

# FINDING THE BROKEN PIECES



COMPILED AND EDITED BY TIM TEDDER, LMHC, NCC

# **Finding the Broken Pieces**

Edited by Tim Tedder, LMHC, NCC

A Resource of [AffairHealing.com](http://AffairHealing.com)



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# Introduction

I'm very open about my story. The brokenness experienced through my affair years ago eventually led me into counseling. The passion that drives me to help others recover from the trauma of an affair isn't just professional; it's personal. I want them to have better tools than I had.

In 2009, I created the [AffairHealing.com](http://AffairHealing.com) website to provide information and resources to anyone who was looking for help. The site reaches thousands of people each month and I plan to continue expanding its content and services.

The most popular area of the site has been the Affair Stories section. This PDF eBook includes a few of the most popular stories along with a number of additional stories and articles only available in this publication.

All the stories are true. The participants have provided clear and honest testimonies, although some names and some details have been altered to protect identities. They agreed to let their affair experiences be told with hope that their stories will be helpful to others.

I hope you will be challenged and encouraged by what you read here.



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*Additional information about services offered by Tim Tedder:*

- **[AffairHealing.com](http://AffairHealing.com)**  
Infidelity recovery help and resources
- **[CurrentsCounseling.com](http://CurrentsCounseling.com)**  
Counseling services offered in Winter Park, Florida
- **[MarriageICU.com](http://MarriageICU.com)**  
Retreat program for couples in crisis

## 4 Lessons Learned: 20 Years After My Affair

*Reflections on what I've learned and what I wish I'd known twenty years ago.*

— Tim Tedder

I remember one particular afternoon in college when, for some reason, I became deeply contemplative during a walk from class to my dorm room. My considerations turned to future expectations, imagining what path my life would take. What would I be doing in the decades to come? How successful would I be? What would my wife look like? How many children would we have? What would it feel like to live the life of my choosing? I tried to imagine it all.

I stopped in front of Pickett Hall and thought, "I'm going to always remember this moment." I wanted that day's thoughts of hope to be a measure against whatever realities would eventually come in years ahead.

What my life became was not too far off that measure. I was married to a beautiful woman and we had five children together. (Okay, maybe there were only two kids in my original imaginations, but she easily persuaded me to expand my vision.) I was respected and successful in my career with invitations to expanding opportunities. So far, so good.

Then came The Fall. I had an affair. My life took a turn never considered during that college walk. It twisted into something nearly unrecognizable.

The details of my affair are really no different from thousands of other similar stories. The short version is this: I was dissatisfied with my marriage. I felt irresistibly drawn to another woman. I wanted nothing more than to experience every pleasure of being with her. I lost my job. I lost my marriage. I broke the hearts of my children. I went through several years of darkness before healing began.

After healing, friends encouraged me to build on my past counseling experience (I had counseled families for many years) by becoming a licensed counselor. I returned to school, completed my masters degree, and began practicing in the Midwest. In 2008, I moved to Orlando where I continue to help couples in crisis through my Currents Counseling Services.

I deal with affairs every day. Sometimes, the stories that come into my office remind me of my own, sometimes in very powerful ways. I use to avoid that pain, but whenever it shows up now, I sit with it for a while. Good lessons are often learned in those moments.

But I wish I'd learned these things before the pain; before the regret. Most of all, I wish I'd learned these four lessons.

## 1 Lesson One: Affairs start before you do anything.

I didn't cross the line between fidelity and infidelity when I first kissed, said I love you, or had sex with the other woman. I crossed it long before that. Here are two "beginning steps" in my affair that started before a single inappropriate word or touch was made.

### **The First Step: A pattern of compromising friendships with women.**

Years before I met my affair partner, I eagerly engaged in friendships with various women who were attractive to me in different ways. My wife almost always recognized these friendships and felt threatened by them, but I dismissed her concerns. I never admitted to anything inappropriate, but the truth was I did become emotionally attached to these women.

There were no intimate conversations, no inappropriate gestures. Even so, these relationships started to feel a little bit like romance, even though I wouldn't have called it that. Time spent with them became more exciting than time spent with my wife. I created opportunities to be with them, anticipated those moments, and occasionally fantasized about more intimate interactions.

I'm not suggesting that heterosexual men and women can't have healthy, wholesome friendships, but it can be complicated. In my case, at least, this unhealthy pattern became so normal that the step into an affair was a relatively easy one.

I should have been more honest to myself and to my wife. I should have set better boundaries. I should have talked to a counselor! It's very likely that if I had done those things, my affair would have been avoided.

### **The Second Step: Fantasizing about the affair before it happened.**

My affair started as a friendship with the kind of compromising thinking described above, but it quickly evolved into more persistent fantasies. Even while I still convinced myself that I would never actually *have* an affair, I started thinking more and more about the other woman and what it would be like to be in a romantic relationship with her. I compared this fantasy to my marriage, and the fantasy won every time. I started wondering what it would be like to experience sex with her. And all the while, I kept convincing myself that these private pleasures were safe; I wasn't doing anything wrong.

**All the while, I kept convincing myself that these private pleasures were safe; I wasn't doing anything wrong.**

One morning, a good friend came into my office to chat. He was someone who cared about me and always encouraged me in my marriage. As he was leaving, he asked about my secretary, an

attractive woman with a lively personality. “Tim, is she ever a distraction? Could that ever be a problem for you?”

I smiled and said, “Honestly, no.” But what I wanted to say in that moment was, “No, not her. But if maybe I should tell you about someone else...” I considered saying that, but I didn’t. I still believed I could keep things under control.

These private, secret thoughts became the subtle steps that led me to the door of the affair and then held my hand as I knocked. I was already in before the door was opened.

## **2 Lesson Two: Some consequences are permanent.**

In the middle of my affair, I was lucid enough to realize there would be consequences to my choices, but I did not want to acknowledge the permanent damage being done. I convinced myself that everything would stabilize over time.

These mental games were especially necessary when considering my children. There is no way I could continue the affair if I believed I was causing deep damage to them, so I softened my guilt with these arguments:

1. They are young. (My youngest was pre-school and my oldest was going into middle school.) They’ll mature and the negative effects won’t be permanent.
2. This period of pain (and I cringe as I write this) might even make them stronger. I know plenty of people who have survived broken homes and seem to be doing quite well!
3. I’ll be a better father if I’m living a passionate life instead of settling for something that doesn’t excite me anymore.

You don’t know my children, but all five of them are beautiful, unique, gifted individuals. If anyone is capable of surviving a broken home, they are. So you need to hear me when I say that none of my children survived without being broken in some significant way.

**None of my children survived without being broken in some significant way.**

Yes, they are strong. Yes, they have learned from the pains they endured and are making positive impacts in their world. Yes, I am so proud of every one of them. But I am very aware, too, that each of them carries a wound that has not completely healed.

Their wounds will always matter to me. They love me and forgive me. I have accepted their forgiveness, but my deepest regret will always be over the cost they paid for my choices.

Additionally, these affair consequences were also permanent:

1. Lost Friendships: I know there were good people who were just too hurt and confused to maintain a friendship with me anymore, especially as the affair continued. I tried to pretend like I didn't care, but I did.
2. Damaged Reputation: No matter how much I heal... no matter how much I work to repair what I've broken... no matter how much I embrace grace and hope in my own life, many people consider me differently than they did before.
3. Financial Instability: I lost my job because of the affair. I floundered for many, many years. I still am paying off debts incurred.

### **3 Lesson Three: I'm not an exception to the rule.**

If you had come to me two months before my affair started and said, "Tim, you're going to cheat on your wife," I would have laughed, "No way!" My response would have been sincere.

Affairs were for people who were idiots or sex-crazed, or maybe sex-crazed idiots, but not for me. I knew better. I'd seen the story play out too many times in other marriages and knew what the outcome of that choice would be.

Somehow, though, I eventually convinced myself that my affair was the exception. I believed the relationship I had with my affair partner was special and enduring. The emotional and sexual connection we experienced felt just too real, much more than the temporary fling that characterizes most affairs.

Ours was different because:

- Conversation flowed easily.
- We shared many common interests.
- We shared similar life views and desires for the future.
- Our emotional connection was deep and growing.
- Laughter was effortless.
- Sex was mutually (and frequently) desired and enjoyed.
- We experienced a quick, natural bond. Even though I knew it was cliché, I believed we were soul mates.

I hear these same arguments expressed every week by the clients who talk to me. Different characters, different circumstances... same story, same arguments.

Recently, one client, struggling in the beginning of his affair, sent me an email:

*Sometimes I think of a life with [the other woman] as the adventure... [she] is mysterious and uncertain, but the connection is SO POWERFUL. I feel*

*helplessly drawn to her... Everyone says this is infatuation but it seems so much more to me. I've been thinking about this for the past few weeks and it seems like the only reason why I want to stay in my marriage is because [it's the thing I'm suppose to do]. Sometimes I honestly think [the other woman] is the person I'm meant to be with. My head feels so clear when I think about this...*

*Here's another point and this is SO CRAZY, but it's almost like [she] meets me where we both need to be in conversation. It's like we are always moving toward each other in conversation. I realize that we haven't had what's considered a true relationship but we've had some pretty serious conversations and I can honestly say that we are always [connecting]. It's uncanny the stuff that comes out of her mouth is almost verbatim the stuff that comes out of mine. I mean I know I'm talking crazy talk right now, but I'VE NEVER EXPERIENCED SOMETHING LIKE THIS BEFORE!*

*Every time I have conversation, I learn something new that just connects me ever closer to her. One would say WELL STOP TALKING TO HER, but it's like my soul is thirsting for more. It's my soul and my heart. This isn't just some high school crush. I feel love, deep deep love for someone, a love that I never thought I would ever feel... Even at our highest peak, I've never felt anything like this for [my wife].*

*I know I know I know I know I know, life with [the other woman] would have hardships, but this relationship feels so pure... I learned the other day that her views of sex go hand in hand with mine. WHERE THE HELL WAS THIS PERSON 10 YEARS AGO? WHY NOW?!*

He's convinced that his affair is special; it's the kind of relationship that will last. But you know what? One day he'll realize that this was no exception. Mine wasn't, either. (I can't help but wonder how many people will read this and still come up with a dozen reasons why their affair is unique.)

#### **4 Lesson Four: I could have changed my marriage.**

One common question I get: *If you could go back in time, knowing everything you know now, do you think you would be content going back to your marriage?*

If I could go back, it wouldn't be to the same marriage. You know what would be different? ME!

How do I know that's true? Because the way I love in my current marriage (to a woman who was previously married to a cheater, but that's another story) is the way I should

have loved my first wife. I use to blame her for my discontent but failed to take responsibility for my part in building a strong connection in our marriage.

It was too easy for me to just shut down when I was unhappy. But now I want to love better than that. I'm learning to move toward my wife, lovingly and honestly, even when hurt or disappointment gets between us.

Of course, I'll never know what that change might have looked like in my first marriage, but knowing my ex-wife, I suspect we would have been surprised at what our marriage could become. And our children, of course, would have a much different story to tell.

### **Bonus Lesson: Grace is the remedy for shame.**

My affair introduced me to a new companion: shame. It crept up from behind and clung to me like a sick man too weary to walk, forcing me drag its dead weight around. I was exhausted, depressed. I sometimes wondered if not living was better than living like this.

Then another friend started showing up: grace. I'd known this friend before, but not well; not like she wanted to be known. It was grace that eventually lifted shame off my back and reminded me what it feels like to be free.

Grace is the act of giving blessing even when it's not deserved. It tells us, "You can stop trying to be good enough. You don't have to undo your failures. I choose to love you anyway."

Grace has healed me. Maybe it would be more honest to say that grace continues to heal me. This happens in many ways, but let me give you the most profound examples of grace in my life.

1. My children have forgiven me and love me. They don't constantly show me their scars to remind me of the wounds I inflicted. They choose to honor me instead. (But, oh, I wish I could take away those scars.)
2. My ex-wife joined me in filming our story for a show appearing on Oprah's network. Despite the fact that the producers edited the story in such a way as to make it nearly a work of fiction, she had joined me with the intent of presenting a message of grace and forgiveness.

**Shame crept up from behind and clung to me like a sick man too weary to walk, forcing me to carry its dead weight around.**

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3. Knowing my story (all of it) my current wife, Sharon, risked trusting me even though she had once been married to a man who repeatedly cheated. She swore she would never date a man who had ever been unfaithful, but she gave me grace. I love her for it.
4. I am a counselor today because of grace. I never intended to be a therapist, but I'm in just the right place. All the things I've learned about change and growth and healing (in my life and in the life of my clients) have come because of my failures, not despite them. Grace made something good out of something bad, and I find joy in that.
5. God is the author of grace. My spiritual story is long and complicated, but it comes down to a simple truth: Grace is a gift from God, not something we have to earn (Ephesians 2:8-9). I remember a scene in the book Pilgrim's Progress where Pilgrim struggled up a steep hill with the heavy bundle of guilt and shame strapped to his back. He reached the top to find the cross there. When he knelt, the straps broke and his burden rolled away. That's grace. ■



## The Truth

**Craig:** She insisted we go to a different counselor, and that's when we started seeing Tim. I still had my guard up. I figured I was walking into a firing squad because everything was my fault. Actually, I knew I was pretty much to blame for what was happening, but I still didn't want to admit it. Those first few sessions, I was very guarded. I was very good at hiding and lying, but I wasn't very good at saying I'm sorry. The shame I felt was a bitch.

