of divorce in many communities, dealing with this option and avoiding its execution is a concern. Although preventative measures are always less painful than after the fact, a majority of couples make the mistake of waiting until after the threat of divorce occurs. Rather than perform the routine preventive maintenance on the marriage, many couples focus instead on damage control.

There are some things that you can do to avoid or reduce the possibility of divorce. The most effective ways to avoid divorce are preventative measures. Although the preventative measures are the most effective, they are often ignored. If you are like many couples, you don’t mess with preventative measures, only what you need to do to fix things. Since you were not focusing on preventatives, you miss out on what you could have done.

The preventative measures include showing respect, having fun with your spouse, giving them time, fulfilling your marriage oaths and other forms of growing together. The mindset concerning marriage is also important here as well. When marriage is viewed as a contract, then when one party defaults on the contract, the other considers the divorce option. When marriage is viewed as a covenant, the dissolution of the marriage is not a simple change of contract. Since marriage is a relationship based on choice, the rules for how conflicts are handled and resolved are not the same as relationships based on birth.

The preventative measures include maintaining honest and open communication about the various issues of concern. This includes finances, communication, health, extended family, religious beliefs, and attitudes concerning children. Ideally the marriage has with it a mutual commitment to improving each other and a spirit of ‘oneness’ or teamwork.
This does not mean that the both of you loose your identities, but rather that you all are working together toward some common goals, which are discussed openly. Maintaining this kind of communication requires time, effort and sacrifice. With the increased openness, there are fewer secrets which often undermine the strength of the marriage and create alienation. When loyalties are divided, there is greater room for difficulties within the marriage.

In the event that the preventative measures are not followed, another approach to avoid divorce is “crisis management” or “damage control. Such measures limit the damage and take steps to avoid letting things worsen. When a couple is in this mode, the divorce option has been threatened or is ‘in play’. When in this mode, although changes happen faster, they are often more difficult and painful to make. Improving communication, safety, and buying off the spouse are some of the actions taken in this mode.

You may have taken on added debt and the stress that goes with it when attempting to buy peace with your spouse. Houses and automobiles have been purchased in an effort to appease your spouse. Rather than having taken the preventative steps of maintaining open communication on a consistent basis and making time for one’s spouse, you now find yourself making emergency measures to halt or slow down the road to divorce. When in this mode, you may even make radical changes in family relations with the extended family to quell the crisis. These changes may include an increased or decreased amount of contact with the extended family.

Although many measures often occur in the crisis management mode, which involve debt, there are also situations where you consider compromising your values in order to ‘save’ the marriage. Some couples consider threesomes or swapping to head off divorce, whereas others may increase the frequency of church attendance. These changes in values either increase or decrease morals in your lives. These kind of forced moral changes are rarely long-term commitments, although some may have long-term damage arising from them. Such measures may purchase some time, but do not improve the commitment that each spouse has to the marriage. When making such forced changes, resentments can build up and the spouse begins feeling used.

Another school of thought on avoiding divorce is that of using legal games. Although divorce begins with emotional separation long before a legal separation occurs. There are some spouses who become very adept at avoiding divorce by refusing to sign divorce papers and using lawyers to interfere with the divorce proceedings. Such actions prevent the legal finalization of divorce, but do little to improve the spirit of the marriage.

When you view marriage as a contract, you have another option. With this contract, like other contracts, there is always room for re-negotiation. Here, the issues of the marriage are viewed in a very business like process. Although such a process may head off the termination of the contract with a divorce, it does little to improve the spirit of the marriage. In such cases, the relationship becomes a business relationship, or “roommates with special privileges”. Such relationships often have limited levels of intimacy and commitment beyond the contractual dealings. Paid sex workers often have business based
relationships with clients. The marriage contract mindset applies a business mindset to the marriage itself.

**The Wrong Questions**

When an affair is suspected or found out, you may be asking questions. Rather than asking "What can I do to save my marriage?" , "What will save my marriage?" or "What is my marriage worth?" you instead quibble about "What does a counselor cost?", "What does a private eye cost?" or "How much does a divorce attorney cost?". By asking the wrong questions, you will find misleading and distracting answers and little is done for the marriage. If you are like most couples, you spend more on your cars than on improving their marriage. The relationship with the person who you pledged your life to share together receives less attention than the brand names of the clothes in the closet or the quality of automobile in the garage. Such poor choices go back to the poor questions that are being asked.

