

Life on Life 301
Class 2 May 9, 2021
After Adultery

But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. James 1:14 - 15

I. Does the church have too broad a definition of adultery? What is the big deal?

- A. The union of a believing man and woman in marriage is a reflection of the intimate relation between Christ and His bride, the church. (Eph. 5:25-33)
- B. Marriage is unique among all relationships in that it is set apart by God to signify to the world the indissoluble relationship between His Son and His bride the church.

II. Why do we seek restoration and reconciliation after adultery? Why not divorce?

- A. The elders of FBC believe that the biblical evidence supports the view that the marriage relationship between a man and a woman is for life, and that only when the death of a spouse occurs is remarriage permitted. Divorce, therefore, is not an option for God's people nor is remarriage to another person as long as one's spouse is living.
- B. Knowing that many godly evangelical Bible scholars hold to a view that permits divorce and remarriage in limited situations (i.e. where marital unfaithfulness has occurred or desertion by a spouse), the FBC elders believe it is important for each couple to study and consider the pertinent biblical texts on this subject and come to their own personal decision before God regarding His will in this matter.

III. Definition of Adultery

- A. A violation of the "two become one" nature of the marriage relationship (Mark 10:8).
- B. **Emotional** and/or **physical** displacement of the one to whom you are covenanted.
- C. By unfaithfully attaching to another love.
- D. **Usually** demonstrated in sexual union with someone not your spouse.
- E. Biblical injunctions and warnings against and indictments for adultery:
 - A. The two become one. Let man not separate what God joined. (Gen 2:24; Mk 10:9)
 - B. Don't commit adultery; the punishment is death. (Exodus 20:14; Lev. 20:10)
 - C. Israel's idolatry is spiritual adultery against God. (Jer. 3:6-10; Ezek. 16:15-63)
 - D. Flee immorality because God will judge it. (1 Th. 4:3-8; 2 Tim. 2:20-22; Heb. 13:4)
- F. Commonly referred to as "an affair" but that is a mistake (sounds happy/carefree).
- G. Also commonly referred to as "cheating". Again, this tries to minimize the emotional impact / devastating consequences of unfaithfulness.

IV. What type of behavior is required to commit adultery?

- A. Sexual contact? Kissing, touching, oral sex, intercourse.
- B. Nonsexual contact? Flirting, hanging out, texting or private messaging.
- C. What about pornography? Is viewing or reading explicit material adultery?
- D. Adultery is not just the physical sex act. Emotional adultery can be almost as painful to the offended spouse. It is also REJECTION!

V. Statistics on Adultery:

A. Adultery in The Digital Age in The U.S. (2017 Study commission by Deseret News)

- A. What constitutes cheating on a partner?
 - a. Large majority (over 70%) believes physical contact is cheating.
 - b. Roughly half believe that being emotionally involved is cheating.
 - c. Interestingly, the numbers plummet to less than 25% for viewing pornography, going to a strip club, or following an ex on social media. These numbers are slightly higher for those who identify as evangelical protestants but is still significantly less than 50%.
 - B. According to the attitude of evangelical protestants toward cheating (adultery) differs only slightly in most categories from those who stated their religious preference as unaffiliated.
 - C. One conclusion from the study was: Republicans have become more accepting of adultery among presidential candidates, and Democrats much less so. This is likely due to partisan associations with President Donald Trump.
- B. Husbands have historically been more likely to commit adultery, however as wives become more financially independent and work full time, the disparity lessens.

VI. Reasons for Adultery:

- A. Reasons for adultery are as numerous as there are people, however, there tends to be a common perception by the offending spouse of unmet “needs.”
 - A. Needs could be defined as goals and desires a spouse had for the relationship.
 - B. When perceived needs are not met, the spouse is open to temptation.
- B. Adultery starts in the mind.
 - A. James 1:14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.
 - B. Spiritual adultery always precedes marital adultery, though not all spiritual adultery results in marital adultery.
 - C. When adultery occurs the offending spouse has forgotten that God will always provide a way to live in their situation without sinning. God will always meet the need and provide a way of escape.

VII. How Does a Couple Reconcile a Marriage Damaged by Adultery? The Offender:

- A. **Repentance:** Repentance is necessary on the part of the offender. Adultery typically comes to light when the offender is caught. This is the point where counsel will be sought. Counselors need to show the necessity of and help their counselees understand repentance. Repentance, whether it occurs in the life of an unbeliever or the life of a believer, means we “agree with God that my way was wrong and His way is right.” In repentance, the change in mind is movement away from the sin and towards God because of conviction of sin. It is in no way dependent upon the response of the offended spouse. True repentance is more than sorrow at being caught. The offending partner must understand.