**Lauren:** I needed to know he was telling me the truth and when it came to the facts of the affairs, I believed he had told me everything, but I wasn't sure what he was feeling. I needed him to be honest about everything, so during one of our counseling sessions I asked him if he still missed the woman from the latest affair. That was a huge part of it for me because the affair had gone on for so long and had ended only because he'd been caught. Since he wasn't talking about how he felt, I was afraid he secretly wanted to go back to her. His willingness to talk about that was an important step for us being able to move forward. As hard as it was to hear all of it, the fact that he was honest helped assure me that he wasn't holding on to secrets anymore.

**Craig:** I thought I'd been doing damage control by not admitting to certain things about my affairs. I knew the truth would hurt her more, and so I didn't want to admit to some things. I was so use to lying, it felt like I didn't even know how to tell the truth. For a while, I was constantly correcting myself... saying something one day and then calling her up the next to say I'm sorry for lying and then telling the truth.

**As hard as it was to hear, the fact that he was honest helped assure me that he wasn't holding on to secrets anymore.**

Being committed to honesty became empowering. It was easier to just admit the truth than to keep trying to control all the information. I eventually told her, "Okay, I'll make you this promise: I won't lie to you, but you won't always like what you get."

That was freedom. It felt like I could cut loose from all the bullshit and start focusing on making our marriage better.

## Recovery

**Lauren:** If we had gone through the truth-telling and then he'd had the attitude of "now that's over, so let's just move forward," I don't think we would have gotten through this the way we have. The affair didn't just go away; it was still a big part of my every day. The way he responded to me being angry and hurt was important. The fact that he tried to be understanding and continued to take ownership of the affairs instead of being defensive was all reassuring.

From that point on, he tried to show me that he was an open book. He gave me access to his cell phone and computer and kept in touch regarding where he was and who he was with. All those things showed a commitment on his part. For me, that was critical in order for us to move forward together.

We went to counseling a lot and things seemed to be getting much better over the next few months. The commitment to talking regularly and consistently about our recovery helped bring us together. There were ups and downs, but we put a lot of work into it and were actually surprised at how well we were doing.

**Craig:** I think we even said to ourselves, “Shouldn’t it be harder than this?” That’s about the time that [the other woman] sent me an email.

**Lauren:** Maybe that was part of reason things began to change for me, I’m not really sure. I think it was more than that, but for some reason I started sinking into sadness and anger. After all the progress we’d made, it was discouraging to feel all that again.

**Craig:** It got dark for awhile. There was a lot of tension and our communication wasn’t very good. It felt like doom and I even think I said at one point, “Why are we bothering to do this?”

**Lauren:** I felt stuck in that for nearly a month before I decided to start taking medication. But I continued to sink until I hit an all-time low. One night, after drinking a little too much, I went crazy in my anger. I attacked him. It was pretty severe. It was so bad, in fact, that someone called the police.

I woke up in jail the next morning, not even sure what had happened until I read the police report. I was sure that this was the end, that Craig had probably already changed the locks on the house and called an attorney. I was afraid I was going to lose everything.

But when he showed up, all I got from him was forgiveness. He meant it, too. He’s never brought it up again since then. I think that being on the other side of things -- being humbled and needing to be forgiven -- changed things. It was a huge step in helping me get to the point of being able to forgive him.

## **Today**

**Lauren:** It’s been a year and our recovery has been hard. Sometimes it still hurts, but it’s gotten so much better.

**Craig:** We feel like now our marriage is where it’s suppose to be. We talk about our problems and work through them together. We don’t always agree, but we feel like a team. I don’t take her for granted anymore.

**Lauren:** Our marriage is more of a committed partnership now. We are open with each other and Craig is much more involved in our marriage. I think his perspective on our relationship has changed.

Nearer the beginning of the process, I think I had to make a conscious choice to act out of forgiveness. I didn't always feel forgiving, but I do feel more like it now.

To be honest, I still feel the hurt of the affair sometimes, but it's not all-consuming. It no longer knocks the wind out of me when it comes up. There's been a gradual healing. There are days when I don't even think about it.

**Craig:** I still think about it every day. There's a lot of regret.

**Lauren:** I absolutely trust him more now that I did a year ago, but I still struggle with it. I don't feel like I have to be constantly checking up on him anymore. but I'm still very alert to signs of anything being out whack. It's going to take more time for things to settle down even more.

**Craig:** It's been an awesome journey for us. I'm still very ashamed of what I did, but I love her more than I ever have. This has changed my whole outlook on how I deal with relationships and how I am in our marriage. It's a million times better than it ever was.

## What Others Should Know

**Lauren:** Don't make extreme decisions right away. You don't have to make life-changing choices immediately. Give it some time.

**Craig:** Because it does take time. Tim told us it would take more time than we expected and he was right. Don't expect a quick fix.

I regret every part of what I did, but in a weird way I'm thankful for how it has changed me. I'm a different person now. A better person. It's worth going through the work. ■

**I regret every part of what I did, but in a weird way I'm thankful for how it has changed me. I'm a different person now. A better person.**

## Julia & Rick's Story

*A young couple's recovery from his multiple affairs.*

*After 8 years of marriage, Rick confessed to multiple affairs. This interview took place a little over a year after that confession, as both speak candidly about their efforts to save their marriage.*

Talk about the beginning of your relationship. What attracted you to each other?

**Julia:** I met Rick on a blind date and I was instantly attracted to him physically and then, within the first few minutes, I realized how easy he was to talk to. I'd never met a guy like him before that... so easily engaged in conversation with me. I thought he was funny, too and was also attracted to the confidence he portrayed.

**Rick:** There were several things that attracted me to Julia. I thought she was beautiful, and as a guy, that has to be somewhere near the beginning of the equation for attraction. I loved her personality, too. She was easy to talk to right away; she had gentleness and quiet confidence.

**Julia:** I was a music nerd in school and always liked the athletes but they never gave me a second glance. Rick was athletic, hilarious and got a lot of attention everywhere we went.

**Rick:** I liked what she did for a living; her profession didn't define her but it was an attraction to me.

**Julia:** Our first date lasted until almost 5 AM and we spent the entire time talking. I told myself, "If this guy calls me tomorrow, I'm marrying him." I thought I had landed my dream man.

**Rick:** Yeah, there was chemistry between us. I'd seen beautiful women, and met a lot with personality, but it was rare to find the trifecta that included chemistry.

You dated for 11 months and then were engaged for 11 months. What were your expectations of marriage?

**Julia:** I thought it would be wonderful; that we just grow deeper in friendship and in faith and be madly in love.

**Rick:** I expected marriage to include lots of passionate love-making, good conversation, and growing old together. And as long as there was plenty of good love making, most everything else would work itself out.

**Julia:** I have always been a daddy's girl. My father was amazing... always supporting me, telling me how proud he was of me, and loving me no matter what. I expected my husband to love me like that, only on a deeper romantic level.

So did it turn out that way? How would you describe the first years of your marriage, before finding out about the affair?

**Julia:** Within a couple of months of our marriage, something switched in Rick. He started treating me like I was a nuisance. He seemed very easily agitated.

Almost immediately, he got a second job that kept him from home on the weekends. During the weekdays, we had opposite work schedules. He would go to work early in the morning and I would get home from work four hours after him. He'd go to bed soon after that, hardly spending any time with me.

Even when we later changed jobs, our schedules kept us apart a lot. Rick started to complain a lot about me, too. He was upset about things like my housekeeping, my weight, and meals not being ready in time. It kept getting worse and he barely resembled the funny, sweet guy I dated and was engaged to.

He usually wanted nothing to do with me. Any positive attention he would give me, even though it was small, I would soak up like a dry sponge. Sometimes, the comments he would make about me would be laced with verbal rage. I started being afraid of him. But I also started to believe the things he was saying about me were true; I started believing something was wrong with me. I mean, here I was, with my "dream man" and I wasn't enough for him. He would give me just enough positive attention randomly to keep me around and only used me when he needed me in small spurts, for things like income, meals, and sex.

He wouldn't let me look at his cell phone and there were times he would go outside to talk on it. I let it go because he grew up with an overbearing mother that was always in his business and the last thing I wanted was to be compared to her. Pretty soon, his apparent disgust with me got so bad that when I came home from work and I would see him sitting behind the computer desk just glaring at me with a look of hatred I will never forget. It made an indelible mark on my self-image that has been very hard to remove.

**Rick:** I wasn't happy, but it was probably guilt more than anything. I went into marriage thinking that my former college party days and sexual explorations would be things of the past, not needed or wanted anymore. But marriage felt like a restriction. I tried to suppress that feeling, but eventually gave into the desire for more sexual exploration.

Once it happened once, I literally thought to myself, I can never tell Julia about this, but I should enjoy these experiences because they make me feel good. And so I did, frequently, with whoever was available at the moment. I spent so much energy managing those affairs and hookups that I had little left for my relationship with my wife.

**Julia:** He was very image conscious. He started working out and tanning a lot. Something inside me told me that he was not doing any of this for me, but I was in denial and didn't allowed myself to entertain those thoughts.

When my work took me away from home and I called him in the evening, he sometimes wouldn't answer. The next day, he'd tell me it was because he was asleep. I found an email once on our computer from a girl that went by "Dream Girl" and she was thanking him for spending the night with her and the best night ever. He freaked out a little when I confronted him with it and basically lied his way out of the "spending the night together" part but acted slightly remorseful for his "flirty personality" and told me to pray for him. Somehow, I convinced myself to believe him.

I never gave up hope for Rick. I prayed and prayed to God, asking for the sweet guy to return to me. I believed that at his core, Rick was better than this, but he would not let me connect with him at any deep level.

**Julia, how did you find out about Rick's affairs?**

**Julia:** During the seventh year of our marriage, Rick went to a men's retreat sponsored by our church. He came back a little different. I started noticing his hard edge was wearing off quickly and he began to be sweet to me again. He started telling me a little more how much I meant to him and stopped complaining so much. Instead of getting angry with me, he started telling me that I was more beautiful to him now than I ever had been. He just seemed to be noticing me again, and I thought this was the beginning of the answer to my prayers.

He started telling me there was something he was wanting to talk to me about, but he said it with a smile every time so I didn't think it would be anything bad. He kept saying he wasn't ready, but that he would be soon.

I'll never forget the day he told me. It was a Saturday. We had a great day together, attending an art festival and then going out for frozen yogurt. That night at home, I was in my pajamas and we were on the couch watching TV. He turned the TV off and said, "Um, I want to talk to you." I said, "Okay..." and he asked, "Do you know what happened?"

I was confused. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, do you know what happened. Before. In our marriage."

**I prayed to God, asking for the sweet guy to return to me. I believed that at his core, Rick was better than this, but he would not let me connect with him at any deep level.**

I hesitated. “Well, I had wondered at times deep inside of me if you had ever cheated on me, but I never knew if...”

His voice broke and he started sobbing. “I was unfaithful to you... many times.... and it’s been killing me. I know you’ll probably want to divorce me after I tell you this, and I don’t blame you, but I’m begging you not to. I love you so much and you are so amazing and I just couldn’t live with myself anymore. I am so sorry.”

I sat there in absolute shock and disbelief. It’s one thing to wonder, but it’s a completely different thing to hear it for the first time come out of your husband’s mouth.

I didn’t shed one tear sitting there on the couch. I was literally frozen in horror. Eventually, I asked “So that’s it. Is there anything else?” and he said no. I got up from the couch, went into the bedroom, locked the door, and cried all night long.

**I got up from the couch, went into the bedroom, locked the door, and cried all night long.**

**Rick:** It would have been easier to walk away and never tell her and maybe find someone new. But I wanted help. And I wanted to be married to her. I know I risked losing our marriage, but I had to tell her the truth.

**Julia:** I woke up the next morning exhausted, sick, still crying uncontrollably. I had to go to work but didn’t speak to him when I left the house. I wanted a divorce. I couldn’t even look at him; the sight of him made me sick. But at the same time, I knew I still loved him and this thought terrified me.

I texted him from work and completely insulted everything about him. Then I told him that if he really wanted to stay married to me, he would make an appointment for us with a counselor of my choosing, that he would participate in counseling without having to be coaxed, and that all appointments would be made and kept by him or else I would not move forward.

He made an appointment with Tim. We went to the first session and both liked him immediately, which I was so grateful for. He talked to us about a truth telling session where I would ask Rick questions about his affairs and he would need to answer honestly in order for the wound to heal correctly. We met separately with Tim to help us prepare for this.

That night of the truth telling session was honestly the worst night of my life. Rick confessed to having more than 20 sexual affairs over a period of almost 8 years of marriage. He told me they had been strictly sexual affairs, except for one that had been more emotional than the others.