If your marriage is in trouble-you need to do something NOW. If you suspect that your spouse is having an affair, you need to do something NOW! If your spouse is distant from you, something needs to be done NOW! When the air conditioner or heater breaks, service is often called immediately, since your physical comfort or health is at risk. When your emotional/relational health is at risk, or breaks, and your physical health is endanger (from stress), rather than taking action, people delay. They dicker over price, convenience, or deny that any problem exists, when they need to be taking action. They show less alarm over a broken relationship than they do over a broken car or air conditioner.

Part of the reason for the wrong questions, besides denial goes back to misplaced priorities. When the priorities are misplaced, the relationship choices will also be distorted and warped by those priorities.

Part of getting the relationship back, will be having the right priorities in your life. "To love honor and cherish until death do us part" are not meaningless words unless you make them that way.
What is so bad about Adultery?

Adultery (aka infidelity) damages to the spirit of the marriage relationship. Besides being destructive to the spirit of oneness in that relationship, it allows someone to come between you and your spouse. Adultery is often accompanied with secrets and lies. Those secrets and lies leave people feeling betrayed and cheated. Adultery involves breaking promises and vows. Some of these promises are explicit and some are implicit. In business terms, it would be regarded as a ‘breach of contract’. In addition to the damages listed above, adultery involves deception and fraud as well. People were led to believe something that was not real. In some cases, the person deceived is the spouse and in other cases, it is the lover.

Marriage as an institution precedes the legal systems man has developed. Marriage also precedes organized religions. The importance of the marriage relationship existed prior to the Egyptian empire, Babylonia, the Mosaic Law, the Koran or the Bible. Although mankind has attempted making modifications to the institution, it has managed to survive despite those modifications. Adultery violates the institution of marriage. It goes against the legal systems developed by every major civilization that contributed to the advancement of humanity. Given its ancient roots, marriage has a profound place of importance. Adultery lessens the status of marriage. Adultery lessens the humanity of people, turning them into instinct driven animals.

The inter-changeability of adultery and infidelity as terms for this practice provides some indication of its roots. In cases of infidelity, they have left their spouse for another person, much like they have left one god for another one. They do not have an exclusive, intimate relationship with the person they made a vow to. By violating their vow, they degrade themselves and their spouse.

Although critics of monogamy want to blame God, the Mosaic law, or the Bible for their anger, the source of their discomfort precedes those systems. Marriage existed before these religious texts did. Their own choices and actions contributed to their pain, not their beliefs. Adultery is a wrong that forces those practicing it to move away from civilization and toward barbarism. It takes humanity backwards.

Is it too late?

You waited until the pain was more than you could handle and the damage was beyond your ability to ignore it, before deciding to work on your marriage. Now that any spirit of oneness and tenderness has been destroyed, you wonder, “Can I ever get it back?” You long for a return to early days of your relationship. You want things ‘the way it used to be’.

Even while wishing that you could return to the way it was, you put off doing anything about your marriage until the pain increases to a level you can’t stand. You confuse a toleration of the diseased relationship with love. There are many reasons and excuses for delaying. No matter what excuse you tell yourself and others, it hasn’t made things better.
At this point, you need to take action, rather than look for explanations or make more excuses.

The time you need to take action is when there is distance in the relationship, not when the pain becomes unbearable. The choice of using pain as your barometer of action rather than the emotional distance in their relationship is a fatal one. It is important in responding to the issues for you to act when your spouse pulls away rather than after they do something like having an affair to make that distance permanent.

Don’t make the mistake of waiting until the pain is intense and unbearable before taking action. Rather than waiting for a magic cure that will 'zap' your marriage back to the earlier days. Deciding to wait until the pain became unbearable is part of the problem that got you where you are at. Rather than asking such questions, you need to be at work correcting how you relate to your spouse. Start with changing you and your behavior towards your spouse.

It may be too late for preventative measures, but not to late to make changes. You may need to get out of the habit of waiting until pain moves you to action. Procrastination may be one of the problems contributing to the demise of your marriage. Improving a marriage takes works, not quick fixes or zaps. The problems did not get there overnight and do not go away overnight. Expecting magic in the form of zaps creates many unrealistic expectations. You may need to learn from your pain that the time to take action is before the pain becomes unbearable. When you are overwhelmed by pain, you will not be able to deal with your own pain, much less your spouse’s.

When you are overwhelmed by the pain, you will need to seek out help. It would have been better had you sought help when the distance began in your marriage. Waiting until things break down often means that the cure is more expensive and painful that it would have been had you done the preventative work. Being in pain also means that you need to consider if you are out to improve your marriage or to reduce the pain you are struggling with.