- A. Regardless of where a non-offender spouse might have failed, adultery is a sin.
 - B. The adulterer is responsible for their sin before God. Blame for their actions can't be shifted to the spouse.
 - C. Repentance must be based solely on what we know to be true and right in God's sight. The desire in repentance is a clear conscience and restored fellowship with God. Period. (See Psalm 51)
 - D. Concrete steps need to be taken to show repentance to the offended spouse.
 - E. An important part of repentance process is realizing the depth of the damage caused to the relationship.
- B. **Confession:** Confession and repentance are like two sides of the same coin. Repentance is the change of direction from sin towards God, the "A" side of moving back to God. Confession is an offender naming her or his sin to the Lord, the "B" side. Confession is not a kind of quick, general, "I'm sure sorry about what I did." Confession is more specific, like, "God, I willfully turned aside from your commandment to be faithful to my husband, I lied and I stole. I lied to my husband when I lay with him when I was already taking someone else into an intimate relationship. I stole when I took someone else's husband from her and someone's dad from them. In doing this, I have broken the trust, security and beauty of our marriage and opened the door for the enemy to attack us. I do not deserve it, but I ask that because of Jesus dying for me, that you would forgive all my sins and cleanse me from all unrighteousness. I believe you will because you said you will." In recognition of sin (by conviction and repentance), this confession is an expression of sorrow/regret to God with a request for pardon.
- C. For the adulterer it is important to address the issue of "double-mindedness."
- a. James speaks of it in James 4:8, "a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." Part of the reality of adultery, and especially so where the adulterer is a believer, is that the guilty party knows it was wrong and generally feels a little bad about it even while it is happening. Some mistake that **"feeling sorry while sinning" as repentance; it is not even close to repentance.**
 - b. It may be early stages of conviction, but when the person continues in sin, they are quenching the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19) and ignoring the gift of conviction. Here is how James addresses it later in 4:7-8. He tells the convicted believer to "wash your hands, you sinner, and purify your hearts, you double-minded." Washing the hands is acknowledgement and confession of the sin and turning from the behavior. For an adulterer, however, the greater problem is very often not a lack of confession or 'initial' turning. The greater problem so often is that she or he feels remorse and says they are sorry, and eventually return to their sin. Why? Because they never addressed the underlying sin (thus, double mindedness) that gave rise to adultery. I didn't just get emotionally and physically intimate with someone not my husband/wife. I made an idol of excitement and the life of a bon vivant and resented the discipline imposed by living honorably before the Lord.

- D. **Apology:** An apology to the offended spouse is necessary
- A. The offender names the sin (both the action and the sinful attitudes underlying the action) and acknowledges and owns the pain caused to the offended.
 - B. The apology is like the confession in that it is specific, not general. We don't sin "generally" in adultery (e.g., Sorry if I hurt you by what happened). We sin very "specifically." Adultery is a specific sin against specific promises in the context of a specific relationship.
 - C. This apology is never done with demand of a certain response by the offended. It is never, "I said I'm sorry. What do you want? You've done stuff wrong, too, you know." Apology is admitting to the other persons what you have done against them, expressing regret for the pain caused them and asking for forgiveness. It is also humbly giving them time to work through it. (Recommend that you read the chapter on Confession/Forgiveness in the book Peacemaker by Ken Sande.)
 - D. (John Morrison) While I have no specific verses on it (other than John the Baptist's "fruits in keeping with repentance" comment), I believe that the fourth thing necessary is for the offender to take whatever steps the offended needs them to take (within reason) in order to show a commitment to restoring the relationship. This includes the offender telling the other person that the illicit relationship is over. It includes no further contact with the person the offender committed adultery with. It could require moving or switching jobs. It includes not meeting on the sly to let the other person down gently or trying to help them with the "hardship" incurred by the change. It may involve counseling to try to address areas of weakness in the spiritual or marital lives of the couple so that they could be strengthened to help prevent reoccurrence. It might involve at some future point a "marriage renewal" ceremony to formally put the past behind and to renew pledges publicly for the future of the marriage.

VIII. How Does a Couple Reconcile a Marriage Damaged by Adultery?

A. Forgiveness:

- A. Forgiving means seeing ourselves in light of where we stand before God, we have no right to hold someone's sin against them. If they have repented, confessed and apologized, we are told to forgive them.
- B. The offended needs to understand what forgiveness is. A good description can be found in the Peacemakers "Four Promises of Forgiveness:
 - a. "I will not dwell on this incident."
 - b. "I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you."
 - c. "I will not talk to others about this incident."
 - d. "I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship."
- C. When we are sinned against, we are called to forgive when repentance is requested. Nothing is beyond forgiveness. (Luke 17:3-4; Matt. 18:21-34) The offended eventually needs to be helped to understand Luke 17: 3 – 4. I wouldn't start the discussion on forgiveness here.
- D. 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 can help the offended understand the grace, reconciliation and forgiveness that has been provide to us in Christ.

- B. Obstacles to forgiveness:** For some people, forgiveness occurs fairly easily. They know their own sin, they know their partner's regret and they extend mercy. For others, forgiveness is very hard to give (such as the original question implies). Several common obstacles may stand in the way of forgiveness.
- A. Is the offender repentant or are they just saying what they think we want to hear to get past this "event"?
 - B. The offender is tempted to try and make all this go away quickly. The offender is more interested in putting this episode behind them than restoring the one who was injured by their behavior. The offender needs to humbly give room to the offended to work through their hurt, anger, sense of betrayal.
 - C. The offended person's spiritual immaturity (they don't know God well nor the ways of God) or their unwillingness to trust God and obey Him by extending forgiveness. That is a matter of personal discipleship, and something that a same sex mature friend from church or biblically minded counselor might be able to help with. Sometimes it involves teaching; sometimes it involves listening and praying. Sometimes it involves gentle rebuke.
 - D. We may need to teach Biblical forgiveness. Even with a believer, with a long church history the understanding of Christ's forgiveness may be limited.
 - E. The offender will need to realize that forgiveness from Christ isn't the same as forgiveness from their spouse. Forgiveness from the offended spouse may take a long time. The offender must be patient and accept their responsibility in this process. Moving past the adultery will only happen when the offended spouse is able to forgive and trust.
- C. Restoration of Trust:**
- A. Julie Ganschow in an article titled Post-Adultery Reconciliation in Marriage states "It is helpful to understand that the marriage affected by adultery is in a sense dead and gone." "...both people are profoundly and permanently changed as a result of the adultery and working through the issues in their marriage and within themselves."
 - B. Forgiveness is not restored trust. A forgiving spouse will want to trust and fully restore the relationship. Trust will need to be earned and will take time. They will both need the Lord's help to do their parts.
 - C. Restoring trust is a process. It will be different for each couple.
 - D. The offended spouse who walks through this with the Lord will go through various stages of trust. Trust will be required to:
 - a. Listen and talk with the offender after learning about the adultery.
 - b. Remain in the home with the offender.
 - c. Have an intimate relationship
 - d. Re-establish the relationship to a place of oneness.
 - E. The offender has to do the kinds of things that create trust. If the offender was "caught" – that is, they didn't come clean on their own but confessed only after being found out, trust is harder to win. Here are some things the offender can do.

