



Hopeless?

by Rick Reynolds

Have you been betrayed by your spouse? When the unthinkable becomes a reality... When the greatest source of security becomes a place of insecurity and fear... When a heart once full of dreams and hope is crushed and battered...

Where do you turn? Where can you go to recover from the devastating pain of an affair?

The tangled wreckage left by betrayal frequently leaves those involved feeling hopeless and confused. Jesus' statement, "Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." ([John 8:32 NIV](#)) seems at the very least misleading in this case. For many, the discovery of what is true leads to many things, but freedom is not how you would typically describe the ensuing feelings. In fact for many, living in the lie, before the revelation of the betrayal, seemed much more comfortable and free than having to live with the truth of what has happened. This holds true not only for the betrayed, but also for the betrayer. As couples begin to face the reality of their situation — to face what is true — they often come to the conclusion that their situation is hopeless, but not everything that is true is the truth.

When Terry first came to my office, he believed he was finally facing the truth. He had been in a four month affair with a woman with whom he had "fallen deeply in love." His 21 years of marriage had been a miserable failure — as he put it, they should have never gotten married. Right up front, he informed me that he didn't want to give up his affair partner, his marriage was hopeless, and that he was sure he didn't want me talking him out of what he was

doing. I surprised him when I told him that his observations were true: "It's true that the other woman makes you feel better about your self than your wife, and it's true that she's younger and more attractive than your wife, and it's true that the sex is better with your affair partner than it is with your wife, and it's true that your marriage is hopeless." As I pointed out what was true I could see his countenance lift, but then I pointed out that not everything that is true is the truth.

We tend to view circumstances from a Godless perspective, forgetting that the "truth" is a person and what is consistent with that person! Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life" ([John 14:6](#)) If what I believe to be true ends up as hopelessness, then it's not the truth, because truth is found in the person through whom all things are possible and in whom things are never hopeless. The truth is, "God will not fail you or forsake you." ([1 Chronicles 28:20](#)) When we see no way, the Lord says, "For I know the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." ([Jeremiah 29:11](#)) I told Terry that we weren't going to focus on what was true, but rather we were going to focus on the truth and get Jesus into the center of the situation. From this Jesus-in-the-center perspective, we began to find hope.

I encourage you to keep focused on the truth and not to become discouraged by what seems to be true. As you've already learned in this life, all is not what it appears to be and only One offers us the truth, the real and powerful and hopeful truth.

Four Classifications of Affairs

As we begin to explore the types of affairs, I know that there is a great deal of pain and confusion for both parties in the marriage. Please know that I am not writing with the intent of causing more pain! Instead, I hope that these categories

will help bring understanding to what has happened and serve as one small point in the process of healing.

Affairs are not all alike, and therefore the approach to healing will differ according to each of these four categories of affairs. I would encourage you to read the descriptions of each affair type and then determine which one best characterizes your experience. The stories of the couples that have already been through the recovery process are posted according to their type of affair. As you read these stories, find the one that best speaks to your current situation and take advantage of the couple's willingness to encourage and support you in your journey of recovery.

The following categories are simple descriptions, and they are not intended to explain the motivations of the betrayal, the consequences, or the path of recovery. They are also not intended to serve as a judgment on the betrayer or the betrayed. Instead they are intended to offer hope to both parties as you begin your journey of recovery. Hopefully, you will discover that your situation is not unique and that there is a path you can follow. You will see others like yourselves who have by the grace of God experienced a fresh newness of life as a result of their healing process.

Admittedly, there is a process upon which you have to be willing to embark, but those of us who have made the journey will assure you that it is well worth it. You may be asking, "Why would I want to consider going back to a miserable marriage?" Let me assure you this path is not just about "making it." I would never wish that on anyone. If your marriage is lousy or even just mediocre, why would you want to go back? If that were the case then I don't believe we would be doing you any favors. That is not what this is about; rather, we believe that this crisis point in your marriage can actually be used as the starting point for each of you to grow both individually and as a couple. Let this process serve as a point of hope for the two of you. Please

take advantage of the support, encouragement and direction we have to offer.

