

ADULTERY

Adultery

"No good Christian man or woman gets up in the morning, looks out the window, and says, 'My, this is a lovely day! I guess I'll go out and commit adultery.' Yet many do it anyway."

Florence Littauer

Adultery can happen to the best of us. After all, if it could happen to King David -- "a man after God's own heart" -- it could happen to any of us.

As we've painfully witnessed in this "adulterous" generation, adultery can literally rock and destroy the foundations of society by eroding the family unit.

The Book of Proverbs, which has much to say about the subject of adultery, counsels God's people to "Drink water from your own cistern, and fresh water from your own well."⁷⁸ In that book, Solomon, who ironically proved the truth of the very words he penned, pointed out how adultery will destroy you:

- sexually (Proverbs 5:9-11)
- spiritually (Proverbs 5:12-13)
- socially (Proverbs 5:14)

Therefore, he aptly summed up by concluding that, "The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; he who would destroy himself does it."⁷⁹

The Best Defense Against the Offense of Adultery

Robert Bell noted in **Premarital Sex in a Changing Society** that premarital sex increases the probability of adultery occurring after marriage begins. Dr. Alfred Kinsey also discovered this same correlation in his exhaustive studies. So don't get in the practice of being sexually promiscuous before marriage if you want to remain faithful after you say "I do!" After studying 250 couples, psychologist Nena

⁷⁷ Acts 13:22

⁷⁸ Proverbs 5:15, NASB

⁷⁹ Proverbs 6:32, NASB

O'Neill concluded that the most stable marriages are based upon sexual fidelity." Fidelity is based on the presumption of faithfulness to God's commandments.

So, first, your best defense is to build a good marriage and never presume that it couldn't happen to you. Just as happened in Joseph's case, it was Potiphar's wife who "hit on him." That is how it often happens. Frequently, many people don't go out looking for an affair; it either comes looking for them or it just happens.

Adultery Starts in the Mind

Our Lord Jesus Christ, in his customary fashion, taught us that adultery starts in the mind. It is conceived in lust. Lust is a much stronger word than mere physical attraction. Lust is the conscious decision to think about having sex with another person or indulging in sexually fantasy. It is virtually impossible just to stop doing something "cold turkey." Rather, we must replace adulterous or impure thoughts with pure thoughts. Seek a clean and pure heart. Keep it and guard it from the "filth" of this world. Contrary to the opinions of some, the "visual images" of sex are powerful and affect 'is profoundly. Therefore, don't "program" your mind to be a receptacle for adulterous images n television or movie screens.

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." (Matthew 5:27-28)

As one writer put it, Jesus in effect was saying, "To want what is wrong sexually is just as evil as to *do what is wrong sexually.*"⁸¹

Monitor Your Marriage

Research has concluded that couples who are happy with their marital sexual relations are less likely to leave a marriage." Monitor your relationship with both your spouse and God:

⁸⁰Robert C. Tucker and Leota M. Tucker, "Lovers and Other Friends," *Essence*, October 1980, pp. 118.

⁸¹Tim Stafford, "Great Sex: Reclaiming a Christian Sexual Ethic," *Christianity Today*, Vol. 31, October 2, 1987, p. 43.

⁸²Philip Blumstein and Peter Schwartz, *American Couples* (New York: Morrow Publishers, 1983), p. - 201.

- find quiet time to talk together
- enhance your closeness
- keep romance kindling
- think about pleasing your spouse
- don't take your spouse for granted
- don't be naive about someone trying to seduce you -- it happens!
- don't trust yourself -- ever
- don't place yourself in compromising situations
- think about the consequences of adultery if you are tempted

Jewish men were exempt from military service for one year so that the newly wed couple could get to "know" each other:

When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, neither shall he be charged with any business: but he shall be free at home one year, and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken.⁸³

The Hebrew word for "cheer" ("samach") literally means "to delight, to know, and to discover what would be pleasing to her." Successful marriages come about by spending time together and growing together.

Another key to preventing adultery is to develop your friendship with your spouse on a continual basis. Remember, they'll be by your side long after your kids are gone.