- a. Offer to the offended spouse the right to ask any questions they wish for a period of time (usually no more than 30 days) and give entirely honest answers. At the same time, offended people should remember that sometimes questions they have are for information they a) don't really need and b) that can be a stumbling block to them later. For example, you ask about the places they would meet, and they tell you "Martin's parking lot" and you might never be able to go into Martin's without thinking about that. What difference does it make that you know that? Did it really help?
- b. Offender must not expect or demand anything from your spouse. Remember you are the guilty one.
- c. Remove yourself from contact with the person (physical, personal, verbal, emailing, etc.) with whom you had the adulterous relationship to the extent possible (usually can be pretty complete).
- d. In conversation with the offended spouse, differentiate between anything they may have done wrong to contribute to your wandering (e.g., lack of attention, lack of affection, etc.) and your decision to wander. Remember you are responsible before God and your spouse for your decision to sin.

IX. Counseling After Adultery Reconciliation is Messy: Adultery presents some unique challenges for Biblical counselors.

- A. Once the offending spouse has truly repented, they may become impatient with their partner. Because a weight of sin has been lifted the offender may be ready to move on quickly in dealing with the "real" marriage issues. At this point we have heard: "Jesus has forgiven me. It is time for him / her to get over it".
- B. Be prepared for the mood of your counselees to change week to week.
- C. Be prepared to deal with anger. We have seen outbursts. The first time it took us by surprise. In hindsight, we probably should have met separately for several weeks with the first two couples we counseled. It may be a long time before they are able to be in the same room discussing spiritual things.
- D. Couples will be in different places spiritually. Some of this will be based on personality, some on desire to know God. The offender can have genuine repentance for their part in the adultery and still not be spiritually mature. We need to help each spouse to learn to rely on God only in their marriage and to realize that they can only take responsibility for themselves before God. To quote Pastor Brad Bigney: "My sin first, my sin worst, my sin most".
- E. There will need to be a higher level of accountability for some time. This resulted in our needing to be available to counsel at odd hours, over the phone and via text message when issues arose.
- F. When a couple comes in for counseling after adultery the sin is no longer hidden. There may be family and friends involved offering counsel that may be unbiblical, punitive or mean.
- G. In the cases we have dealt with there were real issues in the marriage before the physical or emotional act of adultery was committed, and the offended spouse was primarily at fault. Consider that? We need to help this couple restore their marriage.

- To do that, we need to work with the offended spouse to be more spiritual, emotionally connected, caring, loving, etc... in essence to be more Christlike, however, before we can deal with these issues we have to deal with the fact that the other spouse had committed a sinful act that is considered (at least in eyes the Christian community) to be worse. So, while dealing with the offender to come to place of true repentance we also must deal with the offended to help them understand their position in Christ. They are a saved sinner just as much in need of the grace of Christ as the offender.
- H. As noted above the Christian community tends to view adultery as worse than other sins. Because of this both counselees may be facing real or perceived judgment from fellow believers. This may cause shame, embarrassment, a sense of stigma that will complicate addressing the adultery and reconciliation. If the counselees were deeply connected within the church they may want to withdraw from involvement.
 - I. While it is important for each spouse to take responsibility for their actions and recognize that their marriage “died in a way”, it is equally important for them to realize that Christ doesn’t leave them or their marriage. We serve a God not only of reconciliation but also of resurrection. He can take the ashes of that dead marriage and turn it into something better and more beautiful.

- X. Homework: Read the following articles
 - A. Five Steps to Repairing the Damage Caused by Infidelity
 - B. My Emotional Affair
 - C. Don’t Let it Happen Again
 - D. FBC 2004 Statement on Divorce and Remarriage

Appendix One

Five Steps to Repairing the Damage Caused by Infidelity. Colossians 3:13

by Louis and Melissa McBurney

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—Louis and Melissa McBurney were co-founders of Marble Retreat, a Christian counseling center in Colorado.

In the ideal scenario, confessing to adultery results in repentance, forgiveness, and a resolve not to repeat the sin. But forgiveness can be slow to appear, and fears of reoccurrence can be very strong. Here are five keys to heal the wounds caused by infidelity.

Genuine Remorse

As we hear from adulterers in counseling, we find that many try to minimize the significance of betraying their vows. Our secular culture reinforces the notion that just a “one-night stand” isn’t such a big deal. But that thinking is a dangerous deception. All adultery creates hurt and a huge barrier to ever trusting again. Not only was your marriage jeopardized, but any kind of casual attitude about the sinful choice also jeopardizes relationships with your family and God. While there can be repentance, grace, and forgiveness, they have a price.

Genuine Confession

Make no attempt to justify or minimize the sin. That helps rebuild the relationship and makes you aware of your vulnerability. You have a will and the power to make your choices. As a Christian, you also have the Holy Spirit to help you avoid giving in to the temptation. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says: “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

Develop Self-understanding

You said you don’t know why you committed adultery. But if you honestly seek the truth and explore the underlying causes of your adulterous relationship, you’ll find answers. Often they lie in self-doubts about being attractive or desired. At other times it may be a need for excitement and risk taking. There may be an impulsivity left over from adolescence. While there are many reasons that can contribute to adulterous behavior, they’re explanations, not excuses.