I was horrified and disgusted. Some of the women were people I knew: neighbors, our real estate agent, acquaintances at our gym, even a girl who I thought was my friend.

We drove home that night mostly silent except for me hurling random insults every now and then. The minute I walked in the front door, I was so angry, I walked over the dishwasher and started emptying it by throwing things at him. I started screaming, then walked over and punched him as hard as I could about 3 times. He just stood there and took it. He never once got defensive or violent or raging back. He just let me get it out.

**Rick, did you think about telling her about some of the past relationships instead of admitting to all of them? Why did you tell her everything?**

**Rick:** I didn't want to only tell part-truth, but the whole truth so that she would know everything about me; no lies or things hidden away only to be rediscovered later on, having to deal with the shock all over again. And I needed accountability. I wanted to stop keeping secrets and avoiding consequences. I wanted Julia to know what I struggle with and that I was serious about moving forward with her.

**Julia:** After hearing the whole truth, I wanted a divorce. But Tim encouraged me not to make any rash decisions about my marriage while my emotions were at level 10+. He never pressured me to stay in the marriage, but he recommended I give it at least 6 months with counseling before making a final choice. I decided to stick it out and see if this marriage could really be salvaged, but I didn't have a lot of confidence that it would.

**What was it like being together in the weeks and months that followed?**

**Julia:** It was very difficult and extremely painful. There were some days I could not pick myself up off the floor, the pain was so deep. I was angry that I compromised who I was for him in order to meet his ridiculously high and unattainable standards, just to find out that none of it really mattered... that it was all a lie. I felt like I had been punked, and I was angry at myself for putting up with it for so long.

**Rick:** My thinking was so selfish. I literally thought she'd be hurt but forgive me quickly so we could start our new life together. That's not what happened. Now I'm glad that she was able to release her feelings about my betrayal rather than just holding it in. It was important for me to understand how hurt she was. It was hard to watch and experience, but it really made me think about the effects of what I'd done.

**Julia:** He was unbelievably sweet to me and treated me with a tenderness I had never seen before. I suspected he might just doing it because he felt bad about hurting me so much. I wondered if his attention to me would eventually stop, but it never did. He was complimentary even when I was insulting him, sending me emails from work multiple times a day telling me how

**It was important for me to understand how hurt she was. It was hard to watch and experience, but it really made me think about the effects of what I'd done.**

much I mean to him, buying me presents, allowing me to have my space but constantly telling me how much I mean to him. He bought me flowers and gifts much more frequently than ever before. I would get angry and scream at him or send him mean emails and every single time he allowed me to do it but then responded with how much he loved me and how unbelievably sorry he was.

**Rick:** I saw sides of my wife I had never seen, and hope I never see again. She had mixed emotions all the time; anger, hate, sadness, grief. Sometimes she wanted to be held and other times she was throwing dishware at my head when I walked in the door. It was definitely the hardest and darkest part of the process.

**Julia:** I put walls up because I did not want to let myself get hurt again. Eventually, though, his obvious commitment to change and to love and to truth began to convince me that his intentions were pure.

It was very hard because we were at different places emotionally. He felt free from his secrets and sins and really acted like a changed man, excited to start this new life with me. But I just had a bomb dropped on me and my heart was completely obliterated. I hated him, yet loved him all at once. It was extremely difficult to deal with these conflicting emotions.

**Rick, what did you do to assure her that you were committed to being honest with her? How have you tried to win back her trust?**

**Rick:** I tried to assure her I was committed by telling her the whole truth up front. She's also watched me be more open with her by talking about what she's feeling, and about what I'm feeling, too. I'm open with my username and passwords to personal sites and computers, touch base more often when she's out of town, and openly discussed my old patterns of cheating so she can be more aware of what I'm doing.

I make specific attempts to show her how I care about her, whether that's sending her little e-mails or text messages affirming my love for her, or setting up a date or time to spend together. I try to let her know that she's most important to me.

I've also established some great mentors in my life that I can be open and honest with. I'm not trying to do this thing all by myself.

**Julia:** It may sound like a cliché, but he is honestly a different person. I still cower sometimes because I think he will react like the old Rick in certain situations, but every single time he reacts completely different. He joined a men's group at our church and told his story to the guys in the group the very first night he attended, so that he could create an environment of honesty and support. He has been hyper-vigilant about change, and I honestly don't even recognize the old Rick in him anymore. I joke with him and say "I'm on my second marriage. I divorced my first husband. I love my new husband so much more."

**Rick:** We're learning to do this thing together. It takes effort on both our parts. But that concept of second marriage rings true for me, because it is.

**It's been over a year since finding out. Do you trust him?**

**Julia:** Yes. Not 100% yet, but not because of anything he is currently doing. He went out of his way to make me feel comfortable and still does. He kept every counseling appointment and did everything Tim suggested he do for the healing process. He gave me every password to every account he has, took the lock off his phone so that I am free to check it anytime I want to. He would call me if he had to work late from his office phone so that I could see the call coming in from his desk on caller ID.

We have certain boundaries now that he maintains as far as contact with the opposite sex. He has never once, since the night he told me, done anything that would make me wonder. In fact, he goes out of his way to make sure I am comfortable in all situations. I'm not gonna lie, it is still hard, but it is getting easier.

**What gives you the confidence that there won't be another affair?**

**Julia:** I know there is a risk in staying in this marriage, but also getting divorced and marrying someone else would come with its own risks, too. My confidence lies in my faith in God to sustain us and the work that we have done up to this point. And honestly, Rick has created an environment that makes it easy for me to trust him. I am super sensitive to any old behaviors that would possibly come back now and I would be very vocal if I saw even a hint of it them.

**Rick:** There are times when I still feel like I could go misbehave. I've certainly had opportunities. Even when you're not seeking them, they can sometimes seem to just fall in your lap. But I've learned that those experiences are not really satisfying; they're only temporary. Returning to that behavior would damage all the work we've endured over the past year and a half. And it would not help me become the person I truly want to be; a faithful husband who truly loves and adores his wife.

Sometimes when I've had feelings I know aren't good, I've actually told my wife. I tell her it's not her fault or anything she's done, but that I'm struggling and could use her support and prayer. I also use the support group around me; other men who struggle as well. They give me support and help me regain my focus.

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### Has anything hindered your healing?

**Julia:** To be honest, the pain has been very difficult to deal with at times, especially in the beginning. I didn't always release my anger in a healthy way and it began to change who I was. I just wanted to get revenge on him and everyone else in the situation that I felt had done me wrong.

I contacted a lot of the other women in anger, against Tim's recommendation, and it really did nothing to help me; it only gave me more anger to hold on to. Although I felt temporary relief for getting things off my chest, many of their responses were just downright cruel and unapologetic, which added to my bitterness.

I also was haunted continually by images of the other women in my head, comparing myself to them constantly and how I felt I didn't measure up but I really finally came to a realization that it wasn't even about me. Rick continually told me that it wasn't about me at all; that it was about his own brokenness. Even his insults, he said, were because he felt so disgusted and shamed. In order to cope, he would insult me and blame me instead of paying attention to his own faults and brokenness. That's helped me heal.

**Rick:** It's been over a year since I told my wife and just recently would I say her former personality is coming back. I know she still struggles in her mind more frequently than I recognize, but it's much better now. She's found a way to live out her new normal.

### What other things have helped your healing?

**Julia:** Focusing on what is true presently and realizing that in order to move forward, I would either have to forgive him or would have to walk away. It took me a solid eight months before I really decided that I was going to stay in the marriage and that was because Rick was intent in showing me he truly had changed and wanted no part of his old life. He went out of his way to show me how much he really did love me.

When I decided to stay, I decided that I would begin to study forgiveness and what it actually meant and how to go about moving forward in that. I realized that forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling. I had no feelings of forgiveness for him whatsoever at first. Most days, I hated him. But I eventually decided that each minute I would choose to walk in forgiveness with him, and began to act in a way that was forgiving. It was only after I chose forgiveness and began to put that into practice, that eventually the feelings began to slowly change.

I also realized that I needed grace just as much as he did for some of the ways I reacted in the process. There was nothing Rick could do to take back his actions and give me back the last eight years of my life, so the only thing I could do was move forward, to focus on the true meaning of forgiveness and learn to walk in patience, kindness, gentleness... believing that my marriage could be restored. I am now honestly amazed

at the resurrection of our marriage and redemption in both of our lives. It really is a miracle.

**Rick:** Honesty, openness, and discussion have been the elements that have helped in the healing process. Additionally, my wife and I are Christians. I had walked away with my daily relationship with God for nearly a decade. Through this process, I've re-experienced God's grace. Embracing the grace and love of Christ and releasing this guilty weight has been the most freeing experience. Now, I daily pray, read, and allow my heart to be aligned with the things of God. It's allowed me to live in freedom for the first time.

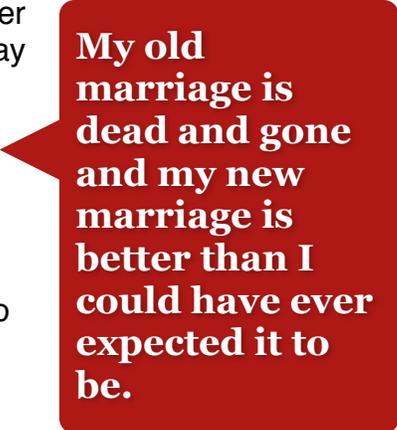
**Julia:** Counseling was also a huge part of our healing. I looked at Tim like a coach, helping us through the process. Without counseling, we would have been lost, and I honestly doubt our marriage would have survived.

Knowing everything you know now, if you send a message back to yourself on that day of the confession, what would the message be?

**Julia:** That there is hope. Even when it seems like a situation is impossible, hope starts to shine and becomes the light that leads to healing. It is a hard and difficult journey toward restoration, with pain and processing along the way, but it will lead you to a better place than you were before.

My old marriage is dead and gone and my new marriage is better than I could have ever expected it to be. I love my husband today more than I ever thought possible. We are intentional and committed to making our marriage and love our priority. He truly is my best friend and I have a wonderful life with him.

**Rick:** It won't initially feel like it, but you're doing the right thing. It'll be hard and you'll wonder at times why you chose to share the darkest parts of your life with the person you vowed never to do this too, but it will eventually create the deepest level of intimacy you will ever experience here on earth. ■



**My old marriage is dead and gone and my new marriage is better than I could have ever expected it to be.**

## Mark's Story

*A man's detailed account of his affair.*

*This is my story; I won't pretend to speak for others. These are the thoughts, feelings, and choices that led me down unexpected paths. My affair ended several years ago, but I am reminded daily of the many ways it changed my life forever. -"Mark"*

### Unexpected Unfaithfulness

While growing up, my family and my church defined my values in all things, including marriage. "Till death do us part" meant a lifelong commitment; divorce was not an option; adultery ranked among the biggest and baddest of sins.

I never planned on having an affair. Even a couple months before it happened, if you had told me I would be involved with another woman, I would have sincerely denied the possibility. But when the conditions were just right, every conviction flew out the window.

Several months afterward, a man sat across a table from me and exclaimed in no uncertain terms, "I might be guilty of a lot of things, but that is one thing I could never do." It may have sounded like conviction, but I sadly recognized a proud naivety that I had once possessed. Even now, looking back on all that occurred, I am amazed at how easy it was to compromised long-held standards and move into an affair.

**If you had told me I would be involved with another woman, I would have sincerely denied the possibility. But when the conditions were just right, every conviction flew out the window.**

### A Vulnerable Marriage

When I met Anne in college, I was instantly attracted. Other men were, too, and so I spent the next three years winning her love. Despite gentle warnings from our parents, who noticed differences between us that caused them some concern, we were married soon after graduation.

Did I love her then? Yes, as much as a 21 year old is capable of loving. After 2 or 3 years, our marriage settled into a typical routine. It wasn't wonderful, but it wasn't bad, either, and we witnessed enough unhappy relationships to know ours was better than most.

We both wanted something better. Periodically, we would make a special effort to heat things up: read a book, attend a seminar, join a support group, go on a trip, or become a bit more sexually creative. These sparks would temporarily warm the fire, but we inevitably settled back into the more common lukewarmness of the relationship.

For the most part, I simply accepted the fact that things would probably never get better than this. In some ways, it was enough. We enjoyed the comfort of familiarity; we provided a caring and secure home for our children; we knew what to expect from each other. With adaptive behavior that seemed common to most other couples, we learned how to maintain our relationship. But in the deepest part of me, I wasn't satisfied.

This disappointment alone wasn't enough to lead me into an affair, but I think it at least set the stage for what would eventually be played out. What happens when love begins to lose its heart? When feelings diminish and duty has to constantly pick up the slack?

## **The Right Conditions**

An affair requires two things: opportunity and willingness. During my first 12 years of marriage, there were opportunities, but not the willingness to act.

That doesn't mean I was void of curiosity or desire. Disappointment with my marriage sometimes led me to wonder what it might be like to be with someone else. But thoughts never turned into action because I valued faithfulness, feared the consequences of infidelity, and didn't want to face the disapproval of others, including God.

