

Guard Your Heart From Emotional Ties

✖ As her fingers eased over the piano keys, repeating gently the notes of the last chord of “Purify My Heart,” Karen knew in her spirit that many had been touched by the worship this evening. A lingering smile sent her way from Wes, the worship team leader, confirmed it.

Karen slid quietly off the piano bench and headed for the music office. She glanced at her watch. If her husband, Marty, had been here, he would have been irritated that the music had taken so much time. He was always in a hurry to get home to his computer and *The Wall Street Journal*. She sighed.

“What was the sigh for?” asked Wes, who had been following her down the dimly lit hall of the Sunday school wing. “A pretty lady like you shouldn’t have a care in the world! And your piano playing was ... was ... how can I describe the beauty and majesty you draw from those keys? Just being on the same team with you has been a thrill for me.”

Karen slowed her steps to match his.

“So what was that sigh all about? You can tell me. We’ve been friends too long to have secrets.”

The soft tones of his voice, his physical closeness, the shadow of his strong, lean frame cast down the hall by the single light behind them brought a great longing for his touch.

Marty never thought of comforting or understanding her, Karen thought to herself wryly. He was always living in another world, a world of business deals and big bucks. He figured she was strong enough to take care of herself.

But he was wrong; Karen was lonely. Surely God had sent Wes into her life to let her know that she was really of special value to someone.

So she poured out her heart to him. And for the first time, Wes reached out and drew her into his arms as she cried.

Together, Karen and Wes stepped closer to the rim of *the ledge*.

It begins innocently enough. There's no plan to entice or injure anyone, just a desire to express how one feels.

"You are special, really special! I've never met anyone before who understands me like you do."

Or simply, "What fun we have together!"

Something springs to life within us at these words, and the connection is made. There's just one problem: At least one of us is married—to someone else.

The temptation to allow someone into our hearts who has no right to be there lurks in every role of ministry. Worship leaders, musicians, youth ministers, pastors, secretaries and counselors are yielding to it in alarming numbers. The end result—what I call "spiritual adultery"—is rarely discerned until it turns sexual.

Yielding to Temptation

I learned of spiritual adultery the hard way—by succumbing to it myself. It overtook me at a time when I was very confident of my love for God and my devotion to my family.

True, my husband and I had endured some rocky times, with both of us wishing we had married someone more sensitive to our needs. But at this particular time, problems in our marriage were "under control," and we seemed quite happy. I was trusting God that our relationship would, in time, become all that He wanted it to be.

Meanwhile, my teaching at a large, residential discipleship ministry was bearing good fruit. Although all my students were men, I was confident that I was too strong, too mature and too spiritual to be tempted to be unfaithful to God or my husband. I had learned to maintain physical and psychological distance from them by dressing modestly and behaving professionally. I wanted to be an effective teacher, not a distraction.

This had been relatively easy to accomplish in the classroom. But when I was given an intern to train one-on-one, I was in for a surprise.

The intern and I shared an office and worked well together. His deep hunger for God and his grasp of the Scriptures greatly touched me. In turn, he expressed to me how deeply my love for the Lord ministered to his spirit—something I had longed for years to hear from my husband, but hadn't.

We found it very easy to be open with one another about our personal lives. At times, it seemed as though we could read each other's minds! We took every possible opportunity to study together and encourage one another.

I was happier than I could remember ever having been before. The relationship seemed like a gift from God. I was loved for me, just as I was! Someone believed in me and cared what I thought and felt.

But my life became split. There was life at the ministry with the intern, where I was appreciated and understood; and there was life at home, where I felt I never measured up.

My authorities at the ministry warned me not to spend so much time with the intern. But I thought they were being narrow-minded. To abandon such joy was unthinkable! I was going to prove I could be best friends with someone who wasn't my husband and not commit sin.

Turning Point

Then one day I began reading John Sanford's book *Why Some Christians Commit Adultery*. It opens with a description of spiritual adultery, the unintentional entering into one another's hearts that easily occurs between trusting people who spend time together, especially in ministry.

When I read this description, I knew something wasn't right. I asked for the afternoon off and headed for a public park in the next town.

All the way there, I begged God to show me my heart. As I spent hours walking the footpaths in the park, God brought back to me memory after memory of times I had denied Him, abused my leadership position in the ministry, betrayed trust and become a law unto myself.

Finally, face down on the ground, I cried out to God for mercy. My heart broke as I saw my darkness, and I repented of what He had shown me.

He met me there in that special moment, and I knew I was forgiven. But the long process of cleansing would take years and would prove to be full of pain—as well as great promise—for my life.