Spiritual Forgiveness before God

We can understand Psalm 51 in which King David expressed his broken heart to God about his adultery with Bathsheba. He realized his sin was ultimately an affront to God: “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (verse 4). Realizing the destructive spiritual consequences of adultery is essential to total restoration. David went on to plead, “Create in me a pure heart, O God” (verse 10). And he does! Every time.

Set Firm Behavioral Boundaries

Don’t allow yourself to go into relationships and situations where you might be in danger. I (Louis) know when a woman is coming on to me in a seductive way—most men do! And I know I’m titillated by the flirtatious attention. I also know that’s a temptation I don’t need. I can flirt with that woman and expose myself to the excitement of her sensuality (and the risk of indulging in inappropriate touch or talk), or I can make sure I steer clear of her. Choose to set boundaries that will keep you from falling.

Appendix Two

My Emotional 'Affair'

by *Anonymous* ©Family Life Today, 2010

About 15 years into marriage, my heart started turning cold toward my husband. He had an odd schedule at work, and then he spent most of his leisure hours volunteering at our church. When I tried to talk to him about spending less time at church and more with me and our children, he angrily shot back, "You're just trying to hold me back from doing God's work." He then began punishing me by turning his back to me in the bedroom.

Feeling lonely and rejected, I confided my misery to a friend who had called about an upcoming ministry project. My friend was kind and understanding. Unfortunately, no one had ever told me to guard my conversations with the opposite sex. The friend was a man and a very good-looking one at that.

We began talking more frequently. I thought the conversations were innocent, even though they now included discussions about the struggles in his marriage. Gradually, our phone relationship escalated to flirting, and his calls were the highlight of my week. Neither of us told our spouses.

At church, I noticed that he watched me a lot. I admit that I enjoyed the attention, the affirmative words, and the "high" I got with my schoolgirl crush. If someone had asked me if I was having an affair, I would have denied it. After all, there were no private lunches, there was no secret rendezvous, and there was no physical touch except for a public hug now and then or a slight touch of the hand. Everybody in our church hugged anyway so no one was the wiser ... or so I thought.

Our emotional affair rocked on for over a year until the day he said to me, "I think I'm in love with you." Honestly, I felt the same about him, but hearing the words jolted me into reality. I was so upset afterwards that I looked at myself in the mirror in shock and cried, "What have I done?"

I didn't like what I saw as the Holy Spirit replayed the ugly truth of my actions back to me. Had I been physically unfaithful to my husband? *No*. Had I committed adultery in my heart? *Yes*.

I plowed through days of agony before finally falling to my knees before God in surrender. One definition of relinquishment is "giving up title, releasing possession or control and yielding power." How could I do otherwise? I had been a Christian for 16 years. My body was not my own. I had been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20), so it was no longer my will that counted but His (Luke 22:42).

I confessed to God that I felt nothing for my husband, but that vows are not made to be broken. I would rather be unhappy the rest of my life than bring reproach to God's name, embarrass my children, or break up my family or anyone else's. As the Holy Spirit strengthened me, I heard the words in my heart that Jesus spoke to Peter over and over (John 21:15-17): "Do you love Me?"

"Yes Lord, I love You, and I repent."

"Then trust Me," said the still, small voice.

With my hands shaking and my heart racing, I made the call to tell my friend it was over. "I can't do this anymore because the Lord has convicted me," I told him. "Please don't call me again." Being an honorable man, he had never pressed me into anything, and he didn't now. He graciously made it easy for me to say goodbye.

I didn't think I would have to tell my husband. We changed churches for other reasons and, frankly, I was afraid to confess. Meanwhile our new church had a positive effect on both of us and our relationship was slowly improving. We spent more time together and our intimacy returned.

Finally, when I felt comfortable and with the prompting of the Holy Spirit, we sat down together one evening and I confessed. I didn't want any secrets between us.

My husband had some questions and then he shocked me by saying, "I knew it all along. Do you think I was blind to the looks and banter between you two?" He couldn't really explain why he had not confronted me, but I was so touched by his grace and forgiveness. For the first time he, too, confessed that he shared the blame for neglecting me and our family. It was a holy moment I'll never forget. Neither will I forget the surprise birthday present he presented to me a couple of weeks later—a 14k gold ring with my birthstone in it.

I learned five important things from this experience:

First, there's nothing more important than my relationship with God. I had to acknowledge that I had drifted from Him. When I got into a crisis, I became distracted and compromised, which led to sin.

Second, the feelings of love for my husband are a direct result of my love for and obedience to God. He rewards obedience. He would not have blessed sin and disobedience. When I put Him back on the throne of my life, I started receiving everything I needed for life, love, and happiness.

Third, married women should not pour out their troubles to another man, or vice-versa. It's a trap of the enemy. Satan wants to derail lives and marriages. Don't let him!

Fourth, infatuation is not love. It is selfish and doesn't meet the criteria of righteous love in 1 Corinthians 13:5-6.

Finally, I chose to lead my heart instead of continuing to let it lead me. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick." I learned not to trust my heart for guidance or truth.

Now, many years later, my relationship with my husband continues to flourish. I never dreamed I could love him as much as I do. The Creator of marriage knows how to redeem it – for those who are willing to relinquish and lay down their own lives for the glory that is to come.

Appendix Three

Don't Let It Happen Again

These safeguarding measures can help prevent adultery from again taking place.