Four Classifications of Affairs

Category 1 The Low Rent Rendezvous

This type of affair may well be a one-time betrayal. The typical one night stand usually occurs when a spouse is away from home, possibly on a business or pleasure trip (not to be confused with a string of one night stands that occur as a sex addict pursues his or her addictive drive), and in the heat of the moment, they give in to temptation. Often this occurs in conjunction with drinking and anonymity. This type of affair is not necessarily an indication of problems in the marriage or that the betrayer is dissatisfied with his or her mate.

The core of this betrayal is based upon bad choices, poor boundaries, lack of integrity, and the opportunity to act. Frequently, there is no emotional involvement, and it may well occur with a perfect stranger who is befriended in the situation. It may be motivated out of loneliness or curiosity, and is generally the result of poor boundaries and the misguided thinking that "this could never happen to me." Normally, individuals who have had one night stands tell themselves that they will go to the grave with their secret. This is not an indication that they want out of the marriage, for in fact, their fear and desire to keep it secret are indicators that they don't want to lose the marriage (even though that's the wrong approach).

Characteristics:

1. It is an affair of convenience or opportunity. It is not something that is sought out, but rather occurs as the result of an opportunity that is presented.
2. The betrayer does not want to leave the marriage.

3. There is not an ongoing relationship.

Example - A Category One Affair

The wife's story: I was eight months pregnant with our second child when my husband confessed to me that he'd had a one-night-stand on a business trip. That news was stunning enough, but then came the kicker. It had been homosexual. After years of pent up thought-battles, wondering what it was like to be "loved" by a man, my husband had visited a gay bar in a far away city and gone home with someone.

We had a great marriage. We were involved in church, had great Christian friends, nice house, good jobs, rarely squabbled about anything - you get the picture. Under the surface though, my husband struggled with identity issues that stemmed all the way back to his strained relationships with a distant father and a biological mother who essentially abandoned him. He had told me about this when we were first dating and getting serious, but I figured marriage to me would fix any lingering issues he had!

The subsequent months were filled with counseling, prayer, AIDS testing, late night talks and much soul searching. I realized early on that it wasn't about me and it really wasn't even about our marriage. There were emotional holes in my husband's heart that had never been healed, never really touched by the power of the Holy Spirit in spite of his being a Christian for a long, long time.

He'd confessed to our pastor, a marriage counselor and two friends before he told me. There was instant accountability. We immediately started working with a counselor. We joined a therapy group and heard stories from others with broken but in-the-process-of-healing hearts.

I can't say it was easy, in fact it was gruesome at times. My husband went to a level of soul-baring that I don't think he

knew was possible. We established a "check in" system so that each day he was accountable to me for his thoughts, feelings and struggles. The amazing thing was, the struggles began to dissipate. The miracle of God's healing began to invade his heart, his memories and his mind to bring him a level of peace he'd never experienced before.

Our marriage experienced a transformation too. I saw moodiness and brooding begin to vanish as the cobwebs, past hurts and "what ifs" began to clear from my husband's mind. It was as if for the first time in our eight years of marriage he was really "present."

Looking back on it now - it's been almost nine years - I can somewhat remember the heartbreak. It was absolutely devastating, but there were a few beliefs I stood firm in during the whole ordeal. One, divorce was not an option. After all, we had one child and one on the way. Single parenthood was not a choice I could make. Second, I knew God could get the glory out of this. He'd used crises in my life before to strengthen me and to remind me to rely on Him - this was no different. The devil may have meant it for evil, but God could make it good. I could ONLY get through this by relying on him. Third, I knew this was not about me. I didn't do anything to cause what happened and our marriage wasn't the problem. Last, I knew deep in my heart of hearts that this was going to make us better.

Today, we continue to grow both in our love for each other and our love for God. It's so clear to us now that there was a purpose and a plan working itself out by the mighty hand of God. I would say to any woman out there, no matter the indiscretion of her husband, give it a chance. Give God a chance to heal your heart. If He is able to make our sins although they are as scarlet, white as snow, He is also more than able to heal even the deepest wounds and fill us with forgiveness and love.