One thought-without-action episode occurred while I was away attending a week long conference. On the first day, I met a woman, attractive in both appearance and behavior, who apparently enjoyed my company and occasionally sought me out during the rest of the week. No improper word was spoken; no inappropriate action made; but I had no doubt she would have shared a night with me if I had hinted at the desire to do so. At the end of the conference she slipped me her address, asked me to come visit her, and hugged me good-bye.

I never contacted her. In fact, when I returned home, I told my wife all about the encounter—another little “victory” that gave me a false sense of invulnerability. But although I never acted on the temptation, I did think about it. Even months after that event, when feeling distant from my wife, I wondered what it would have been like to spend a night in the other woman's arms.

That's as far as my unfaithfulness would have gone, I think, if everything in my life had just remained steady and predictable. It didn't.

The place where I worked began experiencing growth, requiring me to spend extra time at the office. As hard as I worked, the boss never seemed to be quite satisfied, so I doubled my efforts. Work kept me away from home and my wife became increasingly frustrated and critical. I felt overworked, unappreciated, and empty. Although I somehow managed to keep all my plates spinning, I felt like a hollow man performing tricks.

During this period of personal turmoil, I was asked to head up a new project at work. Linda, an assistant from another department, joined me on the task. The time was ripe for an affair. I had opportunity: working with Linda nearly every day, often alone. And I finally had willingness: ready to explore a relationship that would make me feel appreciated and loved. Within two months, the affair had begun.

## The Other Woman

*"Why her? What does she have that I don't have?"*

Those were the questions my wife would eventually ask me—questions I've since heard repeated by many betrayed spouses.

What was it about Linda that made it easy to develop a relationship that led to an affair? Initially, I was most attracted to those qualities in her that were, in my opinion, lacking in my wife.

When I became disappointed in my marriage, I found it easy to focus on Anne's inadequacies. I realize now that she still possessed all the qualities I had originally loved, but the years of familiarity had made it easier for me to focus on our differences...on the ways we failed to connect with each other. Of course, once I was convinced of these areas of incompatibility, I was also apt to pay more attention when I observed other women who seemed to be free from these flaws.

It wasn't about physical beauty. Linda was cute, but I think many would have considered my wife better looking. No, it was her confidence, professionalism, articulation, and life goals: these were the things that drew me to her.

This attraction alone, however, would not have been enough for me to open the door to an affair. Her admiration accomplished that. I wanted approval. I wanted to be valued, appreciated. During this discouraging time in my life, I felt an especially strong desire to hear someone tell me they believed in me.

Anne never did this very well. Maybe it was because of her own insecurities. Maybe it was because I didn't show her enough appreciation. Maybe it was a mix of both. Whatever the reasons, that kind of affirmation didn't come from home.

But it came from Linda.

Linda often complimented me on my work and abilities. These remarks were genuine and, at first, probably innocent. I was thirsty for them and so I looked forward to each

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day of work with her: another opportunity to take a sip. At some point, I think, she realized my need and willingly gave me more of what I wanted.

We talked and joked and laughed and shared stories about our lives. I began to think of Linda as someone who naturally connected with me—a soul mate. I started finding reasons to spend more time with her and thought about her constantly, even at night while in bed with my wife. For the first time in many years, I felt alive and hopeful.

Even at this point, I can think of a number of events that could have intervened and kept me from having an affair. But I didn't want to be stopped, so I kept everything secret. Even my closest friends didn't know where I was headed.

## **Crossing the Line**

Some might argue that my relationship with Linda became an affair the moment I responded to her with private thoughts or feelings that should have been reserved for my wife. While I understand the selfish and destructive nature of this kind of thinking (my growing preoccupation with Linda was inconsistent with the promises I'd made to my wife), I also believe there is a distinct difference between thoughts of infidelity and an act of infidelity (whether or not that act involves sex). While the former often leads to the latter, they are not the same. My thoughts about Linda were pushing me closer to an act, but I had not yet crossed the line.

I could see the line, though. For me, the line was that moment when I would, in some way, declare my feelings to Linda. It could have been with a look, or a touch, or a word—anything that let her know I was interested in moving our relationship beyond friendship. Stopping anywhere short of that line would have avoided the various consequences that were bound to occur once I stepped over.

But I was drawn to the line. At first, I really didn't want to cross it; I simply wanted to get as close as I could, right up to the edge, to see what the other side looked like. My guess was that Linda was willing to step over with me, but I wasn't sure. What if she didn't feel the same? What if she was appalled by any suggestion that we be something more than friends? What if she told her husband (or my wife) that I made a pass at her?

I learned something about standing close to the line: I couldn't stay there forever. I either had to back way up, or take a step. The tension was too great to just do nothing, so I decided to risk placing my foot on the other side.

Of course, I opted for plausible denial. If she took offense at what I said, I wanted to be able to claim innocence. And so, one afternoon as we sat alone in an office, I confessed to her, "If we weren't careful, this relationship could go farther than it should."

She paused, flushed, looked at me, and mumbled something about us needing to be careful about making any regrettable mistakes. She left for the afternoon, but later delivered a three page letter admitting her feelings for me.

There we were, standing together on the other side of the line. I had some vague sense of the looming consequences, but I didn't care. At that moment, I wanted nothing else besides experiencing this budding romance.

**I had some vague sense of the looming consequences, but I didn't care. At that moment, I wanted nothing else besides experiencing this budding romance.**

## **Sex**

In 12 years of marriage, I had never cheated on Anne. But once I opened the door to a romantic relationship with Linda, I knew things were likely to change.

At first, we made weak, insincere attempts at setting physical boundaries. We tried fooling ourselves into thinking we could enjoy the thrill of our emotional connection without letting it become physical. Even a kiss, we said, would make us feel too guilty. I quickly learned, however, that passion has a way of shoving guilt aside.

We started with "just one kiss" that turned into long, passionate kisses shared in every secret space we could find. During those first days, we both held to the belief that things couldn't go any further. We didn't want to jeopardize our families.

But once the relationship was moving, it gained a powerful momentum. There was no stopping. A little more than a week after our admissions of affection, Linda and I made arrangements to work at night. We knew we would be alone in the building and although we never voiced our intent, we both knew what was likely to happen. We wanted it to happen.

I always thought that if I ever had sex with another women, I would be immediately crushed by guilt. I wasn't. Any guilt I should have felt was overcome by the pleasure of that intimate moment and by my desire to be with Linda again.

Prior to this affair, sex had been a bit of a disappointment to me. My wife and I had both grown up in traditional, conservative families that taught us to save sex for marriage. Somehow, we managed to make it to our wedding day with our virginity still intact. But I learned on our honeymoon that Anne's view of sex was quite different from mine. Sex, I was told, was more of a "guy thing" and women usually did not enjoy it very much.

Linda, however, did enjoy sex. She demonstrated a kind of passion and pleasure that I had never experienced with my wife. We made use of every possible opportunity to

share another sexual encounter, even if great risks were involved. The risks, in fact, only added to the excitement.

I began to feel a new kind of tension. I still did not want to lose my marriage or ruin my family, but I was beginning to wonder how I could ever let go of Linda. That was the power of my affair. It started with the meeting of emotional needs (mine and hers) and was sealed with the giving of ourselves to each other in the most intimate act we could share. We began depending on each other to fill in all our empty places.

As others would eventually learn, our relationship was not one that could be severed by reason or argument. At some point, we had stopped loving our spouses and now were caught up in the thrill of a new kind of love. We wanted each other...needed each other. It was intoxicating.

## Taking Risks

Once my affair began, I was obsessed with Linda. Adjustments were made to my schedule so I could be alone with her. We met in secluded areas of local parks, drove out of town for private meals, invented excuses to be absent from our families, and even went to each other's home when spouses were away.

I did not expect to be caught and so didn't spend much energy worrying about discovery or considering the consequences of being found out. The affair was an addiction; all I cared about was getting my next fix with Linda.

Our desire was greater than our caution. We began taking bigger risks: closing ourselves in an office room even though we knew it might look suspicious; stealing quick embraces when someone was just around the corner; calling each other when our spouses were home.

I am normally not a reckless person. Doing something I would have never risked before was part of the thrill of the affair. It was a new kind of rush and I wanted more and more of it.

Of course, the more risks I took, the harder I had to work at keeping my tracks covered. Prior to the affair, I had always valued the truth and held integrity as a personal virtue. Looking back, I am amazed at how quickly and easily I turned to dishonesty. In an affair, deceit becomes a basic tool of survival.

**I was amazed at how quickly and easily I turned to dishonesty. In an affair, deceit becomes a basic tool of survival.**

## Lies

An affair needs to be hidden. I camouflaged mine with lies. I created fictitious appointments away from the office, told my wife about out-of-town meetings that never took place, and excused myself from my children by telling them I needed to go to an important something-or-other. Later, when friends confronted me with direct questions about having an affair, I offered a convincing story of innocence that they believed.

This easy embrace of dishonesty would puzzle people after the affair became public. Because I had lied so much, those who knew me wondered about the “real me.” Was I the trustworthy, honest guy they’d always known? Or the habitual liar that had just been revealed? Unfortunately, from that moment on, many labeled me as a man with a critically flawed character that had finally been uncovered.

I had changed. Lying had never been natural to me, but now it became necessary. I was caught up in the passion of an affair and there was nothing more important. I was willing to make great compromises just to be with Linda.

Of course, managing so many lies required a lot of work. I had to remember what story I’d told to whom, making sure all accounts remained consistent. Occasionally, I’d slip, but people didn’t expect me to lie so I easily recovered. The amount of energy required to maintain my stories was exhausting. It was easier to avoid people than to risk adding another lie to the list and so, as I continued opening myself to Linda, I began shutting others out.

## Getting Caught

Every new day brings with it the possibility of unexpected blessing or trouble. On this particular day, as Linda approached me in the office hallway, I anticipated only good things—more opportunities to be with her.

But something was wrong; I could see a hint of panic in her face. She slowed just enough to say, “He knows,” then walked on. That’s when I noticed her husband, Ron, standing at the end of the hall with Mike, a man who knew us both. My vision narrowed and all thoughts fled into hiding except one: How was I going to survive this?

Mike approached me with a look of concern. “Ron asked me to come with him. He wants to talk to you.” I managed a smile. “Sure. Let me take care of something in my office. I’ll meet you in the conference room in 5 minutes.”

Everything around me shifted to slightly out of focus as I slipped into my office and shut the door. There was no time to find Linda; no time to question her or to get our stories straight. My best chance, I thought, would be to find out exactly what her husband knew and simply deny everything else, hoping that Linda had not already confessed.

The two men were seated at the table when I walked into the conference room. Ron was on the verge of rage; Mike simply looked worried.

The accusations started to flow and I felt my world begin to crumble. He knew too much. But was he guessing? Or did he really know? I just listened, trying to find an escape. When it was my turn to speak, I attempted to present a confident denial, hoping to call his bluff. That's when he mentioned the evidence.

Evidence? How could he have evidence? It sounded like something he was making up. Besides, we had been too careful, hadn't we? I tried to deny the possibility, but as Ron explained what he knew and how he knew it, the facts became undeniable. I had put my hand in the cookie jar convinced that I would never be caught, but he had the proof of it.

I was stunned. Silent. Now what?

"People are going to know about this," he told me. This news would definitely ruin my career, but that wasn't my concern at the moment. I could only think of one thing: What would this news do to my family?

"Have you told Anne?" I asked them. Both of these men knew my wife, but had said nothing to her. "Please let me tell her before you do anything else," I begged.

Ron pointed a hard finger in my face. "You stay away from Linda." Mike simply looked at me with an expression of both accusation and pity as they left the room.

In less than 30 minutes, my world had been turned on its head. I sat alone, attempting to gain some mental and emotional balance, trying to predict what might happen next, realizing I was heading into a crisis I could no longer control.

I finally picked up the phone and called home. Anne answered. I hesitated, then said, "We need to talk."

## **Telling My Wife**

Anne sat across the kitchen table. I could tell she was concerned, maybe even frightened. I'd called to tell her I had something important to talk about and had made arrangements for the children to be gone. Whatever she was about to hear, she knew it was going to be big.

I can't remember a word I said, but somehow I managed to tell the main details of my affair: who was involved, what we had done, and how long it had been going on. What I do remember was my complete lack of feeling. I sat there, watching my wife's worry turn to confusion, then sorrow, then rage. Through her turn of emotions, I felt nothing. Nothing.

I remember thinking, “Show some emotion. Make yourself feel!” For her sake, I wanted to show that her pain hurt me; that I was sorry for what I had done. But no feeling came; no tear fell from my eyes. All I felt was numbness.

I probably felt nothing because I was not truly sorry. My confession came out of necessity: I had been caught in an affair and had to break the news to her before she heard it from anyone else. She deserved at least that much.

But what I was sorry for was that I had been caught and that there would be consequences. I had not reached a place of genuine sorrow over the affair. That kind of sorrow would have led me to end the affair even without being caught. That kind of sorrow would have looked different, and it would have been more deserving of trust.

The truth is, even as I sat there making my confession to Anne, I thought about Linda.