James 1:14–15

by Jill Savage

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My husband, Mark, and I spend countless hours mentoring hurting marriages. We counsel others based on our own “back from the brink” experience many years ago when our marriage seemed hopeless. Many of these couples are dealing with damage caused by infidelity. The story is always the same: the unfaithful spouse develops a relationship that started as an innocent friendship. It was someone to talk to who listened and cared.

We know that story all too well. Even though no lines of unfaithfulness were crossed in our marriage, at the most difficult time of our relationship, I experienced attraction for a man I worked with. Luckily I realized the dangerous place I was in and got honest with Mark. We recognized the need for establishing boundaries in our personal lives that exist specifically to keep temptation at bay.

The Bible tells us that “each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:14–15). Temptation, enticement, desire, sin, death . . . those are the steps infidelity takes. Because of that, we have to put boundaries in place that keep us from stepping into situations where temptation can take place.

As we talk to hurting couples about advance decisions needed to protect our marriages, we use as an example the line of trees along the west side of our house. The previous owners had wisely planted the trees to provide a hedge of protection against the winds that rage across the cornfields. When the hedge of trees was planted on our property, each tree was planted individually. As the trees grew in size and strength they worked together to protect our home from the unpredictable weather and wind.

In the same way, we need to plant a hedge of protection around our marriage, that is, we need to make advance decisions that will keep temptation at bay and the marriage a priority. Each hedge that we plant around our marriage will do the same. Each time we make one advance decision to protect our marriage we are on our way to building a marriage that is marked by faithfulness and on its way to lasting a lifetime.

Hedge 1: Choose wisely. Avoid unnecessarily spending time with someone of the opposite sex. For instance, if you're looking for a personal trainer at the local gym, choose someone of the same sex.

Hedge 2: Share carefully. If you find yourself sharing things about yourself or your marriage that you haven't or wouldn't share with your spouse, that's a red flag. Not all affairs are physical—an emotional affair is just as damaging.

Hedge 3: Stay in large, public settings. Determine not to meet one-on-one with anyone of the opposite sex. If your coworker asks if he or she can join you for lunch, ask a third person to join you as well. If necessary, don't hesitate to share the boundary you and your spouse have agreed upon in your marriage. You just might lead by example.

Hedge 4: Don't be naïve. Most people who end up in affairs don't set out to have one. Infidelity usually begins with an innocent relationship that, in time, moves to an emotional depth that crosses a line of fidelity.

Hedge 5: Increase your investment at home. Solid marriages are built by spending time together, laughing together, and playing together. If you aren't dating your mate, set up dates for the coming months and make spending time together a priority.

Hedge 6: Pay attention to your thought life. When all you think about is your spouse's faults, any other man or woman will look better. Make a list of the strengths that initially attracted you to your spouse. Increase encouragement and decrease criticism.

Hedge 7: Don't play the comparison game. We all make mistakes, have bad habits and annoying behaviors. When we compare a "new friend" to our spouse, it's an unfair comparison because we aren't seeing that person in a "living under the same roof, taking care of kids at 3 A.M., struggling to make ends meet" reality.

Hedge 8: Seek help. Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. A Christian counselor can provide valuable perspective and help set new strategies for a marriage that can go the distance.

—Jill Savage is the founder of Hearts at Home, www.jillsavage.org

A STATEMENT ON DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE
BY THE ELDERS OF FELLOWSHIP BIBLE CHURCH

I. Background:

Few would argue today against the fact that the institution of marriage is undergoing an incredible spiritual attack. The divorce rates continue to run alarmingly high, and many marriages that never end up in a divorce court often experience a kind of “practical” divorce. In spite of all the valuable seminars, resources and counseling opportunities that exist, marriages continue to disintegrate and the negative impact on families continues to be felt, something even secular scientists are beginning to admit in larger numbers.

At Fellowship Bible Church, we are not exempt from this marital meltdown our society is undergoing. And that is why there needs to be an ongoing ministry to the families of our church body that touches all aspects of marriage and family relationships. As we seek to minister to today’s families our desire is to be marked by both grace and truth. Grace, because there are many hurting people who need to feel the love and grace of God. Truth, because Jesus said when you know the truth the truth will set us free, and too many marriages today are shackled by the bonds of sin, selfishness and unfamiliarity with biblical truth.

II. An Introduction:

There are several underlying motivations for this position statement that need to be understood.

1. This statement is motivated by a desire to emphasize the permanence of the marriage relationship and God’s intent that marriage is for life. It seeks to elevate marriage to its rightful position as found in God’s Word and acknowledge that marriage is unique among all relationships in that it is set apart by God to signify to the world the indissoluble relationship between His Son and His bride the church.
2. Second of all, by emphasizing the permanence of marriage the desire is to help stem the disintegration of marriages and homes that is occurring at epidemic proportions today.
3. Thirdly, this statement is motivated by a desire to elevate the Scriptures and make them the focal point of any discussion on this important issue. It is a statement that is willing to take a bold look at what the Scriptures teach on the issue of the permanence of marriage and then apply those Scriptural principles to the life of our local church family.
4. This statement is also motivated by a desire to raise the standard of life-long marital commitment among our younger generation. And while acknowledging there are differences of opinion over this issue, the elders are advocating the permanence of marriage in hopes that this message will be heard by our youth.
5. This statement, therefore, ultimately has our children and young people in mind as they consider the eventuality of marriage. By lifting up the concept of “until death do us part” it is believed and hoped that our young people today will take extra caution in who they marry and take seriously their preparation for marriage knowing that God desires their marriages to reflect His glory in this world

6. Finally, this statement is motivated by a desire to affirm to those who have been divorced and remarried that in no way are they viewed as “second class citizens.” As Jesus said in John 8:7, “**Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.**” This position is in no way stating that those who have been divorced and remarried are currently living in a perpetual state of sin. The Scriptures do not teach that and neither do the FBC elders. Though the following elder statement lifts up the sanctity and permanence of the marriage bond, it affirms the wonder of God’s amazing grace, and that couples who have gone through a divorce and have been remarried can seek His forgiveness and experience His grace in their remarried life in abundance.