The husband's story: I loved my wife. I wanted to be married to her, to raise our kids together and to have a happy home. I was thrilled, knowing we had a baby girl on the way. In spite of that though, my mind and thought life was a battlefield. That battlefield erupted into an all out war during a business trip.

I'd been to that city before and had explored a seedy side that I had no business in. Satan used that window of opportunity the next time I was there and I went to a place where years of curiosity and questioning came to the surface.

I'd struggled for years wondering if something was wrong with me, wanting to be loved deeply by a man because my father had been so uninvolved and disapproving. I didn't want to live a homosexual lifestyle but the mental games that I played in my head were nearly constant and had continued into my marriage to a wonderful woman.

When I finally "acted out," I wanted to die. I prayed the whole flight home that the plane would crash because I knew I had to come clean. Hard as it was, that's what I did. I immediately called my best friend, one of my spiritual mentors and our counselor.

See, we already had a relationship with a marriage counselor. We'd gone in for "tune ups" periodically throughout our marriage. We were both from dysfunctional homes and carried unhealthy baggage into our relationship. It was now time though, to dig out the baggage buried in the attic of my mind and really get it all out in the open.

A few days after my return from the trip, I told my wife. She was crushed. She's not really a crier, but she sobbed for hours. I couldn't really do anything but say I was sorry and cry with her.

The next day, we told our Bible study group. Although that was one of the scariest things in the world, it proved to be a godsend. Those people wrapped their arms around us and loved us through our ordeal. One of my friends said, "Bill, I love you and will see you through this, but I am really, really angry at you right now." It was that kind of honesty that started the healing process.

We went through both one on one and counseling as a couple, and we joined a therapy group. To hear others struggling through their own crises was so helpful. You'd hear others' stories and think, "Wow, we're not in that bad of a spot after all!" You'd also see couples who were farther down the road and feel hopeful. And you'd meet those who were so very fresh from their wounds that you'd think even you could offer hope.

All in all, it was a remarkably difficult time. I drug up emotions and memories and pains that had been buried away for years. Those things had manifested themselves in the sexual addiction behaviors that had haunted me and prevented me from living my life to the fullest. Sure, I'd never DONE anything, until that fateful business trip, but my mind was a war zone with the enemy pushing me into battles I fought daily and only frequently won.

Without sounding trite, today I'm a new man. God is still at work in me - we are all still in process and will be until the day of Christ's return, but I am so much further down the path he has for me because I was willing to enter into the place of healing he had for me. It was there all along, unfortunately, it took a crisis for me to be able to accept his love, forgiveness and wholeness.

I would say to anyone who has made a mistake like mine, whether it was homosexual or heterosexual, that there is immense freedom in confession. There is freedom in accountability. The secrets are where the torment lies.

My spouse showed a capacity for forgiveness and a commitment to sticking to our marriage that surprised me. In ways, she's one in a million, but there are also millions like her who want to keep the family together, who want to see the silver lining to the dark and stormy cloud. Get help. Get God deeper into your life. Give Him a chance to surprise you with his unfailing love. Perhaps before you know it, you'll have a testimony of restoration and healing just like ours.

Category 2 The Country Club Affair

This type of affair is characterized by two individuals who believe that they are "in love". With this type, the betrayer believes that he or she has fallen in love, and feels powerless over powerful emotions. It is not uncommon for the betrayer to feel guilty over what they are doing, but at the same time they are no longer in love with their spouse and know that they will never be happy unless they are with their lover. This type of relationship frequently develops from an existing friendship that begins to deepen as the boundaries between the two individuals weaken.

It is not necessarily based on sex. In fact, the power driving the relationship is the strong emotions generated by the growing romance. In this type of affair, the betrayer has most likely made the decision to leave their marriage. They realize that they can never be happy unless they get to be with the one they love.

Unlike the Low Rent Rendezvous, this type of affair often indicates a deeper problem in the marriage. Let me be clear - the marital problem is not the cause of the affair, but there are defects that at the very least, serve as inhibitors to the betrayer's motivations to consider working on the marriage. While this description may cause you to believe the situation is hopeless, please know that it is not. There are many couples that have recovered, and in fact, will report that

they are grateful that they were able to reconcile. If you are in this category don't lose hope! God is able even in this situation to bring new life.

