

FINDING THE BROKEN PIECES



MARK'S STORY

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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 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 officered by Tim Tedder:

- **AffairHealing.com**
Infidelity recovery help and resources
- **CurrentsCounseling.com**
Counseling services offered in Winter Park, Florida
- **MarriageCU.com**
Retreat program for couples in crisis

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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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. ■