III. Purpose Statement:

The purpose of this position statement is to specifically explain what the FBC elders believe is the Scriptural teaching on the very difficult subject of divorce and remarriage, and to share how that teaching will impact the marriage policy at Fellowship Bible Church. After many hours of personal and corporate study over many years, the elder team has concluded that God’s Word has much to say on this important issue. And though they understand that there is disagreement among the evangelical community today concerning divorce and remarriage, they believe it necessary to arrive at a statement that reflects the Scriptural teaching on this subject based on their study and interpretive conclusions. The elders understand the gravity of their role to “**keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account**” (Hebrews 13:17) and therefore desire to lead the FBC congregation in biblical truth and guard the flock against destructive teaching which runs contrary to God’s Word. What the Scriptures teach concerning marriage is crucial to the success of God’s institution of marriage. Failure to know and apply biblical principles greatly contributes to the many problems in marriages that affect so many lives. The following attempts to reflect that Scriptural teaching.

IV. Position Statement:

- A. The FBC elders contend that the biblical evidence supports the view that the marriage relationship between a man and a woman is for life, and that only when the death of a spouse occurs is remarriage permitted. Divorce, therefore, is not an option for God’s people nor is remarriage to another person as long as one’s spouse is living.
- B. Separation for a time, however, would be encouraged and supported where a spouse may be in physical danger.
- C. Knowing that many godly evangelical Bible scholars hold to a view that permits divorce and remarriage in limited situations (i.e. where marital unfaithfulness has occurred or desertion by a spouse), the FBC elders believe it is important for each couple to study and consider the pertinent biblical texts on this subject and come to their own personal decision before God regarding His will in this matter. FBC pastors are encouraged, therefore, to provide a copy of the Divorce/Remarriage Worksheet to every couple considering remarrying after a divorce and either they or one of the elders being available to discuss with the couple these biblical issues.
- D. Though remarriages involving divorced couples will not be permitted at FBC or conducted by FBC pastors, if a couple after thoroughly considering the pertinent Scriptures arrives at the conclusion that they can in good faith proceed with their marriage based on the belief that

marital unfaithfulness or desertion was grounds for ending the previous marriage bond, and then subsequently go through with the remarriage ceremony outside Fellowship Bible Church, such couples will be accepted into fellowship at FBC and allowed to participate in ministry, except the positions of elder and deacon.

By taking this no divorce/no remarriage stance, the elders are not saying they have the “final word from God” on this issue. They are saying, however, that this view reflects accurately the teaching of Scripture based on their in depth study over a period of many years and are thus leading FBC accordingly. The desire of the elders is to raise the value of the marriage relationship to its rightful place as taught in Scripture. If marriage is understood as an indissoluble union; that divorce is not an option in the eyes of God; that He truly does hate divorce (Malachi 2:16); that Fellowship Bible Church is a church that is willing to take a bold stand for the sanctity of the marriage bond; then maybe, just maybe, our young people will grow up understanding that marriage is a serious matter before God and they must not enter it lightly. If that message is not coming from the church in a loud and clear way, what hope is there for the marriages of the future? The reader is therefore urged to consider the following biblical and practical reasons for this position.

V. **Biblical Reasons for this Statement:**

Even a casual reading of the clearest Scriptural passages pertaining to this subject seems to support a no divorce and no remarriage position. (See Malachi 2:16; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:10-12, 39.) There are two passages, Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, that have an “exception clause” which becomes the basis of alternative views to the no divorce/no remarriage position. And though these passages must be considered, the preponderance of clearly stated texts on divorce and remarriage strongly indicate the permanency of marriage until “death do us part.” (Note: this may be why all the church fathers throughout the first centuries of Christendom except one—Ambrosiaster—agreed that remarriage after divorce, whatever the cause, constituted adultery. It wasn’t until Erasmus that the view of conditional divorce and remarriage was espoused and then accepted by many of the Reformers.)

The teaching of Jesus supports a no divorce/no remarriage position as recorded in Mark’s and Luke’s Gospels (Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18). (Matthew’s account includes an “exception” clause which is the root of the confusion and disagreement to the no divorce/no remarriage position. However, there are defensible reasons why only Matthew recorded this exception clause, which will be mentioned below.)

When Jesus was asked by the Pharisees, seeking to trap him, whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all, He grounded His answer on Genesis 2 and the permanency of marriage. ***“Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”*** (Matthew 19:3-6). The word “cleave” implies a permanent bonding.

As far as Jesus was concerned, the only reason why Moses permitted the writing of a certificate of divorce (Deut. 24:1) was due to ***“the hardness of heart”*** because of sin.

The Apostle Paul's understanding of Jesus' teaching on this subject is found in 1

Corinthians 7:10-11 where Paul says: ***“But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not send his wife away.”*** It appears that Paul understood the Gospel accounts as teaching a no divorce/no remarriage position.