Characteristics:

1. The betrayer wants out of the marriage.
2. They are in love with their affair partner, and are willing to sacrifice life as they know it for the opportunity to be with their lover.
3. Typically, this type of affair is a long-term relationship that has developed into a romance.
4. Frequently, there is a pattern of the betrayer swinging back and forth between the marriage and the affair partner. When they are at home trying to do what is right, they are miserable and feel they will never be happy. When they are with their affair partner, they are ecstatic, but may be feeling so guilty that they can't stand it so they move back home only to feel miserable and to realize once again that they can never be happy unless they go back to the affair partner. This dance of insanity can continue for years.
5. The betrayer often seems incapable of making a decision as to what they are going to do. Even though the betrayer doesn't want to be in the marriage, other factors may keep them from choosing to divorce. For example, feelings of guilt or of failure may cause them to stay. There may also be strong feelings regarding what is best for the kids, so they may decide to stay for the children. A lack of commitment to the marriage, but choosing not to leave, is not the solution to a country club affair.

Category 3 Looking For Love In All the Wrong Places

These affairs are committed by those who have an ongoing pattern of sexual betrayal such as frequenting topless bars and/or adult bookstores, viewing pornography, compulsive

masturbation, prostitution, repetitive encounters with sexual partners, and other behaviors that are destructive to both the individual and to the marital relationship. These individuals, though married, have never been able to find complete fulfillment from their marriage. Rather, they are enslaved by a drive to satisfy their longings.

Driven by obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors, they are powerless over their extra-marital attachments to behaviors, people or objects, such as pornography. These individuals look to these extramarital attachments to meet their God-given need for love and acceptance rather than to the intended source (which would be their mate or God).

Interestingly, this category of affairs is not about the marriage, and often the betrayer will state that they don't want their marriage to fail. They would have pursued the same behaviors regardless of whom they married. Actually, for some, it is this fear and shame that helps to create the dual life of an addict, and which helps propel the ongoing destructive behaviors. They often feel hopelessly trapped by their behaviors and at times by their marriages, but are afraid to come clean because they don't want to lose their marriage or their addictive behavior.

This type of betrayal is especially difficult for the spouse because their suffering is not just from the betrayal, but also from their inability to understand their mate's behavior. What the addict has done seems so foreign the spouse cannot comprehend it. Or they are in shock when they discover the sheer magnitude of the compulsive behavior (like the man who visited more than 300 prostitutes).

Characteristics:

1. There is a habitual pattern of extramarital behaviors that are either sexually related and/or relational.

2. Typically, the betrayer wants to save their marriage, but they still have a compelling drive to look elsewhere to meet their needs.
3. Often these behaviors began before the marriage, stopped after the marriage, and then began again after the addict realized that the marriage couldn't meet the need met by the addictive behavior.
4. It is common for the betrayer to have made past efforts to stop the behavior, and to have actually been successful for a season, only to relapse after they believed things were better.
5. Frequently the betrayer has a deep sense of shame and guilt. Professional help is needed from a pastor or counselor at this point.

Category 4 Having Your Cake and Eating It Too

This category of affair is similar to the Country Club Affair in that the betrayer is involved with a single person, but at the same time he or she does not want to leave their marriage. To them, the affair partner is a soul mate.

These affairs frequently spring from a relationships where the two individuals share something in common such as music, art, work or some other common interest. Typically, this area is something they don't share in common with their mate, so they turn to this person for understanding, companionship and support.

It is as if this person develops two lives. They share one part of themselves with their mate and then they reserve another aspect of life for the affair partner. Daily activities and information is divided into two realms: that which will be shared with the spouse, and that which will be shared with the affair partner.

Usually this type of affair indicates that there are other deficits in the marriage, but like I stated before, these

marital problems in no way excuse the infidelity. They are rather areas that will need to be addressed in order to strengthen the marriage.

Characteristics.