When I finished talking, I endured Anne’s rage for a while. She needed to express it and I deserved receiving it. She finally told me to leave the house—to get away so she could think. I packed some things, called a friend, and left to spend a few days away from home.

As family and friends heard the news, I was asked to explain what had happened and what I was going to do next. I had no idea, but ended up telling people what they wanted to hear: I loved my wife; I loved my children; I wanted to put our family back together again. All that was true, but it was only part of the truth. Another part of the truth—the part I kept hidden—was that I was grieving the loss of Linda and wasn’t sure I could keep from seeing her again.

**I loved my wife; I loved my children; I wanted to put our family back together again. All that was true, but it was only part of the truth. Another part of the truth—the part I kept hidden—was that I was grieving the loss of Linda and wasn’t sure I could keep from seeing her again.**

## **No Contact Rule**

Linda immediately quit her job and I lost all contact with her for a while. Any knowledge of her location or the state of her marriage was kept from me. (I later learned that she temporarily lived with friends while her husband filed for divorce.) I was feeling desperate; torn between my desire to salvage my marriage and my longing to be with Linda again. This inner conflict drove me to tears, anger, and depression.

It was good that Ann, my wife, didn’t see all of this inner turmoil (although she did see some); it would have hurt her even more. When I said I wanted to put my family back together, I was telling the truth. And yet, I had let another woman hold my heart, hold my body, and I didn’t know how to reclaim them again.

This is why the NO CONTACT rule is so important if a marriage is to have any chance of surviving an affair. This is especially true when the affair involves emotional attachment. I am convinced that a couple who is caught in an emotional affair (whether or not it also includes sex) will almost certainly renew their relationship at the first opportunity. There is simply too much power there. It might require some drastic decisions to help assure that contact is severed, but I believe it is necessary (although the cheating spouse will no doubt try to downplay the need for this).

It was helpful to not know how to contact Linda. For all I knew, she had left the city and had no interest in seeing me again. In time, I think, the power of my ties to her would have diminished.

## **The Wife's Pain**

I had never witness such pain, despair, sorrow, and rage in my wife, but with the knowledge of my affair, these poured out on me in waves. I wish I could have been strong enough to stand against them. I wish I could have supported Anne. But I was damaged, too. Or maybe I was just too weak. Whatever the reason, I did not give her what she needed. Since neither of us could give, we withheld ourselves from each other.

Anne was never sure she would have my devotion again. I was never sure I would have her forgiveness. Our attempts at reconciliation were too weak and always out of sync. I had the sense that my failure would always be held against me and believed there was nothing on which to hang hope. She probably believed the same.

After a couple months of constant conflict, she asked me to move out. At that point, I simply wanted to run back to a place of comfort. I wanted to be with Linda again.

## **Back to the Other Woman**

It had been over 2 months since my affair was uncovered. Gossip spread quickly and widely, changing with each new telling. The simple truth of my story should have been interesting enough, but each version that came back to me included its own unique embellishments. I was accused of leaving the state, fathering other children, having multiple affairs, and even stealing money from my job. Even the people in my social circle weren't sure how to act around me anymore. Many of them didn't know what to say and may have been afraid of having to take sides in the conflict of my marriage.

My wife, Anne, remained hurt and angry. I did not deserve grace or forgiveness from her, but I wished for it. A deep part of me wanted my marriage to survive. I wanted to believe I could love my wife again, but our constant fighting kept pushing us apart.

If there had been no emotional ties to Linda, perhaps I could have stood strong through all this. Maybe I could have endured months or years of Anne's anger and unforgiveness. Maybe I could have held on until my public shame diminished. Maybe I could have hoped in something better for my family.

But my heart was still pulled toward Linda and I did not know how to sever the ties. Smart people, who understood the power of this kind of relationship, worked to keep us apart. I had not seen or heard from her during all this time. The details of her circumstances were kept from me so that I would not be tempted to contact her again.

With time, I think, it would have become easier to let go of these feelings. But time never had its chance. During a conversation with a former coworker, he inadvertently mentioned the name of the family with whom Linda had been staying. He did not even realize what he had done. In that instant, I had been given two dangerous facts: Linda was not living with her husband, She was staying in a home less than a mile from mine.

If an affair is like an addiction, I had just been told how to get my next fix. The urge to reconnect with Linda flooded me. A silent but terrible battle raged in me...wanting two things...afraid to move in either direction.

I finally made a choice. A few days after learning of her location, I called the house. Linda answered. We talked and then met. The affair was rekindled. For the next 18 months, we would swing back and forth between heaven and hell.

## **Pulled in Two Directions**

I lived between two choices. I could end the affair and try to salvage my marriage, or I could end my marriage to Anne and try to build a new life with Linda.

If this decision had been merely cognitive—if simply deciding something could have been the end of the matter—then I have no doubt the affair would have ended. That choice may have been possible at the beginning, before I crossed the line into the affair, but now my heart ruled my mind.

I was not a helpless victim. My turmoil was a consequence of the choices I had made. But regardless of how I got there, I found myself in a place where I was constantly being pulled in two directions. If I could have flipped a switch to turn off my emotional and physical desires for Linda, I think I would have done it. But I couldn't. I didn't know how. I couldn't "just say no" and forget about her.

I tried. There were periods when I stopped seeing Linda while attempting to mend things with my family. But my encounters with Anne always ended up being ugly. Her

trust in me had been so broken that even when I was truly trying to get it right, she doubted my intent.

Sometimes, Linda simply waited for me to come back. Sometimes, she actively pursued me. Either way, I inevitably ended up at her door again.

Trying to hold on to Linda and my family at the same time couldn't work. They were moving in opposite directions. I knew I'd eventually have to make a choice, but I didn't want to face the pain of letting go of either one. In my indecision, I began to lose both.

The split between Anne and me continued to widen and deepen until it became a chasm. We tried to cross it. Anne took tentative steps and so did I, but never at the same time. It seemed that whenever one of us was reaching, the other was pushing away.

Linda, who had always encouraged me to be more hopeful about our chance of a life together, began to doubt that I would ever be able to make a commitment to her. We started talking more about what her life might look like without me. For months, we discussed this, and finally concluded that we should stop seeing each other.

One afternoon, we said our goodbyes and then she left. There was a feeling of finality that had never been there before. I searched through all my possessions, gathered up every reminder of Linda (pictures, letters, cards, keys, gifts), and drove to Applebee's where I threw them into the trash bin. This was not an act of anger, but of sorrowful resolution. I believed my best hope for moving past the loss of Linda was to let go of everything that had been a link to her.

Our favorite stories tend to be the ones where we get what we wished for. I danced between two desires and lost both of them. Linda was gone and Anne filed for divorce. A couple more futile attempts were made at rescuing our marriage, but they didn't work.

She blamed me. I blamed her. The attorneys did their thing. Our marriage was over. Not a happy ending.

Two years previously, when I dared to hint of my feelings for Linda, all I could see ahead of me was the hope for good things that might come from being with her. What if I could have had a glimpse of two years into the future? What if I could have felt just a little bit of the pain that would be poured out on all of us? What if I could have seen those dreams stuck to the bottom of an Applebee's dumpster?

But I'd made my choices. Now I had to find a way to move on, even if I was dragging along a big ol' bag full of unresolved issues. And so I did, until a seemingly normal event delivered a blow that stopped me dead in my tracks.

We usually have to be hurt before we can be healed.

## **My Children, My Brokenness**

This is the one thing I can hardly write about. I had been a creative father, loving my children and building a family full of good memories. My affair confused and hurt them. I became a father so different from the one they'd always known.

I cannot deny the pain I caused by children. They were witness to my lies and my leaving. They lost times of joy and innocence that I can never give back. They were injured. When I see their scars, I ache, knowing that most of those marks came from wounds inflicted by someone who should have loved them better.

When I first became a father, I couldn't stop imagining what life with my daughter would be like. I wondered how we would share all the important moments: first steps, first words, first day at school, boyfriends, birthdays, holidays, family vacations, driving, graduation, wedding.

The celebration of her sixteenth birthday wasn't quite what I'd imagined. I sat in a house that wasn't my home and tried to ignore the uncomfortableness of being in a room with former friends and in-laws. Even though my affair had ended years ago, there was still an awkwardness in many social settings. People who use to enjoy being around me weren't quite sure what they were suppose to say.

I became an observer, watching as people moved in and out of rooms and conversations, and realized that I felt less like a family member and more like an invited guest. Normally, I would have been fully engaged in such a special event, injecting my own mix of creativity and surprises to create a special memory for my daughter. My responsibility this year was to bring the chips.

I left the party, but couldn't shake the feeling of loss and regret that had settled in me. As I drove home, I began to cry.

I don't remember much else about that night. I welcomed sleep as an escape from my sadness, but I couldn't get away from it. When I woke in the morning, I was still crying. The tears turned to sobs—the deep kind of sobs that pounded like fists into the grief buried deep inside me.

It was nearly an hour before I could maintain even a little control. I reached for my phone and called Anne. Between sobs I managed to tell her how sorry I was for the promises I had broken, for the lies I had told, for the pain I had caused.

My sorrow was genuine, coming from a deeper place than it had ever come before. Anne needed to be a witness to it. I knew it would help in her own healing.

This brokenness did not restore our marriage. Our lives and circumstances had separated enough to prohibit that, but it did clear the way for us to begin treating each other with respect, and even a kind of love, again.

We are both remarried now, but we enjoy a kind of unique friendship that I value. The pain of the affair and divorce will never be completely gone, but grace is able to cover so much.

**I understand that my affair was not directed at my children. I did not intend to harm them, but the news of my affair was like a bomb, sending shrapnel into their hearts and minds.**

## **Children: Unintended Victims**

Years before the affair, my two oldest children returned from grade school one afternoon and asked Anne and me a question that was obviously worrying them.

"Will you ever get a divorce?"

"Why do you ask?" we wondered. They had never expressed this concern before.

My daughter answered, "Because Chrissa just told me her mom and dad are getting a divorce. Her dad's not living at her house anymore. Will you ever do that?"

They wanted assurance in the security of our family. They wanted to believe things would never change for us.

We took them into the family room and they sat together on the couch. Anne and I knelt in front of them and I said, "Look at me. Every family has problems. Moms and dads sometimes argue. Even your mom and dad sometimes get angry with each other, but we always forgive. I promise you that no matter what happens in this family, your mother and I will never get divorced. You don't have to worry about that."

I still flinch at the thought of that broken promise. It hurts more than the breaking of my marriage vows. When I said "I do" to Anne, she was an adult; at least some part of her understood that well-intended promises are sometimes broken. But the trust of my children was pure, untouched by betrayal. They grasped hold of my words as if they were a magical guarantee, and never asked the question again.

Perhaps it was a rash promise, given out of a sincere desire to assure my children. At the time it was spoken, I had no doubt that it was true. I was absolutely certain that nothing would break my marriage apart. That promise still haunts me.

When my affair started, I gave little thought to its effect on my children because I never expected them to know about it. Even before they knew, however, my children were affected. They saw less of me. When I was with them, I was often distracted. I was pouring most of my emotional energy into Linda and my family got whatever was left.

My affair was not directed at my children. I did not intend to harm them, but the news of my affair was like a bomb, sending shrapnel into their hearts and minds. Subsequent conflicts between me and Anne continued to inflict wounds.

Children are unintended victims.

## **Authenticity and Grace**

I've learned that I need to ask myself an important question: Am I living authentically? When my life lacks authenticity (genuineness, honesty, transparency, truthfulness, trust), I lose respect for myself and start becoming "undone" (a state of decline from whole, healthy living).

When I violated my moral values, I started living a life of contradiction that almost guaranteed an unsatisfying ending. Even when I tried to convince myself that my values had changed—that I no longer believed the affair was necessarily wrong—my lies and shame demonstrated a lack of true conviction.

I can't change the choices I've already made, but I learn from them. This idea of living authentically has become foundational to my life. Nearly every choice can be measured by whether or not it is consistent with being a real, genuine person. I'm convinced that the failure to live authentically leads to all kinds of consequences: emotional, relational, spiritual, and even physical.

Living authentically isn't enough, of course. A person can be "real" and still be a fool.

But to experience a full measure of healing, I needed more than a new perspective or new direction. I needed something that I couldn't provide myself. I needed grace. Fortunately, I finally found it... in my children, in their mother, in my wife, in God. Grace covers a multitude of sins. ■

## Q&A with Mark

*The author of Mark's Story answers some questions.*

You wrote honestly about being torn between your sense of obligation to your wife and family and the emotional connection you had with Linda. If you could retain the knowledge of what you've learned and go back to make your choices all over again, what would you do?

**Mark:** I have little doubt as to what my choice would be. If I could go back, I would not have an affair. I wouldn't even go close to the line.

But I'd like to think I would make other choices as well. Instead of just accepting the state of my marriage, I'd want to be more honest in dealing with its problems—no longer pretending my disappointments didn't exist—and work harder at understanding how I contributed to the condition of our relationship. I'd want to put more effort into salvaging my marriage instead of escaping from it.