Paul also reveals his belief in the permanency of marriage in Romans 7:2-3 where he

uses marriage as an example in his teaching concerning the Christian's relationship to the law. He writes, ***“For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then if, while her husband is living, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man.”***

Paul's belief that only death dissolves the marriage bond is again clearly stated in 1

Corinthians 7:39, ***“A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.”***

The so-called “exception” clause found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 is focused around the Greek word *porneia* (“fornication” or “marital unfaithfulness” in the NIV). There is compelling evidence that since Mark and Luke did not record this exception clause but Matthew did, the reason for his inclusion of this clause is to be found in the nature of the audience he was writing to. The gospel accounts that Mark and Luke wrote were intended for a Gentile audience. But Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience. Matthew included the exception clause because within the Mosaic Law, which was written for the Jews, there were certain prohibitions regarding illicit, incestuous relationships that are recorded in Leviticus 18:6-18. It is very possible that this is the *porneia* Matthew refers to. These Levitical laws did not apply to Gentiles and therefore Mark and Luke saw no need to include the exception in their gospels written to Roman readers. (For a fuller treatment of this explanation see [The Divorce Myth](#) by J. Carl Laney.)

(Note: In Acts 15:22-29, when the Jerusalem elders appealed to the growing Gentile churches to abstain from certain practices so as not to upset the Jewish believers, on their list was abstaining ***“from fornication (porneia).***” It should be obvious that the elders were not asking them to abstain from sexual sins--that would have been understood. They were asking the Gentiles to abstain from those marriage relationships that every conscientious Jew would have avoided based on Leviticus 18. Therefore, in order to not unnecessarily trouble their Jewish brethren, Gentile believers were told to abstain from ***“things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication (porneia).***” These four prohibitions follow the order recorded in Leviticus 17-18. This provides very convincing evidence that Matthew's use of *porneia* likewise fits the Leviticus 18 laws and thus was intended only for his Jewish audience.)

The phrase in 1 Corinthians 7:15 ***“not under bondage”*** does not refer to the marriage bond. While many have interpreted these words as allowing for remarriage in the case of desertion, Paul doesn't mention remarriage in this verse at all. The only clear statement of the ending of the marriage bond and the permissibility of remarriage is in the case of widows in 1

Corinthians 7:39 and Romans 7:2-3. If Paul had meant the marriage bond was broken in 7:15, he could have easily used the same word for the marriage bond as he did in 7:39. But he did not. Furthermore, it is quite unlikely that Paul would prohibit divorce and remarriage in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 and then allow it only four verses later in 7:15. Rather, Paul is teaching in this verse that a believer who has been deserted by their spouse is “not under bondage” (i.e. “not enslaved”) to be pressured into preserving the union by following the deserter around like a slave seeking to maintain the marriage. Being enslaved is contrasted with being at peace. Rather than being a slave to an unwilling spouse, the believer can be at peace in the midst of a difficult situation. Paul also adds in 7:16, that by maintaining this posture of peace, the unbelieving spouse may eventually be saved—and by implication, the marriage too.

Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians follows the pattern of first addressing those who have lost a spouse to death (7:8-9 – the “unmarried” here is best taken as “widowers” correlating with “widows”). Then Paul addresses those who are currently married, either to a saved spouse (7:10-11) or an unsaved spouse (7:12-16). Finally, Paul addresses the issue of young virgins in 7:25-38. Granted, some interpretations find in these verses permission for divorced people to remarry. But such an interpretation is forced in light of the clear teaching from Paul in 7:10-11 that remarriage is not an option. It would be very inconsistent of Paul to clearly affirm no remarriage in one verse and then imply it is acceptable some verses later. The reference in verse 27 to being bound to a “wife” may be misleading because it may suggest that the man is already married. But in Greek the word for wife is simply “woman” and may refer to a man’s betrothed as well as his spouse. The context (“now concerning virgins”) dictates that the reference is to a man’s betrothed virgin, not to his spouse. So “being bound” and “being loosed” have reference to whether a person is betrothed or not.

VI. Practical Reasons for this Statement:

- A. Even if doubt remains in some minds as to whether a no divorce/no remarriage position is a viable option, it should be considered that the horrific affects on families and our society as a whole due to divorce should lead one to pursue reconciliation at all costs or remain single. Furthermore, if there is the slightest possibility that allowing for divorce and remarriage is offensive to God, should not those considering remarrying refrain from doing so instead of risking violating God’s will? Let us not forget that God clearly said in Malachi 2:16, ***“I hate divorce.”***
- B. Related to this, the no divorce/no remarriage position seems to call a person to trust God much more fully, leaning on Him and drawing from Him the grace and strength to either live in a less than desirable marriage or remain single, not contemplating remarriage. Too many times a divorce becomes man’s way of dealing with a bad marriage. Likewise, remarriage is too often times entered into without trusting God to change the heart of a spouse from whom one has been divorced. The no divorce/no remarriage position calls for greater faith to be sure, but opens the door to God’s greater display of His all-sufficient grace and thus greater glory for the One who said He would meet our every need through the riches of Christ.
- C. Such a position also has a very practical impact on those contemplating marriage. The unsaved world says, and sadly much of the evangelical world concurs, that divorce is always an option and remarriage is an opportunity for a fresh start. But the incredibly destructive consequences

of both are seldom acknowledged. Therefore, our young people enter into marriage relationships with little preparation and less and less commitment. Maybe greater care would be taken if they truly believed this marriage relationship was for life. When a local church takes a stand for the indissolubility of the marriage relationship and will not conduct remarriages unless the spouse is deceased, it would appear it is doing its young people a great service rather than a disservice.