Friendship is the one common ingredient among couples who seem to have it all together. Friends are the people you miss the most when you're lonely -- the ones who warm your life, comfort, applaud, support and forgive you. Friends work out problems, accept differences, have patience and grow together.⁸⁴

Success Story

Joseph and Potiphar's wife

Although he wasn't married himself at the time, Joseph was nevertheless tempted by a very married woman. She literally threw herself at him. Joseph took the prudent course and fled the painted face of temptation. His primary motivation for just saying no was "how then can I do this great

⁸³Deuteronomy 24:5

⁸⁴Ibid, p. 89.

wickedness, and sin against God?"⁸⁵

Adultery Breaks Up Families

There are many detrimental effects that adultery inflicts upon the family unit⁸⁶:

- after divorce, children are twice as likely to live in poverty than they were before the breakup⁸⁷
- about 350,000 children are kidnapped by family members involved in custody battles⁸⁸
- divorce is very stressful on children⁸⁹
- 1988 National Health Interview Survey on Child Health indicates an excess risk of negative health and performance indicators among children who don't live with both biological parents⁹⁰
- some claim that divorce is the main cause of problems that children face today⁹¹

⁸⁵Genesis 39:9

⁸⁶See the recent article in *The Atlantic Monthly* entitled "Dan Quayle Was Right" in the April 1993 issue, Vol. 271, No. 4, pp. 47-84 for an excellent summary on how the deterioration of the family has affected children.

⁸⁷Jason Deparle, "Child Poverty Twice As Likely After Family Split, Study Says," *New York Times*, March 2, 1991, p. A-8.

⁸⁸J.C. Barden, "Bitter Sign of the Times: Children Abducted by Parents," *New York Times*, May 6, 1990, p. A-30.

⁸⁹Paul Taylor, "Therapists Rethink Attitudes on Divorce," *The Washington Post*, January 29, 1991, p. A-1.

⁹⁰Deborah A. Dawson, "Family Structure and Children's Health and Well-Being: Data from the 1988 National Health Interview Survey on Child Health," *Journal of Marriage & the Family*, vol. 53, no. 3, August 1991, pp. 573-34.

⁹¹"Second Thoughts on Divorce," *Economist*, vol. 320, no. 7720, August 17, 1991, pp. 23-24.

- there is a significant correlation between children from broken homes and juvenile delinquency⁹²
- child homicide rates are higher in divorced homes⁹³
- effects of divorce on children are still evident many years afterwards⁹⁴

In his book *Emotions, Can You Trust Them?*, Dr. James Dobson highlights the impact infidelity can have upon a marriage:

Who can deny a society is seriously weakened when the intense sexual urge between men and women becomes an instrument for suspicion and intrigue within millions of individual families; when a woman never knows what her husband is doing when away from home; when a husband can't trust his wife in his absence; when half of the brides are pregnant at the altar; when both newlyweds have slept with numerous partners, losing the exclusive wonder of the marital bed; when everyone is doing his own thing, particularly that which brings him immediate sensual gratification.⁹⁵

Spouses effected by adultery must deal with:

- shock
- anger
- grief
- depression
- guilt
- loneliness

As a counsellor, you must get one or both of the spouses to come to grips with these emotions. Forgiveness from the heart is imperative if the marriage is to be salvaged. Look for these signs and help the family deal with them.

⁹²Edward L. Wells and Joseph H. Rankin, "Families and Delinquency: A Meta-Analysis of the Impact of Broken Homes," *Social Problems*, vol. 38, no. 1, February 1991, pp. 71-93.

⁹³Rosemary Gartner, "Family Structure, Welfare Spending, and Child Homicide in Developed Democracies," *Journal of Marriage & the Family*, vol. 53, no. 1, February 1991, pp. 231-240.

⁹⁴Anastasia Toufexis and Georgia Harbison, "The Lasting Wounds of Divorce," *Time*, vol. 133, no. 6, February 6, 1989, p. 61.

⁹⁵James Dobson, *Emotions -- Can You Trust Them?* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1980), pp. 666-7.

Resources

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