One of the ways of dealing with pain is understanding what you are up against. I included the brief article ‘Hurt people hurt people’ to provide you with more of the information you will need. In working on your marriage, there will be times where you deal with your own pain and there will be times that you will be dealing with your spouse’s pain. Since the two of you were not communicating effectively prior to the affair, it is unlikely that the two of you will be dealing effectively with your pains. When you are in pain, you are often less able to think clearly or work through issues.
Hurt people hurt people

One of the sad realities of human relationships is that “Hurt people hurt people”. This is important to keep in mind during the aftermath of an affair. When spouses have been hurt by an affair, they often hurt back. Whether or not the adulterous spouse intended to hurt, the betrayal of the affair inflicted hurt. In an attempt to deal with their hurt, the resolute spouse often strikes out.

The striking out may be direct or indirect. When the pain is exceptionally intense, they often find ways of making the adulterer ‘feel’ the intensity of the hurt that they themselves are experiencing. Whether or not the hurt is justified becomes irrelevant. When a person is hurting, they are often not logical or rational. They often find themselves striking out. When the affair is one that was exceptionally painful, there are often directed intentional attempts at hurting the other spouse. Love is often withheld. At times, they may attempt to withhold the children from the parent as well. One sign that danger is present is when the phrase, “You don’t deserve your children”. In such cases, the situation often spins out of control and allegations of “child abuse” are often hurled at the adulterer. When the spouse is hurting, there are always lawyers willing to fan the flames and “get them what they are entitled to”. In most cases, it is not about entitlement, but rather revenge.

Keeping this in mind, when your spouse is hurting, it is not the time to attack back, either verbally, physically or legally.
About Jeff Murrah

I want to help you through the crisis of an affair. Whether you are the cheater or the one who was cheated on, there are things that you can do. Here at the blog, I share experiences from working with couples over the years along with personal insights and experiences to help you through your struggle.

As a teenager, I experienced firsthand how infidelity devastates families. When my own family fragmented in the wake of an affair, it triggered a series of bitter fighting, secrets, and inner turmoil that rippled through the extended family, community and church. The joy of each holiday, birthday, and accomplishment was quickly poisoned by the ‘hurt that never stops hurting’ in the form of the affair, subsequent divorce and remarriage of my parents.

My journey took me through episodes involving children’s protective services, domestic abuse, spying, legal fights and secret keeping. The ugly episode continued getting uglier over the years, with threats of murder, and attempted suicides within the family. I wrestled with the inner struggles and outer struggles that each of these issues brought with them.

My journey eventually led to me to becoming a marriage and family counselor in Texas, with over thirty years’ experience of helping others through the pain of affairs and family issues. I bring together personal experience and research in helping you and your family navigate through your crises. Over the years, thousands of families have benefited from the lessons learned from going through these experiences.

I have been in private practice since 1994. This includes working with hurting people in many different kinds of care situations, including hospitals, residential treatment facilities, detox centers, and out-patient clinics.

My counseling website contains articles on family, and parenting issues where he shares from his experiences (www.RestoreTheFamily.com). A second site focuses on helping couples save their marriages and recover from affairs (www.SurviveYourPartnersAffair.com). I worked as a Christian Counselor with Rapha for nine years prior to going into private practice. My work has led to being invited to speak from the pulpit at churches in Houston, Pasadena and Gonzales, Texas.

In addition to counseling, I have also taught psychology courses at San Jacinto College and conducted parenting classes at the Star of Hope homeless shelter in Houston. These experiences working with people and teaching have provided a broad knowledge base that I shares with people through articles, e-books and blog posts on family and marriage related issues. These articles have an international distribution. My work has been featured on Wall Street Journal Radio and the Larry Elder Show. I have also been...
approached by television networks about doing shows dealing with affairs involving clients, yet declined them due to sensitivity and ethical concerns associated public exposure and affairs.

My articles have been featured as part of the Parent University program of the Pasadena Independent School District along with the Chicago Sun Times, Livestrong, Chefs.com, Plaza Lima Sur Magazine and Pasadena Citizen. I have also received requests to use my articles from Australia, Europe and across the United States.

I meet with clients locally and nationally via telephone.

My specialty areas are dealing with affairs and family/relationship issues. I am a Licensed Professional Counselor, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor and a Certified Medical Psychotherapist.

My wife, Peggy, and I have been married since 1985 and have three incredible sons.