- D. It should also be pointed out that if divorce and remarriage were permitted in a limited sense, this would cause serious problems when a remarriage was requested. A pastor who was willing to conduct the marriage and yet be biblically conscientious would need to investigate thoroughly the reasons why the divorce to the previous spouse(s) took place in the first place. Was there some marital unfaithfulness? Was the spouse deserted? Would there be any hope for reconciliation to the former spouse? Oftentimes, these questions are never asked. Should any pastor who holds to a limited divorce and remarriage position marry a divorced couple without thoroughly investigating these questions? And in reality, could such questions ever truly be satisfactorily answered? What pastor or elder board would be willing to go to the lengths needed to find out such information? Would the previous spouse be interviewed? And yet, if the view is held that only in the case of marital unfaithfulness or desertion can a remarriage take place otherwise the parties are committing adultery, shouldn't such investigations be taken seriously?
- E. There is another practical reason why the no divorce/no remarriage view is to be favored. Even though the biblical debate continues, practically speaking, views that permit divorce and remarriage have done nothing, it would appear, to stem the tide of marital breakups and strengthen the institution of marriage. A 2004 George Barna report indicates born again Christians are as likely to divorce as non-Christians. If Bible believing churches across this land would decide to adopt a no divorce/no remarriage position, we might begin to see a dramatic drop in the divorce rates, provided such policies were coupled with strong biblical discipleship, premarital counseling, and the mentoring of husbands and wives by mature men and women within the local church.

VII. Conclusion:

The above biblical and practical reasons have been put forth as support to why the elders of Fellowship Bible Church have adopted a no divorce/no remarriage position. And though other views on this issue are espoused today, the FBC elders hold the conviction that this statement reflects the biblical and thus, most beneficial view for the church today.

In reality, this no divorce/no remarriage position is a statement about the very high value of marriage. In a world that constantly attacks this oldest and most foundational of all institutions, it is important that the church of Jesus Christ, the “pillar and support of truth,” should do everything possible to uphold the “one man with one woman for life” position—taking seriously the words of Jesus, ***“what God has joined together let no man separate.”***

The FBC elders realize, however, that a no divorce/no remarriage statement is empty and meaningless apart from the needed ministries within the church that build Christ-like character in husbands and wives so that marriages can grow to be all that God has intended for them, and to minimize the fleshly tendencies of the human heart that can destroy relationships. Ministries are needed that help young men and young women who are contemplating marriage get the needed preparation that will help them make wise choices in whom they marry and how their marriages will be

lived out. Other ministries helping troubled marriages need to continually provide them with the solid footing of God's Word and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to live out that Word on a daily basis.

To this end the elders of Fellowship Bible Church are committed. And through God's enabling strength and grace FBC will continue to provide the needed resources and tools that will help Christian marriages and homes thrive amidst the marital carnage of this world.

VIII. Guidelines for Working with Divorced Couples Contemplating a Remarriage:

The following guidelines are written to specifically explain what role the Fellowship Bible Church pastors and staff should take when dealing with a couple seeking to be remarried after one or both have gone through a divorce. The FBC elders understand that it is one thing to come up with a position statement that takes a strong biblical stand on the issues of divorce and remarriage, but it is another thing to deal with the people involved. Couples contemplating remarrying need guidance to help them think through the Scriptural principles that inform their personal decision as to whether or not they can and should continue with their marriage plans.

Rarely does a couple planning on getting remarried spend the needed time to explore God's Word regarding God's view on divorce and remarriage. In fact, it would not be far-fetched to conclude that most couples planning on getting remarried after a divorce don't even know that God has spoken on this topic. It would seem that the world's way of thinking has superceded God's way of thinking. Paul wrote in Romans 12:2, *"and do not be conformed by the world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds that you can prove what the will of God is, that which is good and perfect and acceptable."* Effective spiritual shepherding leads people to God's truth, to God's heart in the matter of marriage. Effective spiritual oversight begins by helping people get their minds renewed through the power of the living Word.

Though the leadership at FBC has taken a strong stand on the issues of divorce and remarriage which does not permit remarriages to take place at FBC, this position in no way wants to communicate that couples considering remarrying, and who may in fact get remarried, are discarded and forgotten. The following guidelines, therefore, are set forth to explain just how the pastoral/shepherding role will be conducted towards such couples.

- A. First of all, all couples when inquiring about getting married at FBC are sent the typical packet of materials that they are required to read and fill out. If a couple indicates that one or both of them have been married before, an appointment will be set up with a pastor to sit down and explain the church's position about divorce and remarriage. At that point a Divorce/Remarriage Worksheet will be given to them for their personal study on this topic.
- B. But it does not end here, unless the couple desires it to end. If the couple is willing to meet further, the pastor or marriage mentor will meet up to 4 sessions with the couple to accomplish the following:
 - Discuss the biblical passages on the Worksheet with the couple, helping them understand the issues and why FBC has taken the position it has. The couple should come away, however, clearly understanding there are other views on this issue but that the FBC leadership believes the most biblical view is a no divorce/no remarriage position. The goal here is to help the couple wrestle with the Scriptures and realize that God does have something to say on this topic.

- Help the couple assess their own personal situation. What went wrong in their previous marriage? What did they contribute to the marriage failure? And if they were to decide they did have a biblical right to get remarried, how would they approach this second marriage differently?¹
- C. At this point, if a couple decides they will still go through with their remarriage plans, the FBC position statement will be reaffirmed and the couple will be on their own to plan their wedding without the use of FBC pastors or our facility.
- D. A couple who proceeds with their marriage and continues to fellowship at FBC will have access to all the marital discipleship and counseling that can be provided when needed. The role of the leaders is to help people grow into Christ-likeness, and this they will continue to do even with those who disagreed with the statement on divorce and remarriage.

¹ Note: the underlying belief here is that even though the FBC elders hold to a no divorce/no remarriage position, they are fully aware that many godly biblical teachers believe the Bible permits divorce and remarriage in certain situations. And if a couple after thoroughly and prayerfully studying the Scriptures comes to that same conclusion, upon request they will be shepherded by being provided resources on a biblical marriage that they can personally study on their own.