In the months to come, God taught me, step by step as I could bear it, deeper matters regarding love and the sanctity of my spirit. One night, when I found myself unable to sleep, I stumbled upon Malachi 2:14-16: "The Lord is acting as the witness between you and the [husband] of your youth, because you have broken faith with [him], though [he] is your partner, the [husband] of your marriage covenant.

"Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His. And why one? Because He was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the [husband] of your youth" (NIV).

I was pierced through! For the first time, I had a revelation

of how serious God was about covenant. It didn't matter in the slightest how happy I was with my husband. At all costs, I was to "guard my spirit" and not break faith with him. I had sinned on both counts.

I also had broken faith with God. He had told me to trust Him in all things and not to have any other gods in my life. But I had made an idol out of "being loved."

I had broken God's heart by looking to someone else to meet my needs. I had forgotten that I was indeed His Bride, too, married to Him forever. He had been loving me dearly all the time, but I had not learned to draw from that love.

The intern suffered immeasurably as a new Christian because I had allowed him to look to me instead of to God for deep friendship and love. I had sinned in thinking I had the right to be anything special to him.

For more than a year after that, the Lord washed me over and over again as I wept at His feet. His great mercy, love and forgiveness comforted me as each lesson was burned into my heart.

In the midst of the healing process, the Lord reminded me of something. Nine months before I met the intern, I had prayed that God would send His refiner's fire into my life to expose and burn up anything in my heart that could come between Him and me. God had simply answered my prayer! I began to sense His holiness as never before and to learn how thoroughly I am to worship Him.

Because spiritual adultery is not sexual, we often are not on guard against it. But it is every bit as dangerous. It slowly eats away at our relationships with God and others, inevitably destroying intimacy and trust. Little by little, it poisons our spirits, setting the stage for sexual adultery.

Are You at Risk?

Candidates for spiritual adultery are typically committed and spiritually sensitive people who would be appalled at the thought of ever being unfaithful to God or their spouses.

But they usually share a common misconception: that human love can rescue them from their weaknesses and failures, hurts and sorrows, and that it is their inalienable right. They haven't fully grasped the truth that God can not only meet their needs but also more than compensate for a lack of love from others. Without realizing it, they have judged His love insufficient.

The truth is that God's love is perfect all the time! It is always there, always capable of making us truly happy. And the best news is that it isn't based on our performance, and it never pulls back.

Renewed Marriage

During the months that followed my repentance, my husband and I were greatly helped through Christian counseling. We slowly discovered and dealt with the root problems and judgments within each of our hearts that had set the stage for spiritual adultery.

It has taken a long time, but we have finally become good friends who can tell the truth and bear to hear it from each other. We have a brand-new respect for each other, out of which is growing a faithful love.

This can be your story, too—if you are willing to let go of improper relationships rather than clinging to them. Wishing things were different or that you had married someone else will throw you into the lap of deception—not help you grow.

Feelings of powerlessness, inferiority, loneliness, rejection, anger and jealousy, along with poor communication, an excessive desire for attention, fantasizing and ungratefulness must be acknowledged and resolved. You need to forgive, repent, and be cleansed and healed.

If you have connected deeply with someone else, ask God to dissolve all spiritual and emotional ties with that other person and to totally take away any vestiges of unseemly love or affection that might still be in you.

After separating yourself from the person spiritually, you must also separate physically. The person must be dead to you! It is often necessary to change churches, move into a different ministry or even leave the area.

For a time, thoughts and longings for that person usually return, even though you have repented. When they do, take them captive and give up ownership of them to God. Don't dwell on them! Use the temptation as an opportunity to thank God for saving you from a worse fate, and recommit yourself to faithfulness to God and your family.

If it is your mate who falls into spiritual adultery, ask yourself what insensitivity on your part might have contributed to it. You may need to do some soul-searching and repenting of your own.

Start talking with and truly listening to your spouse. Swallow your pride, and get help for your marriage before it is too late. You and your mate are more important than any ministry, and if leaving the ministry will facilitate healing, do it.

Those of us in ministry must have our lives in order. Whatever seeds of selfishness or imbalance we allow into our private lives will be sown alongside the good seed of the Word we minister. Every part of the kingdom of self must be torn down to produce an undefiled life message that is safe to give to others.

Illegal bonding, spirit to spirit, pollutes our lives, marriages and ministries. It destroys discernment and twists reality. We must guard our hearts at any cost. It is time to take responsibility and grow up! Spiritual adultery is a deadly deception; no one involved in it escapes unscathed.

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