

Saving Your Marriage After Adultery

A Christian Approach to Restoration

Salvaging your marriage after an adulterous affair will take some effort on your part. Whether you are the offending party or the one who was hurt, your road to recovery is slow and complex. When coping with adultery, you are dealing with many intense emotions: anger, jealousy, rejection, feeling vulnerable and naked, and feeling like your whole sense of security has been shattered. You not only have your trust shattered but many times have to re-build your self-image, questioning, “What have I done wrong? Why am I not good enough? What caused my spouse to look elsewhere?” In dealing with adultery, it requires effort to be open and forthright to some very hard truths, overcoming self-doubts, and to learn ways to re-build your wall of trust.

First of all, **trust is earned**. This is a hard concept for so many people to understand. So many times the offending party wants the other party to “forgive and forget”. While forgiveness is a huge key in restoration and healing, it is not the only key for success. **Forgiveness is a gift**. The offended party is not obligated to give this to someone who has hurt and destroyed them. As a Christian, you are taught to forgive so that your sins will also be forgiven, Mark 11:26. Listed below are some helpful hints in learning how to forgive and make your marriage work:

- 1. To forgive, we must identify the problem.** Sometimes infidelity is only a symptom of greater problems that may exist. These may include pornography, lack of commitment or foundations of sound relationships, child abuse, or even a narcissistic nature. Humans are full of emotional shortcomings and overcoming these requires us to face these, acknowledge them, and work on improving our relationships. It may take a professional to help you to disclose underlying problems that have happened years before your relationship ever started. Whatever has caused your spouse to look outside of the marriage, **you will need to honestly deal with it** so it will not re-occur again.
- 2. To be forgiven, one must have full disclosure.** One of the greatest flaws bringing about trust and forgiveness is for “new things” to keep cropping up whenever you start trusting again. It is much better to disclose everything once rather than to “re-live” that experience again.
- 3. To be forgiven, one has to be patient.** So many spouses have commented, “When will my spouse ever stop questioning me? Why cannot he/she just forgive and forget?” When questions are being brought up over and over, your spouse usually is feeling “vulnerable” again and wants to have that assurance that everything is going to be okay. Too many times, the offender gets upset and strays from reassuring his/her spouse. You have to be patient, loving, and understanding. It may take years of questioning for you or your spouse to feel safe again. If your marriage is going to survive, both of you have to be patient.
- 4. To forgive and be forgiven, give your relationship an honest chance.** In order to recover from adultery, both spouses must be truly committed to the process and to do whatever is necessary to give the relationship a chance to survive. If you are the offender, it means that

you are going to have to work hard to improve your communication, through words, deeds, and actions to re-build your marriage, brick by brick, rebuilding trust and confidence in why your marriage is worth saving and why you and your spouse first married each other. If you are the one who was hurt, it may require you looking beyond your spouse's event or actions, slowly dealing with the emotions that come through adultery. For both parties, it may mean keeping your mouth shut, when your anger or other emotions are triggered, and stop trying to hurt your spouse back for what he/she has done.

5. **To mend your marriage, you have to have commitment.** Forgiveness is the start of restoration and healing. Commitment is the glue that holds your marriage together. Both of you have to be committed to staying in a relationship “no matter” what happens. It is not going to be easy. It is much easier to go about your separate directions but there is no value or reward when this happens. You both must make a good-faith effort to live together, love one another slowly, and rediscover what brought you together in the first place. Prayer is also a stabilizing force for Christians to lean upon. It brings unity into the home that was previously destroyed by single desires to seek comfort elsewhere.
6. **Protect/guard your marriage.** If both parties are willing to commit to this marriage, both have to make sure that outside forces are not going to influence your partner again. Your marriage is precious, just like jewels. No one would ever think about leaving them unprotected. Neither should you. One way to ensure this is to pray before each partner goes out of the home. Ask God to put a hedge of protection around your marriage, children, home, etc., sending guardian angels to guide and protect, bringing each other safely home back to the other one. The other way to protect/guard your marriage is to remove any hindrances that previously caused the infidelity, such as pornography, flirting, being out late with others when you should be home committed to your family, etc.
7. **To forgive yourself.** Whether you are the offender or offended, God's grace is sufficient to forgive you and help you along the process of healing. The woman caught in the very act of adultery is a prime example as well as David's sin of adultery. Jesus told the accusing people, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw the first stone”. David was a man after God's own heart. He paid the price for his sin, just as we do when we commit adultery (the process of restoration). But God is more than able to bring that healing and restoration if your heart is sincere and you have a commitment to one another. God has already forgiven you. It is time for us to sin no more.

There are other ways to bring healing back into your marriage through avoiding the 4 danger signs to every marriage. These include:

1. **Escalation.** All marriages and relationships have their ups and down with heated discussions or arguments. The negative responses to each partner, going back and forth as if in a tennis match, will only cause further anger and frustration. Couples, who seem happy, try to limit their escalation to a “safe” place. They both understand the importance that their marriage is more important than arguing over small things. Proverbs 20:3 says, “It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel”. 1 Peter 3:9 says, “Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing”.

2. **Invalidation.** This is a pattern in when one partner subtly or directly puts down the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other. This is the most damaging of the danger signs and will definitely lead to divorce if not overcome and put under submission. Proverbs 15:1 says, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Ephesians 4:29 says, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” The words you put into a marriage, either positive or negative, will reflect what type of marriage you will have or whether your partner will remain.
3. **Stonewalling.** This is when a partner is unwilling to get involved in a discussion or work on possible solutions. Men are usually guilty of stonewalling more than women. When people stonewall, they usually fear the possibility of re-starting another argument or causing their discussions to escalate. The problem with stonewalling is that solutions to disagreements or problems will never come about if there is not a scheduled time to resolve these. Choose a good time when both parties are calmer to discuss ways to solve this disagreement or problem. Agree to objectively look at ways to avoid further division between yourselves. Ephesians 4: 26-27 says, “In your anger do not sin: do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold”. Problems unresolved will fester and bring division between parties. A marriage is all about unity. You do not always have to agree but you should not be disagreeable.
4. **Criticism or negative interpretations.** Every couple will have negative interpretations from time to time. These can be very easily resolved. Criticism is often a prelude of invalidation. Women are guilty of criticizing more than men. Criticisms and negative interpretations can be very destructive when they are entrenched into your relationship. It is easy to misunderstand or not hear something properly; but to negatively assume or criticize the other person can lead to further problems and separate the very fiber of a sound relationship. Research shows that love is more effective if given the benefit of the doubt. 1 Corinthians 13: 6-7 says, “Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trust, always hopes, and always preserves.”

Researchers state that every good marriage has a ratio of 4:1 of positive to negative. Negative things will always happen but your hope lies in the fact of whether there are enough positive things in your relationship to keep your relationship alive and together. The Bible can teach us to be overcomers. The woman caught in adultery is a prime example of Christ's love for you.

Other areas of help include:

1. **Finding ways to better communicate or solve differences.** You can use a statement, when I do _____, in this situation _____, I feel _____. This helps you in the communication process by not putting down the other person with the “you” statements and explains how you may feel when something is said or done. It allows the other person to hear you and understand how you feel rather than trying to have them to interpret for themselves.

2. **Worshipping together.** For most, your faith is very important and is a central part of your life. Some of you may have different spiritual beliefs or expectations than your partner. One solution may be to agree on some things, such as attending church together, praying together and over one another each day, agreeing how your children will be raised with respect to your spiritual beliefs, and to ask for forgiveness and help in your marriage.
3. **Re-paint your portrait.** What was your picture or portrait like when you first met and first married? Did it have color, sound, and was full of life? Throughout the years, you may have allowed things to sneak in to rob the color, fun, and the very existence of what brought you together. When infidelity comes into your marriage, it destroys your portrait altogether. You have to re-paint and restore your portrait back to color and life. Work together, share the memories, together you can bring the joy back into your portrait.
4. **Putting fun back into your marriage.** Do some of the things that first attracted you to one another. Use techniques such as a date night, spend a special time together, go on trips, validate each other through gifts and other surprises, etc. Fun is vitally needed when it was robbed by you due to infidelity. One needs to have the validation that you want to spend the rest of your life with the one you almost lost.
5. **Find time for intimacy.** Some of the common reasons for infidelity are due to a lack of caressing, touching, sex, and other forms of intimacy. Understand that this may require some time and patience since the offended party might be **resistant to open up his/her heart at the jeopardy of being hurt again.** Take your time, romance, do the little things that can restore and bring your marriage and intimacy to a level that is beyond all you had ever hoped or imagined.
6. **Plan your future together.** Explore, hope, and work together to share your common bond and commitment. Why work hard to make something work when there is no future? A part of commitment is being together to the very end. Allow your partner to share your hopes and dreams.

These are openly a few suggestions that can help you through your journey. It is a journey which only you and your spouse can face and work out together. You may need professional help to get you going, but the ultimate success depends upon your involvement along with your spouses. Even though you may feel overwhelmed, there is nothing impossible for those who believe. Let me encourage you today, there are thousands of other couples who have faced the same difficulties and hurts you have. They are standing testimonies of what God can do. Their success was based upon some of the same principles. You can be an over comer too. God bless you on your journey.