Pure romantics would damn duty for the sake of the heart. They believe we should treasure the experiences of love whenever and wherever we find them, even if it requires secrecy and deceit. I have to admit, loving Linda felt wonderful, but our affair required me to live a dual life, and that is what destroyed me.

But couldn't you have stopped living a "dual life" by choosing Linda openly and not trying to hide the relationship?

**Mark:** I'm not just talking about the tension between the secret affair and whatever public reputation I was still trying to hold onto. That dual life tension was within me, a struggle between what I wanted to do and the conflicting values I just couldn't ignore.

I still wanted to be an authentic individual. I still wanted to live a life that my children would respect. I still wanted to believe that the story I was telling with my life could be an honorable one. But how could I want all that and still insist on staying with Linda? It became a real battle inside me: feeling like I couldn't stay with her, but not having the strength to let her go.

Did you really love Linda?

**Mark:** Yes, I did.

At the start, our affair was driven by emotional need and sexual passion, but later on it became more than that. That's why opening the door to any kind of connection that was

promised only to your spouse is so dangerous. It certainly is possible to fall in love with someone else.

It wasn't really helpful when people tried to tell me "this really isn't love you're experiencing" in hopes they could talk me out of the affair. When they said that early on, it was probably true, but there was no way they could have convinced me. Even though I now understand that the attraction had more to do with satisfying my emotional and sexual needs, it sure felt like love.

As the relationship went on, however, I really did grow to love her. You could say a lot of things about the relationship—it was wrong, it was selfish, it was destructive, it was foolish—but saying I didn't love her simply was not true.

### If you really loved her, why didn't you stay with her?

**Mark:** Well, for all the reasons I already mentioned. I became increasingly aware that choosing a life with Linda would mean I'd continue sacrificing other things that were important to me. I started feeling very guilty.

I also knew my family (parents, children) would have always struggled in accepting Linda, which would have made life very difficult.

And, to be honest, I was still flawed in ways that made me vulnerable to the affair in the first place. I have little doubt that my relationship with Linda would have eventually come into trouble. Whether or not we could have survived or not, I'll never know, but I suspect it may have failed. It was never honestly tested since we never experienced much of the boredom and disappointments that come from a real-life relationship. When it ended, there was still some fantasy in the affair.

### Did you receive counseling after your affair?

**Mark:** Yes. My wife and I went to counseling for a few sessions. It didn't do us much good for a couple reasons.

First of all, I really didn't want to go. We didn't go to counseling until after I had re-established connection with Linda, so in the counseling sessions I was just playing the game, saying what I thought they wanted to hear. I did not have a real commitment to the process because I was still in contact with Linda. I don't think there is ANY way for someone to really make progress in their marriage while they maintain contact with the other person.

Another problem was that the counselor seemed to dismiss my feelings for Linda. The approach seemed to be "ignore your feelings and just do what's right." That didn't work. While there was honestly a part of me that wanted to save my marriage/family, the

emotional ties to Linda were powerful. I really needed someone to acknowledge that and help me deal with it. Counseling may have been more successful if I felt I was being listened to in that regard.

### How did your life change after this story?

**Mark:** Eventually, I got to a good place, but it took time. After the brokenness I described in my story, I went through a painful period of gaining insight into the ways I was still flawed in my attempts to love. It was a process of learning that took several more years. I had further experiences, including more brokenness, that exposed the unhealthy patterns in my relationships. I continued to stumble before I could stand.

### You said you're remarried. What's different about the way you engage in your marriage now?

**Mark:** My wife knows my story, all the ugly parts of it. She's offered grace. We stay open and honest with each other and work on being connected with each other. I talk and touch a lot more now.

Because I know I am capable of failing, my wife has absolute rights into EVERY area of my life. I've told her she can ask anything and go anywhere. If she has any concern about another woman, she has the right to set boundaries for me. I won't argue. It's not a matter of being willing to do that only if I agree that she's right about her concern; she needs to know I value her need for security more than any other choice. It's important to me that she trusts me completely.

When either of us is frustrated in our relationship, we end up talking about it. She's great that way, encouraging me to get it out. Because we talk about concerns instead of keeping them in, there is little room for bitterness or disappointment to take root.

### What else has helped you?

**Mark:** I've had good support from my family, a few friends, and God. I got really messed up in my faith in the years after the affair and I'm still in the process of growing in my experience and understanding of God, but I'm absolutely convinced that the one who made me has dealt with me in ways that are compassionate and graceful, and that helps me heal.

### Do you think you could ever have an affair again?

**Mark:** Before my affair, I was certain that I would never do something like that. So I'm pretty sure it would be foolish for me to claim I could never cheat again. My history gives evidence of the possibility.

But I have promised my wife I will not be unfaithful to her and I am confident I will not be. My assurance has much less to do with the conviction of my vow and much more to do with the daily evidence that I love much differently than I did before.

I remember the ways the affair twisted me; I have no interest in turning into that man again. ■

## **Robin's Story**

*One woman's account of losing her marriage, finding it again, and changing in the process.*

Pain from kneeling on the shower floor radiated up knees and into my legs; hot water poured over me, stealing my tears before they could run down my face, but I didn't notice. All I could do in that moment was cry out over and over again, "God, please save my marriage."

I begged God to do something, anything to bring my husband back. I knelt for an indeterminate amount of time, hoping my dedication and denial of pain would bring the answers I wanted. I pleaded and made deals, trying anything to make God fix things. But our prayers are not always answered in the time or the way we want.

## **The Unexpected Storm**

One month prior to my pleading prayers, I thought I was happy. I thought my husband loved me. I had no inkling of the storm that was about to descend.

That night started out like many other nights before it. The work was done, kids put to sleep, and I lay reading in bed, waiting for my husband to return from the gym. When he arrived home, I immediately felt a tension in the room. My husband of six years sat shakily on the bed, looked me in the eye and with a trembling voice told me he no longer loved me.

I just stared dumbly at him. I didn't know how to process the words coming out of his mouth; they seemed to hang there in limbo waiting to be addressed and confronted. A bomb had just exploded and all I could hear was a deafening silence.

After storms have raged and torn down everything in their path, survivors are left with a destructive stillness. And here, in the midst of the worst storm of my life, I couldn't acknowledge or begin to address the words he spoke. All I could think about was having to make the kid's school lunches for the next day.

He followed me as I numbly got off the bed, made my way downstairs and calmly spread peanut butter and jelly on pieces of bread. He sat at our kitchen table waiting for my reaction while I methodically finished the task. I thought if I didn't answer him, if I didn't acknowledge those awful words, maybe when I woke the next morning it would prove to have been a nightmare. I didn't want it to be real, so I went to bed on that night hoping to awake from this awful dream.

## Roller Coaster

It wasn't until the next night that reality finally sunk in; there was no way to avoid what came next. He walked down the stairs after putting our children to bed and told me he wanted a divorce. All I felt was cold, hard anger. The warm rush of it began in my chest and rose to flush my cheeks. Failure at my marriage was not an option. I had never quit anything in my life and I wasn't about to start now. I yelled and asked how he could just walk away without even trying to save our marriage. I questioned him as to why our family wasn't worth fighting for. I did everything I could to convince him to stay. I didn't understand how he could love me one day but not the next. I wanted to know what was really going on.

I saw no warning signs leading up to his declaration. No fights. No heated arguments. No slow deterioration of our marriage that had a discernible path. His answers as to why he suddenly felt this way were vague, leaving me without answers. But, after an emotionally taxing night, he agreed to go to marriage counseling and try to work through our issues.

The next two weeks brought a roller coaster of emotions. I never knew which version of my husband would walk through the door: the one who was trying save his marriage or the stranger who now flinched at my touch. I couldn't figure out where we had gone wrong or how we ended up in this place. We started looking for a counselor to help us find the answers.

During this time, my husband began omitting the three words that I had taken for granted our whole relationship. When he left the house each morning, instead of saying "I love you" as was his custom, he just offered a cold goodbye. The entire time we were working on our marriage he never once told me he loved me. I never knew the absence of words could cut so deep and hurt so much. There was so much I didn't know anymore.

**I never knew which version of my husband would walk through the door: the one who was trying save his marriage or the stranger who now flinched at my touch.**

## Being Left

After two weeks and more arguments than I could count, my husband packed his stuff and moved out of our house. He left me with a gaping hole in our closet, my heart, and sad children who could not begin to understand the enormity of what just happened. That's when I found myself on my knees in the shower, making promises to God I could not even begin to keep.

After he left, I considered the counsel of many people who told me there was more to the story he wasn't telling. A man doesn't just wake up one day and decide he no longer loves his wife without a reason. With a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach, I pulled

up his cell phone records and saw what I didn't want to face. The same number showed up over and over again in phone calls and text messages. Through the wonder that is the internet and Facebook, I was able to put a name and a picture to the woman behind the numbers. As I grabbed my keys to go confront him, all I could think was this isn't happening to me.

I remember the day my father left our family and moved in with another woman. I remember the day my step mother left his house because of his infidelity. I thought I found a man who would not do to me what was done to them. I didn't want to be another cliché, another couple who couldn't make it because of an affair.

My husband wasn't supposed to be "that guy"... until he was. After confronting him with the records, he denied everything. He told me it was a client for work and there was nothing going on. After looking at the times of the calls again, some lasting for an hour at 12:30 am, he could no longer deny what was so plainly obvious. He admitted to an emotional affair with this woman and told me he was attracted to her, but that was all. I chose to believe him. In some ways I felt relief at hearing the news. Finally, there was a reason behind the behavior and I could fight for my marriage thinking I now knew everything.

## **Unraveling the Reasons**

At my urging, he agreed to break off all contact with her and resume marriage counseling. We decided that, for the kids' sake, he shouldn't move back in until our relationship was on steadier ground. Through the process of therapy, we began to unravel all the reasons our marriage had begun to come apart and why he sought out the attentions of another woman. We had failed to recognize the complete disconnect we were both responsible for in our relationship.

There were many reasons for our disconnection, including a period of depression I went through and a focus on the raising of our kids. Somewhere, in the middle of all that, we stopped communicating. By withholding our feelings we thought we were protecting the other person, never recognizing the walls we were putting up or the damage we were doing. The reasons for growing apart were many, but the way back together had one very clear path: complete openness and honesty with each other.

Over the next couple of weeks, I started to glimpse the man my husband used to be. We began making date nights. He was opening up and talking more. I thought we were finally making headway with the worst now behind us. We agreed that he should move back in so we could have more time together to work through the issues.

Through all this, I was still checking cell records and emails to reassure myself he was keeping his word. While searching the computer history, I discovered he had opened a new email account that I wasn't aware of. It was like being hit in the chest with a baseball bat. I couldn't breathe; the weight of his betrayal was crushing. In what seemed

like a recurring nightmare, I confronted him with what I had found and he again denied the account was his, until he couldn't anymore. He finally admitted he was talking with the other woman again.

## Letting Him Go

My heart shattered. I was left lying on the floor, all the pieces scattered around me. All I could think about was why wasn't I enough for him? What was it about her he just couldn't live without? Here was some woman he hardly knew, taking away my husband and the father to my children.

After another confrontation, I knew I couldn't do it anymore. He moved out again, for the final time, and I had to let him go. There was no fight left in me. I was emotionally wrecked. I had lost at least 10 pounds I didn't need to lose.

I wrote him one last e-mail to let him know I couldn't fight anymore. Love is a choice. In any marriage, things aren't always sunshine and rainbows and we can choose to keep loving the person we vowed to love, or we could take the easier path and walk away. I let him know he was choosing the wrong path and he would answer to our children one day for the decisions he made. I sent that email with a heavy heart but knowing I had to pick up the pieces and move on. My children needed me to pull it together and be strong for them. I knew my oldest child would possibly remember this day forever, just as I could still remember what we ate for dinner the night my father left our family.

After sending my final email, I stayed home from work as I had for many days over the past two months. I was checking my email when I saw one from my husband. With a trembling hand I clicked open the most painful letter I have ever read. He came clean about everything, from the start of our relationship to the end. He admitted to what I should have known before. He had, in fact, had a sexual affair with the woman and lied about it this whole time.

As the whole truth came out and the tears streamed down my face, I thought the pain would finally crush me completely. But as I finished the letter, it was as if everything inside of me shifted and the past eight years of our relationship came into clear, sharp focus. All the reasons for our disconnect, all the hurt we had done to each other, all the things that had led up to this point were finally made transparent.

It was like somebody held up a mirror to our past and there was no turning away from what I saw. There was no excuse or justification in the choice he had made, but suddenly it all made sense. There were no more questions left unanswered and for the first time I understood why he made the choices he did.

**All I could think about was why wasn't I enough for him? What was it about her he just couldn't live without?**

## **A Choice to Make**

As I lay on the floor sobbing, asking God why me, I realized I had a choice. I could let this turn me into an angry, bitter person or I could stand up and face what came next with an open heart and open mind. The worst thing I could have imagined happening to me did and I was still here, still breathing. The sun was still shining outside. I had a choice to make. I called my husband and told him to come home so we could talk.

When he walked in the door, I saw a broken man. I sat and sobbed on the couch next to me. I had never seen him cry, ever. I was sad, angry and hurt beyond words, but in that moment my heart broke for my husband.