1. The individual wants to stay married.
2. It's not unusual for the affair partner to be referred to as a soul mate.
3. The betrayer's life is divided into two parts, the part that they share with their mate and the part that they share with their soul mate. Therefore two distinct sets of needs are met by two distinct relationships.

Example -A Category Four Affair

From the perspective of the betrayer: As I write this my wife and I have been married for over 25 years and our recovery process began over 20 years ago. We now have three children (only one when our journey began) are active in our church and have a very full life. I was a classic sex addict, but became involved in a category four affair. Here is my story.

If ever a "Leave it to Beaver" family existed, it was mine. I was the oldest of three boys growing up in the South, a boy scout, and attended church three times a week. Mom ran the PTA. Dad ran the company. Our family was intact and solid and our home was full of love. From all appearances, all was well. As I grew up, I was active in church, a good student athlete, had a great peer group, and I longed to serve God. I attended a Christian college, seemed to be well liked, had the normal set of friends, and continued to serve the Lord.

After college I got a job, rode a motorcycle, played a guitar and got married. What wasn't apparent to anyone however was my nagging sexual addiction. I was the king of the dual

life and my act was so smooth no one suspected, especially not my wife.

My marriage could be described as wonderful. I was the dutiful husband with an upwardly mobile career. I completed graduate school and started a successful business. My wife was beautiful, caring and amazingly organized. She had her own thriving career and ran our new household like a pro. She also came from an intact family with strong faith. We were active in church, leaders in our Sunday School class, attended a bible study, and stayed involved in our community.

To the best of my recollection our marriage had no serious problems to speak of, at least not apparent ones. The "problems" we did have seemed typical of most married people: I felt Mary tended to be critical. She wanted to address issues and I wanted to avoid conflict. I felt controlled and unwilling to express how I felt. I tried to please, but it never seemed to be enough. She was frustrated with my passivity and avoidance.

During the first six years of marriage my sexual addiction progressed undetected. My visible life was flawless, but my secret life was spinning out of control. I was compulsively masturbating, using porn, hitting on women and so forth. My wife suspected nothing. While I knew what I was doing was wrong, it really didn't seem that bad. It had been a part of life since my early teens and as far as I was concerned never caused harm. I saw no need or reason to stop until I began to cross lines that even I thought I would never cross.

I remember the day I finally realized that I couldn't stop. Fasting, bible study, prayer, confession, self will, self help, and church all failed. I was now hopelessly trapped in an affair and knew no way out. All I could do was wait for an inevitable and explosive grand finale. My addiction had grown to the point where it was only a matter of time until it

would be discovered. Too many plates were spinning around my head and at some point my world would come crashing down.

I hesitate to share what came next in my life, only because I don't want anyone to feel that my experience needs to be their experience. God is the author of all things and one of his most interesting characteristics is his creativity. I find that he rarely uses the same tactics with us. So please don't assume this is the path you will follow, or that you are somehow a lesser person if God does not work in this dramatic fashion with you.

Here it is: I had a vision. Please don't think I'm crazy - that's just the way that God chose to get my attention. It could have just as easily been that I was discovered by my wife or friends, rejected by my affair partner, or developed a sexually transmitted disease, but a powerful vision is the way he chose to work with me.

As I'd done many times before, I'd gone to a spiritual growth conference hoping to find an answer to my addiction problem, when suddenly, while in the midst of a presentation, I found myself sitting alone in a movie theater. I didn't fall asleep. I wasn't day dreaming, so the only way I know to define what happened is that I had a vision.

At the front was the big screen but it was divided in half. Showing on the right side of the screen was the "Holiness of God". I don't know how I knew what was showing because there were no titles, I just knew. It was magnificent and indescribable. Shifting forms of light filled the screen with power and warmth. The light was so pure and bright that I felt as if it were moving through me as if I had little or no substance.

The left side of the screen was showing the holiness of Sam. It was so black and dark that light couldn't even refract off

the screen, it just seemed to suck the light in. I immediately turned and yelled to the projectionist that he had the wrong picture up on the left. I was aware that I had some problems, but at the same time felt God was fortunate to have me on his team. I was leading Sunday School class, I helped lead a bible study, I had introduced people to Jesus, and I was a good husband with only a slight problem. In my mind, my accomplishments, good heart, and good works more than made up for my failings.

