

After an Affair

As Christians who are not in the public eye, most of us will be spared the drama President Clinton experienced as a result of his relationship with Monica Lewinsky. However, a number of us may have to deal with the reality of an extramarital affair.

Bill and Dawn are a good example. Married for seven years, they hit a bump in the road when Dawn, who worked in a male-dominated engineering firm, began going to lunch with one of her male co-workers.

Initially their conversation was friendly but platonic. However, it became more intimate as time went by, and before long, it had led to a physical relationship.

Dawn admitted the affair to Bill. He was devastated. Unsure how to handle the breach of marital covenant, he called a close Christian friend. The friend suggested that Bill leave his wife and make her pay for humiliating him. He had a biblical "out."

Another Christian friend had a different approach. He asked Bill if his wife would go to counseling to try to reconcile the relationship. Bill didn't know what Dawn wanted.

The friend suggested that Bill think about what God wanted in the situation. God permits divorce in cases of adultery, but nowhere in the Bible does He demand or encourage divorce, not

even for adultery.

The model of Christ is forgiveness and reconciliation. Christ commands both. Many spouses are willing to forgive adultery but unwilling to reconcile the relationship. Sadly, they choose to exercise their biblical “out” even with a partner who confesses and repents from his or her sin and wants to reconcile.

There is no question about the fact that extramarital affairs are devastating to marriages. The consequences are serious and sometimes life-threatening, given the transmission of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Furthermore, the trauma a spouse experiences with the discovery of an affair is significant. Symptoms are similar to those of post-traumatic stress disorder: anxiety attacks, grief, anger, hostility and so on.

Nonetheless, infidelity does not doom marriages to failure. Whether a couple can pick up the broken pieces of a tenuous relationship has everything to do with their willingness to exercise the grace and forgiveness of God. These do not come naturally, given the breach. But through the Spirit, people can do unnatural things.

If we believe God is able to heal tumors, cancers and diseases of the body, we can believe He is able to heal broken relationships. The problem is, many of us don't want healing by way of restoration. We prefer to leave the marriage and then be healed.

If you have a partner who has confessed an affair, is willing

to receive counseling and is determined to change, work with him or her and believe God for reconciliation. Affairs are usually symptomatic of deeper issues that need to be resolved, and restoration of the marriage will require the participation of both spouses. Here are some steps to take to begin the process:

1. Cease all contact with the person outside the marriage who was involved in the affair.

2. Express feelings related to the crisis.

3. Identify what made you vulnerable to an affair.

4. Figure out what the affair meant. Did you lose your spiritual grounding or want to hurt your partner? Are you afraid of intimacy, or is there some other reason for it occurring?

5. Forgive. Unforgiveness leads to bitterness and a host of physical and psychological problems.

6. Build caring moments into the relationship again.

7. Move toward reconciliation. Restore trust by trustworthy behavior and assurance. Don't live in fear of a recurrence. Determine to do things God's way.

8. Get counseling that incorporates the Word, prayer and leading of the Holy Spirit. There may be multiple wounds to be healed.

9. Don't live in continual condemnation after trust and true repentance have been established.

10. Believe God can restore what was broken and lost. This is His business. Your past is not a prologue to your future in God. *