What came across in his letter was a man who believed he wasn't deserving of forgiveness or grace. He knew his infidelity was a deal breaker and he came clean as a way of absolving me of the overwhelming guilt I felt at the destruction of my marriage. It takes two people to destroy a relationship and I was as culpable as he was; I just chose to act out in different ways.

As we sat facing each other on the couch, I told him I didn't know if I could ever get past this, but I also didn't know that I couldn't. Everyone is deserving of forgiveness, but whether our marriage could survive would depend on how he would act in the weeks and months to come. We went back to our counselor and it was like a different man was sitting next to me now. He no longer tried to hide his feelings or the things he had done. He understood the reasons for his infidelity.

Now we had to put in the work to reconnect. He committed to being completely honest about everything moving forward. I would have access to all passwords and accounts. Communication with the other woman was to never happen again under any circumstances.

## **Knit Back Together**

We began to "date" each other again. It was like a bad blind date, but worse. We were awkward and unsure of each other. We sat across at dinner thinking we already knew everything there was to know about the other person and there wasn't much more to say. It took a lot of nights drinking wine and bonding over a mutual love of Scrabble to start talking and reconnecting again.

Through this time we both realized we had changed a lot over the years. We began sharing our hopes and dreams for the future. I discovered who my husband was in the present, not who he used to be. Slowly, our relationship was knit back together stronger than it ever was before. We became more aware of what it takes to keep a relationship

going strong. Cinderella may have lived happily ever after but for the rest of us in the real world it takes real work to sustain a marriage.

His affair changed me, changed him, and changed us forever. It completely altered the trajectory of our lives and we allowed the experience to mold us into better, stronger people. We were given the gift of a second chance and I felt awake for the first time in my life. The change occurred so gradually and through many different stages, I can't tell exactly when it happened.

**His affair changed me, changed him, and changed us forever. It completely altered the trajectory of our lives and we allowed the experience to mold us into better, stronger people.**

Over the past two years, I stopped accepting complacency in my life and started welcoming new experiences. Before I was content to sit on the sidelines and cheer for family members as they competed in running races and triathlons; now I cheer them on as I run beside them. My husband and I have found a new passion for running and competing and it has become something we enjoy doing together. I used to tell myself that I didn't like new places or new things; I wasn't one who welcomed travel. On a recent trip to Puerto Rico, I zip-lined through the mountains. The old me would have taken one look at the tiny wire connecting one mountain side to the other and promptly marched back down. I would have missed out on one of the most exhilarating and beautiful experiences of my life. I can't wait to see what lies ahead. Instead of looking for reasons not to do something, I now look for more things to try and places to see.

It takes a real man to admit the mistakes he made and take full responsibility for them. My husband did just that. He chose to not let the past define who he is. He is a better man because of it. I have had the joy of watching him evolve into a better husband and father since he broke down and admitted the truth. He has taken an active role in the lives of our children. When I see the love they have for him, I know we made the right decision.

He is now the kind of husband I could have only dreamed about. He has taken a genuine interest in who I am and encourages me in all aspects of my life. He truly wants what is best for me. We talk about what is happening in our lives on a regular basis. I feel like he listens with an open mind and takes into consideration my feelings, wants and needs in all decisions.

It hasn't been easy. There hasn't been a day in two years where some part of what happened hasn't crossed my mind. It could be just a snippet of conversation between strangers or the story line on a TV sitcom that brings back unwanted memories. I have made the choice everyday to focus on the good of what came out of his affair and not focus on the pain those memories bring. I forgave my husband for the mistakes he made and we made the choice together to not let his affair define who we are as a couple.

It is but a short chapter in the story of us. Two years, almost to the day, after my husband moved back in for good, I stood on a beach as the outer bands of Hurricane Sandy swept over us. In the midst of this storm, I watched as my husband was baptized and I marveled at just how far we had come. I now stood on my own two feet, stronger than I ever thought I could be, more in love with my husband than on the day we said, “I do,” and excited about the chapters yet to come.

Sometimes God’s answers our prayers not in the way we ask but in the way we need to make us stronger, better people. I couldn’t be more thankful. ■

## Sheri's Story

*A woman confesses an affair secret she held for 5 years.*

My husband and I had been married for nine years when I had my affair. My husband was a really nice guy but there were no sparks and we were no longer having fun together. I was bored in marriage and in life.

I had started doing some volunteer work when I met the other man, and it was a case of sparks right from the start. At first, I was very disciplined, not allowing myself to entertain any thoughts about “what if.” But I was really struggling in life—confused about direction, feeling like a square peg in a round hole at work and in social circles, isolated and not understood. This volunteer job made me feel like I fit somewhere for the first time in a long time and this guy was fun to be around. We had similar tastes/interests in areas that my husband and I did not share.

I knew it was wrong but the attraction seemed overwhelming. I eventually grew tired of feeling that what made me happy was wrong. Doing what I was “supposed to” was making me miserable. So I began entertaining fantasies about this guy, started eating lunch with him and going out for dinner.

After several months of this inner fantasy life, I finally told him how I was feeling and found out he was also attracted to me. We initially just kissed but it was amazing. I felt alive for the first time in a very long time.

I felt guilty about lying to my husband, but I couldn't stop myself. We started a physical relationship while my husband was out of town for a week. He really was just a Romeo, a single guy who went out with lots of women. I told him I wasn't going to leave my husband for him and he wasn't interested in a relationship either.

While the affair was going on, I was offered a job—my dream job—where I was volunteering, but I knew what we were doing was wrong; I knew I could not work with him and do the right thing. I felt guilty and wanted to stop, so I turned down the job and quit volunteering in order to cut off my contact with him.

We went through a long period of no communication, but the next time my husband went out of town, I had an overwhelming urge to call him. He answered, we met... and it went on like this for a couple of years, only seeing each other a couple of times a year. He was like a drug I couldn't stop using. Thankfully, he got a job in another state and moved away. That was the end of that.

I kept this horrible secret for five years. I repented and prayed, experienced forgiveness and grace, but I still always felt like a fraud. If anyone knew what I've done...

Several times, after attending a church service or Bible study, I sensed that God wanted me to confess the affair and move forward. But I would argue that nothing good would come of it; it would only hurt my husband.

My husband had always become angry when talking about infidelity, so I knew he would not take it well. After another very clear message that I needed to tell him, I was arguing again that I didn't want to hurt him when God pointed out that He was God and I was not, that it was His job to determine what my husband could handle. So I decided to come clean.

I confessed to my pastor first, and then confessed to my husband. It was a hard and ugly conversation. I had never seen that side of him before. It was painful to hear some of the things he said. During the following few weeks, he continued making occasional snide remarks.

I realized I could not control my husband's actions or responses, but I could control how I acted and responded to him. In *My Utmost For His Highest*, Oswald Chambers says, "Never look for right in the other man but never cease to be right yourself... never look for justice but never cease to live it." I had to pray for the strength to do what was right despite the reaction I might receive, and to keep relying on God. He was with me and sustained me during those initial rough weeks of recovery. Over time and through counseling, my husband's hurtful comments lessened and eventually stopped.

So why did I tell my secret? The main reason I confessed was because I could no longer deny that God wanted me to. Keeping my secret had destroyed my relationship with God; as a result, I had been miserable the past five years. I finally had to ask: Do I trust Him to take care of me if I confess, even if it all falls apart?

I really expected my husband to leave me when I confessed. My pastor asked if that was what I wanted, and I wasn't sure. If he left, I would have to quit a job that I love because it doesn't pay enough to support me, possibly move back home to live with my parents, lose friends, and face shame and embarrassment when everyone found out what I had done. I didn't want any of that, but I also didn't know if I wanted to stay in my marriage.

As I was crying to my pastor about "What will happen to me if he leaves?" he said something that stuck with me: "You're going to be all right, whatever happens. God will be with you." When my husband said he was willing to try and save our marriage, I knew I had to try. We agreed to go through counseling together.

In the beginning, I struggled with not feeling attracted to my husband and having little desire for him. I was depressed, which also affected my libido. After talking with my doctor, I went on an anti-anxiety/anti-depression medication and it helped significantly. Trying to fight for a marriage when my emotions were out-of-whack was making a tough situation even worse.

We started counseling with Tim and he asked if I had ever been attracted to my husband. Yes, in the beginning of our relationship, I had been. He helped me see that if it had been there before, it could return, so I focused on that. I began to seriously pray about this area of attraction. God created sex, after all, and He wants us to have a healthy, fulfilled sex life in our marriages. I asked God to give me eyes to see my husband as He does, to love him as God loves him. Those feelings returned.

Tim had us read the book *How We Love* and discuss the questions at the end of each chapter. It was really eye-opening. We learned so much about each other and my husband said it helped him forgive and fall in love with me again. The way he loved me began to change, and he became a man I was attracted to again.

Being open and honest in my communication was very tough for me in the beginning of this process. My life-long pattern was hiding my true emotions or anything that felt shameful or embarrassing. Initially, I made excuses for holding back, like wanting to protect my husband. But secrets and lies were what got me where I was in the first place; now it was time for truth.

My husband and I have grown so much closer through times of honest communication. No more hiding. It's scary, but necessary. Listening to God and sticking with my marriage has allowed me to experience the love I've always wanted and a relationship I didn't think was possible. It required a commitment to make it work, to change my way of thinking, to "let go and let God," but it has been worth it.

As I took my fears and concerns to God in prayer and asked Him to change my heart towards my husband and our marriage, I found hope. We experienced change in our marriage and in our feelings for each other.

This a Bible verse encouraged me at the start of my journey:

*Forget the former things;  
do not dwell on the past.  
See, I am doing a new thing!  
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?  
I am making a way in the desert  
and streams in the wasteland. (Isaiah 43:18-19)*

My heart and feelings towards my husband sometimes felt like a desert and a wasteland, but God did make a way and streams in that desert. That's not to say everything is wine and roses all of the time, but we are committed to daily making the choices that move us towards each other and towards God. ■

**Listening to God and sticking with my marriage has allowed me to experience the love I've always wanted and a relationship I didn't think was possible.**

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## Tim & Lori's Story

*A marriage struggles to heal from a wife's affair.*

*When Tim found out that his wife, Lori, was involved in an affair, they started their journey toward recovery, although the outcome of that process was not certain for many months.*

**Tim:** [Our recovery] is a daily process. Is it a victory? Yes, but it's a victory in progress. I don't think I'll ever be done with the process and I'm okay with that.

What do you mean by that?

Tim: We have twenty years of history of hiding from each other. We have twenty years of not communicating in a real way with each other. Every day is an opportunity for us to be real with each other. The conflicts don't frighten me anymore because I'm free. I'm no longer dependent on her. I choose to be with her and I offer her the same choice. I've given her freedom to be who she is and do what she wants to do. That freedom has created a new comfort zone for us.

*That's certainly a different perspective: We're giving each other freedom and we're learning to trust the choices each of us makes is for each other and for this relationship. The more common perspective a lot of people come to is: Marriage is the thing I'm supposed to do or have to do.*

**Tim:** Obligation. Both of us fight against obligation.

**Lori:** "Don't tell me what I have to do."

**Tim:** That pretty much makes us not want to do it. I've released her of the obligation. At the end of the day, when we're having dinner together, it is a blessing that she's there.

Tell the story of what happened.

**Tim:** I thought I had married my best friend. I felt like we had a good marriage. Not without hiccups, not without high volume discussions now and then, but I really felt things were going pretty good. I worked hard to be a provider. Even in the military, I chose a place to live where she could use her musical gifts and further that education.

Fast forward a couple of years. I went away on a military deployment and came back. I thought everything was normal, but one day we were having an in-depth conversation and I asked her, "Do you ever struggle with anything?" She got really quiet, and I got really scared. Then she said that while I overseas she had an affair. By the time I returned home, it was over; she had ended it on her own.

My world was crushed. I wanted to get counseling but she didn't want that. We chose to keep it a secret because she was a performer and we didn't want her reputation to be harmed. I offered forgiveness and we just pressed on without counseling.

**Lori:** Probably a year later, we had our first son, then another son, and then we moved to Florida. There were no other incidents during that time, but my heart felt like it had a vacancy. It probably had never healed from my first affair.

I was very vulnerable to being flattered; I enjoyed the attention and I liked looking good and being noticed. There were a few more times that I become involved in relationships, anything from an emotional kind of affair to more inappropriate boundaries being crossed. Each time, we went through a similar aftermath of brokenness and then Tim would clamp down and become more suspicious and controlling. I didn't really take responsibility, either. Each time I felt like he should just get over it and I didn't really accept it as my problem.

Eighteen months ago, Tim discovered that I had been having another affair. During the affair, I knew I was pretty much laying everything on the line—being a public figure of sorts, a performing artist, and a mom to two boys—but I chose to do it anyway.

When Tim discovered it, I just felt like my life was over... that he was really done with me.

He asked me to leave, which I didn't do right away. We later separated for about a week, and then I felt like he asked me to come back only for the convenience of helping take care of our two teenage boys. We had nothing. We had no relationship and no connection. It was gone.