Then God spoke, as only the sovereign God of the Universe can speak with absolute authority, "THAT'S YOU!" As I looked again, it was as if scales fell from my eyes and I saw myself for the first time as I truly was. I experienced a wave of horror as I realized how despicable I was. And then I began to connect the dots. I might not be the brightest light on the block, but even I was able to understand that what was on the right could never coexist with what was on the left. That God's holiness would never have anything to do with what I had become. So this was it. This was the end of the line. Now I was awash in terror, thinking I must be having a stroke or a heart attack in the conference room.

Then God spoke a second time. "AND I LOVE YOU, JUST THE WAY YOU ARE. I LOVE YOU ANYWAY!" Those words were spoken with the same absolute authority as the first, but they were also perfectly full of compassion and emotion. The reality was so thick that it almost felt as if those words took physical form and embraced me. I was overwhelmed with relief and wonder. Those words were spoken with such conviction and power there was no room for doubt. I was literally consumed by the security of His love and I began to weep uncontrollably.

Suddenly I was back in the conference room, weeping and feeling like a fool. I'm sure the speaker must have thought he was having a powerful impact on me but it was actually the simple love of God that had transformed me. "What do

you want from me?" were my first thoughts upon re-entry into reality. "TELL YOUR WIFE AND TELL THE OTHERS INVOLVED," was His reply. Why? Why should others be hurt because of my indiscretion? It made no sense to me. It was my failure, my fault, my affair, my addiction. It was my wrong, not theirs.

I approached the conference speaker during a break. I shared the most current part of my story, the affair. He wisely asked what God was saying to me. "It's funny you should ask because He's telling me that I need to tell Mary and the husband of the woman I'm having the affair with, but that doesn't make sense to me because why should they be hurt because of my sin?" The speaker replied, "Why does it need to make sense to you if God told you to do it?" I realized that it didn't need to make sense. That I just needed to trust the God of love that I had just so powerfully encountered, so I determined to take the plunge and tell everyone.

The speaker gave me more advice which later served me well: "What's the consequence of sin?" he asked. "Death" I replied. "Then anything that happens to you short of death is really mercy isn't it?" He was right. Regardless of the outcome, if I was still breathing after my confession then I would be the luckiest man on the face of the earth. Second, he warned, "Never be defensive." There was no excuse for what I had done, no one to blame. I had made my own choices - no one forced me. If I tried to explain why I knew my wife would feel that I was trying to justify my actions. I decided there were only two safe phrases I could use. "You're right," when she was correct in her accusations or observations, and "I deserve that," even if she was mistaken in her assessment. I wasn't even going to try to keep the record straight.

After a sleepless night and much prayer, the opportunity for my confession arrived the next day and I told her

everything. My wife was devastated. Not only had she been betrayed by her husband, but the other woman was a dear friend so she experienced a double loss. That night was filled with tears, questions and answers. I felt convicted that I needed to answer everything fully and truthfully and did so to the best of my ability. At the end of it all I finally told her that I hoped she would choose to stay married, but I would understand if she chose to divorce me (I knew that I would divorce me if I could) but at this point even more important than the marriage was my newly found relationship with God. I was going to go where He led me. I only could hope she would choose to come along.

I believe that night was the best night's sleep I'd had in years. It felt as if a huge weight had been lifted. Mary on the other hand was awake all night, the life she thought she had was shattered.

Strangely enough, that night was the new beginning. We continued to talk and process what had happened in the affair, as well as what had happened in our marriage. Mary had the difficult task of rewriting the history of our life together and I was the one who had to supply missing puzzle pieces. Even with that brutal level of honesty, I was at peace because for once in my life I wasn't living for Mary, or the marriage, but rather I was living for God and letting him direct my footsteps.