**Was it hard for you to break off the affair?**

**Lori:** Not by that point. It was difficult earlier, even after I had already realized the affair was a time bomb and I didn't want it anymore. But I was still entangled. If the affair partner reached out to me, I would reach back. I couldn't get free from it.

When Tim discovered it, it actually felt like I was finally free. From that point on, I wasn't going to respond to the affair partner at all even if he tried to contact me again, which he didn't.

**Tim:** It was a kind of relief.

**Lori:** It was a relief because I didn't have to feel entangled anymore. I didn't feel strong enough before to do that on my own.

**If the affair partner reached out to me, I would reach back. I couldn't get free from it.**

Tim, how did the discovery of this affair affect you?

**Tim:** After the previous incident (about seven years ago), I made up my mind that if this ever happened again I would be done. That thought was in the back of my mind. Lori's right, I lived in a constant state of suspicion, a constant state of controlling. That wasn't healthy because there was never any real healing.

The difference this time was that I moved from hurt to anger and action in about ten minutes. Up until this time, everything had been a secret. We'd never told our closest friends. Because of Lori being a public figure, I could have plastered it all over the news and everyone would have know.

Did you think about doing that?

**Tim:** Yes. The only thing that kept me from doing that was my boys. But, yes, I absolutely considered it.

I jumped to action right away. I told Lori to pack her bags and get out of my house. And after, that I went immediately to our pastors and told them because I was not going to hide anymore. I was done playing the game, pretending that everything was fine and that we were okay.

People use to say they couldn't believe we were still so happy after being married for twenty-two years. One person said, "When I get married, I want to be like you guys." Every time I heard that I just wanted to throw up; I wanted to say, "No you don't want to be like us."

**One person said, "When I get married, I want to be like you guys." ...I wanted to say, "No, you don't want to be like us."**

Lori, what were you experiencing? What was different this time?

**Lori:** Well, that night after Tim had discovered everything, we had to sit down and tell our boys. I saw their broken hearts. But I also saw Tim's broken heart, over and over and over.

I saw what I had done for what it really was and I didn't want that. I didn't want our family to be broken. I didn't want our boys to have a broken home while they finished growing up. And after they married and had families of their own, I didn't want them to have to choose Christmas and holidays and all of the things that result from broken families.

I saw all that laid out and decided right then that I needed to change. I would accept whatever process we have to go through. But I knew I needed to realign some things and stop following my heart, so to speak, because my heart told me a bunch of lies. I needed to lead my heart and tell my heart where to go.

I chose to love no matter what and I chose to stay no matter what. Even when Tim told me over and over to leave, I didn't. I respected his request for me to move out for a little while, but once I came back I wasn't going anywhere. That angered him, but I know that now that it was the right choice because I was steadfast and I chose to do the work of change.

That's an interesting turn of the phrase: "I need to lead my heart and tell it where to go instead of being led by my heart." Where does that come from?

**Lori:** That was something in the introduction to a book I read that jumped out at me because it threw a spotlight on what I'd always done. The message that comes in from world around us tells us: *Follow your heart; do what moves you.* But your heart is going to lead you to a bad place if it's acting selfishly.

We chose to marry somebody with a certain set of flaws that we had to evaluate. Am I going to accept these flaws? The strengths are easy to accept most of the time; it's the flaws that get us.

**Tim:** What flaws? [laughter]

**Lori:** Because of the anger that Tim held onto for so long, I saw the boys lose respect for him and even, in some cases, start to side with me. I didn't want that. I wanted us to be a family unit. I was very intentional about spending time and investing in them.

I know that paid off because even though they were initially very broken and angry with me over what I had done, the relationship that I have with them now is better than it ever was before. It's made them feel like I am a safe place. Now Tim is having that experience, too, but they had lost respect for him while he was angry, until they saw him extend grace.

Tim, talk about the place you got stuck in for a while. Would you describe it that way?

**Tim:** Not stuck, I felt trapped. That's different. I had an obligation to my boys. I felt like I needed to stay there. I had plenty of support from people. Whether I chose to leave or wanted her to leave, I was fully justified. But the feeling I had was like being trapped—like I couldn't get away.

I couldn't be who I was, I couldn't let her be who she was. The trust was gone. It had been gone for a long time but now I wasn't even trying to get it back.

I was in a constant state of anger and resentment. All my life I'd been told to do the 'right thing,' and for the most part I've chosen to do it. But I felt trapped by that.

All my life I've been told to do the 'right thing' and for the most part I've chosen to do it. But I felt trapped by that.

I saw changes in Lori. For example, she said I want to go to counseling. She'd never done that before. So there was just enough hope, not that we could have a great marriage, but that I could last until the boys were out of the house and then be done.

Counseling together was helpful, but eventually I reached a point where I didn't have any hope in a restored marriage. I knew I still need growth and healing, so I continued to come on my own. After a while, though, I felt like I was spinning my wheels.

You didn't need any more information.

**Tim:** You're right, I didn't. So I stopped coming to counseling as well.

**Lori:** But I kept coming because it was benefiting me. From Tim's perspective, he was glad that I was figuring out what was wrong so I could fix me. I didn't really need any more information, either, but it was just a comfortable place to come and say what was happening and for you to tell me, "This is normal; you don't have to stay in that place of sacrifice forever." There was a light at the end of the tunnel.

Tim was often angry and mean during those times. It's hard to go back and remember those feelings. Even going through last year's receipts for our taxes, remembering the different places and the dates we went on how painful it all was... it was like reliving last year.

But I thank God it's not like that now, because when we're together it's a completely different experience. It's like night and day. We really enjoy being together. We have a connection and I don't feel like it's an obligation to text him back if he texts me. I don't feel like he's checking up on me or that he's trying to track me or control me. I really do feel like I can be free to be me.

Besides counseling what else was helpful for you?

**Lori:** Friends. Being able to find things to have joy in. Spending time with the boys was huge. Taking intentional steps. I didn't just let things happen to me. I was steadfast. I was evaluating my intentions and making sure they were pure and that I was controlling my responses.

I was working hard, but it created really good habits. The book that I was reading was called *The Love Dare*. I didn't read it to manipulate Tim into a certain response. I did very few of the actual like action dare things. I read the book from a perspective of "I need to learn how to love my husband and love my boys and love everybody with action" and that is how the book helped me.

Embracing the chance to learn and educate myself in this was largely due to talking with you and feeling like: okay, I'll take every tool that will help me do that.

Tim, what was the process in your change from anger to grace?

**Tim:** On September 23rd last year, I was sitting in my office and I began to think about everything that had transpired. It was almost like I had an out of body experience, in a way, where I tried to look at everything more objectively. I made three or four realizations that day. First and foremost I realized that no matter what Lori did, no matter how many love dares she decided to do, no matter how intentional she became, she could not undo the damage she had done. The odd thing about realizing that was the fact that that I could stop trying to control it... I found great freedom in just letting it go. And I did.

**But then you were left with the choice of what you were going to do.**

**Tim:** That goes into the next realization: the fact that there we had friends who had experienced something similar years ago. He was one of the first men I talked to. He and his wife came into our lives and showed us what it meant to be a friend without judgment.

In addition, at the beginning of September another couple we'd known for about twelve years admitted to me that their marriage was in trouble and they didn't know what to do. I told them a little bit of my story and said, "Honestly, I don't think I have anything to offer you."

But what I did have to offer them was friendship, like our friends had shown us. So I just loved on them. I let them talk, let them vent when they needed to vent, asked a lot of questions, and chose not to judge them. I just let them be who they were.

It dawned on me that day that I don't think I had ever been that kind of friend to Lori. I had been a friend, but not a friend that accepted her as she was, failures and all. I stopped trying to manipulate her, to change her into something ideal. I thought, *even after all this mess, maybe I can be that kind of friend to her.*

I stopped thinking about a marriage; I just want to think about a friendship. What if I stopped trying to be a good husband and started trying to be a good friend? That was another piece of burden that fell off that day.

The third major thing I realized was that in releasing Lori, I was going to be okay no matter what she chose to do. Her decisions could hurt me, but those decisions don't change who I am or who I can be. I found that really empowering. I don't want to sound negative when I say this, but it was almost a realization that I didn't need her. I can be all I need to be, all I can be, whether she's in my life or not.

Because I already realized that I could be her friend, that thought didn't drive me away from her, it actually drove me towards her.

**What if I stopped trying to be a good husband and started trying to be a good friend?**

So I went home that late afternoon and through the course of a really long conversations (probably the best one we had in years), I said, “You're free to be who you want to be you're free to do what you want to do. I'm choosing to be your friend. If all we have in this is a great friendship, I'm okay with that.” It was the most freeing conversation. That grace brought peace, and we started down a road of connection that we haven't had in a long time. We actually enjoy being together.

Your three points are really important ones You stopped trying to control Lori and in doing that realized that whether she chose you or not, whether your marriage survived or not, you were going to be okay. And when you talked about pursuing a friendship, there was something in you that moved to love her in a different way than you'd been loving her before. It was certainly something you hadn't been experiencing for a while.

**Lori:** Definitely not.

**Tim:** The kind of love that we're talking about, the kind of friendship we're talking about, isn't a friendship that tries to manipulate, control or judge. It's a friendship that says, “I'm proud to know you. Go be all you can be.”

There's no magic answer in all this. There's no one bit of advice that you or I, despite our stories, can give to someone and say, “Oh, you're dealing with infidelity? An affair going on? Here's your solution!” It's complicated. It's messy. And we spend a lifetime moving towards healthy lives and healthy relationships. But you both, individually and together, have learned a lot through this process and you will continue to benefit from that.

As you've shared your story more publicly, I know there are people coming to you asking for help and advice. What is the important thing that you want to share with others who are dealing with the same thing in their marriages?

**Lori:** The first thing that comes to mind is to surround yourself with people you can confide in and talk to. When you can't really do that with your spouse yet, they can come in and support you. People who don't have a network of friends or people that they can vent to—I don't know how they survive. I think isolation is the worst thing that a person could do.

I didn't tell everyone; we kept the circle pretty small. I began to build really good friendships with girls I had known but who hadn't really known me. Those friendships became much deeper. We started sharing each other's struggles.

It also was good to have people that I could laugh with because, honestly, Tim judged me for having fun. For a while, he felt like I should always be in a somber, groveling place. So having fun with friends was such a relief for me.

**Tim:** One thing that was most impactful for me, and what I'd shared with anybody who has been in my shoes, is the realization that we don't have to fight anymore. We are going to be okay, no matter what happens. When I removed the fear of what might happen from the equation, that's when I became free.

The number one thing I say to them is, "You're going to be okay no matter what happens. No matter what your unfaithful spouse chooses to do. You're going to be alright."

But betrayed spouses or partners can get stuck because they don't have that guarantee of what's going to happen ahead. "How can I be sure I'm not going to be hurt again? I already know what that feels like; I never want to feel this again?"

**Tim:** And that might happen with Lori.

You're not saying, "If she has another affair, that's okay. We've learned how to do this so we're good." I'm not sure you'd stay in this marriage if she had another affair.

**Tim:** No, I'm not saying that. I didn't trade one mask for another.

Some people will hear what you say and think, "Really? Give her freedom? I don't get that. That would scare me to give someone that level of freedom." But I think it's an important point. What I hear you saying is: "I've given her freedom because if she chooses to betray me again I know that will hurt tremendously..."

**Tim:** It will hurt.

"...but I'm learning that I'm going to be okay."

**Tim:** Yes. I'm going to be okay. You know of the two of us. I'm the introvert, she's the beautiful extrovert with all kinds of talent. I grew in an unhealthy way by finding all of my identity in what she did. I was her number one fan. I was her number one promoter. I could hardly have a conversation with anybody without talking about her. I was proud of her.

But I'll be honest with you, it was unhealthy. It was unhealthy for me as a person and what I finally realized was that she's not my identity.

Jerry Maguire—great movie, sometimes funny. But when he walks in and says, "You complete me," I just want to say, "You're an idiot." I realized Lori doesn't complete me. I don't complete her. We are a whole complete being separate from each other. The two of us together are greater than the sum of the parts, but that doesn't discount the fact that we're complete by ourselves.

I think that's tremendously significant in your own growth and change. I don't know if you remember, at the beginning of the counseling process, talking about that root of

insecurity being a real tripping point for you. If I remember correctly, you reacted against that a little bit.

**Tim:** I probably didn't want to admit it, but that's a fact. Realizing that I have the ability to make my own friends, I have the ability to develop my own talents... I don't have to be dependent on her strengths to make me who I am.

**Lori:** When he was elevating me and finding his identity in me—I didn't feel like that was loving me. He may have told everyone else how amazing I am, but he really didn't tell that to me and didn't make me feel like he felt that way. But now, with a healthier view of who he is, he can look at what I do and who I am in a fresh way. He is actually more complimentary of me and gives me more words of affirmation now than he ever did before.

**Tim:** I do?

**Lori:** Yeah, you do. [laughter]

**Tim:** See, I'm not even trying.

Well that's the beauty of it, it starts to happening naturally. ■

**With a healthier view of who he is, he can look at what I do and who I am in a fresh way.**