When we began our recovery there was little information available regarding sexual addiction and no support groups in the town where we lived. Our initial attempts at recovery occurred at the book store where we purchased every book we could find on the subject of affairs. While this was useful it wasn't nearly as helpful as our friends who were aware of my failure and supported us through out our recovery.

The first couple of weeks were rugged. Mary was up and down, one minute she would cry out in pain that she was

going to divorce me, then the phone would ring and someone, prompted by God, would call and help her to refocus on what He wanted versus what she was feeling. I continued to give her the freedom to leave. The daily contact from these brothers and sisters, their encouragement and challenges to trust God and his abilities sustained us. Our counseling consisted of pastoral counseling with both men and women who had walked this path before.

There was something very encouraging, especially for Mary, about the encouragement she received from other women. Personally I didn't want to talk about what was going on, but for her, conversation was healing. Each night it seemed there was another aspect of our past that needed to be explored, or a scripture to be shared, or even for the first six weeks new revelations that I had remembered during the day.

Each night she would ask, "How was your day" which was really the dreaded code phrase for a series of questions. "How was the battle today? How many temptations were there? How did you handle them? How was your thought life?" While this may sound intrusive we found it to be extremely healing.

For years I lived two lives, the one my wife knew and my secret life. Now our conversations and check-ins began to help her build trust and sense of safety. She knew as long as I willingly shared the events of my day she had nothing to fear. There were no secrets in our new way of life full of openness and honesty. I experienced unconditional love for the first time in my life. I had finally realized I could never be loved unconditionally as long as I only conditionally let her know who I was. During my life of deception I avoided conflict, but after the affair, when I began to live for God rather than for my mate, I developed the courage to be real with her and said what I felt. I quit trying to manipulate her

with my passive-aggressive behavior and began to act like a peer in our relationship. In my opinion the steps that we took were God directed. I certainly didn't have the smarts to do this on my own. I only knew that I wanted to become the man that He wanted me to be. I realized that He lovingly pursued me through my entire life, but I avoided real and genuine relationship with Him just like I had avoided real and genuine relationship with my wife.

The initial stage of our recovery took about three months. After that a sense of stability seemed to return, but not a sense of normalcy. I feared returning to my old patterns of behavior even though my newly found freedom was worth everything I had gone through. I never wanted to lose my newly found relationship with God. As Mary witnessed my spiritual journey her security began to grow. She was aware that I was capable of lying and of deceiving her, but she could tell I wasn't faking what Jesus was doing in my life, my newly found joy and peace, and my hunger for God. From that point forward we began to grow into a new life.

It is now over twenty years later. I'm still an addict who clings tenaciously to God. I relapsed five years into recovery (I didn't go back to all the behaviors I had once been in, but I did begin to slide down that slippery slope). Once again, I had to die to my pride and turn back to God. Both He and my wife welcomed me back with open arms. Since that time I have been vigilant. I realize that my sin nature is still intact and it is only by the grace of God that I am not living as I once was.

For Mary and me the journey through this marriage has been a blessing. What we have now far exceeds what we ever dreamed possible. Mary has reached out in support of many women who are traveling a similar path. I stay in support groups and still pray for the knowledge of God's will in my life and the power to carry that out. I know of no one with a stronger marriage. We've asked ourselves the

question, "If you had to do it over again would you still marry me?" and for both of us the answer is a resounding "yes."

In this short story it is difficult to describe how painful this was for my wife and I am often guilty of minimizing the how far down my addiction had taken me. It is challenge to look back over twenty years to remember the pain, because what rises to the surface are the good memories and the amazement at what God accomplished in our lives.

The one message we want to communicate is that God is able to walk you through this. If he was able to save us I'm sure His amazing love is more than sufficient for your situation.

Author

Rick Reynolds, LCSW, LMFT, holds joint licenses as both a master's level social worker and marriage and family therapist. Over the past fifteen years, he has helped hundreds of individuals and couples struggling with affairs and compulsive sexual behaviors. Rick is both a writer and lecturer. He developed and began leading "recovery groups" in 1992. He received his Master's of Social Work from the University of Denver and completed three years of post-graduate training at the Colorado Institute for Marriage and Family Therapy. He is a clinical member of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists.