

COVENANT KEEPERS

“Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles”

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Safeguarding your marriage from immorality.

Have you ever considered how a person falls into an adulterous relationship? Is there anything you can do to safeguard your relationship against this evil trap that has consumed so many marriages? How can you formulate a plan of action so that when this temptation comes your way you will have a hedge of protection?

Beware of thinking, *Adultery would never happen in my marriage.* Over the years many have made this statement to me in counseling. However, I am sad to say that some of those same individuals, who thought themselves invincible, have fallen into immorality. They sit before me with heads hanging to their chests, the weight of condemnation on their backs, and my heart goes out to them. It is so heart-wrenching to watch the tears stream down the face of a betrayed partner and to hear those awful words, *“How could you?”* This searching question is usually met with a blank stare by the offending spouse.

When this situation arises in counseling, I usually ask the person who has fallen to summarize for me how it all happened. I explain that I don't want all the sordid details, but only the general steps that were taken, in order that he or she might understand the mechanics of the failure. My reasoning is this: if people don't understand how and why they have stumbled, how will they ever protect themselves against future temptation?

Beloved, if you will heed these words, this heartache will never occur in your life and you will spare yourself immeasurable grief. Let me discuss the danger signs that can warn you of impending disaster as well as instructions given in Scripture to keep you from immorality.

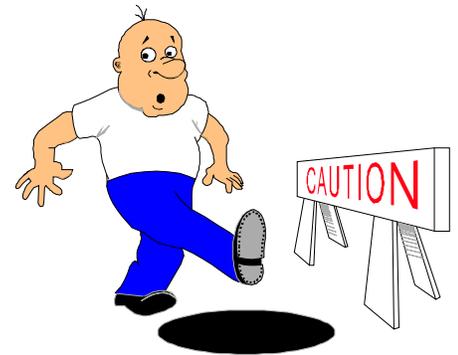
What leads a person into an adulterous relationship?

1. **A series of choices.** Each of the following principles entails a choice. Every decision you make is either a step down the path that leads to adultery or to a wholesome relationship. Solomon has given many instructions regarding immorality and acknowledges this truth when he describes the choice of an adulterous man: *“He took the path to her house”* (Prov. 7:8). Solomon doesn't try to shift the blame to the woman or to his circumstances. He merely emphasizes the choice made. I believe that there are many influences that draw a person into immorality, but in the final analysis, it is always one's choices that determine ultimate victory or wickedness. If you are a Christian, God's fundamental command for every decision you make is to *“choose what pleases Me”* (Is. 56:4).

2. **Feeding an unholy attraction.** Each of you know when you sense an attraction to someone of the opposite sex. You have a built-in antenna for detecting and interpreting someone's second look in your direction or any flirtatious behavior. However, God initially made men and women attractive to each other to bring about loving and wholesome marital relationships. Nevertheless, Solomon acknowledges the power of attraction gone awry when he declares that *“the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil”* (Prov. 5:3).

Therefore, what do you do to quench an unholy attraction when you detect it? You must first choose to recognize this passion and do nothing to feed it. This means that when you are flirted with, you don't flirt back. When undue attention is given to you, politely remove yourself from the person's presence. Make sure that you are never alone with him or her. If you never spend time alone together you will greatly affect the feeding of this unholy relationship.

3. **Playing with the thoughts.** Another determining factor in your path is what you allow in your mind. You may be able to stay away from a person you sense an attraction to, but what about your thought life? You can still feed this illicit attraction in your mind. If unchecked, your thought life will ultimately stumble you.



Watch out for impending disaster

Paul warns us that the mind is the real battleground when it comes to the struggles in life. He encourages us to bring *“every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ”* (2 Cor. 10:5). *“Whatever things are just, whatever things are pure...if there is any virtue...meditate on these things”* (Phil. 4:8). Again, this is a choice. If you are ever to be victorious against the desires of your fleshly nature, you can't play with the thoughts of an adulterous relationship in your mind. If you do, it's only a matter of time before a tempting opportunity comes along and you will act upon these thoughts.

4. **Not dealing with your lust.** Solomon also warns his son concerning the power of unchecked desires. He instructs: *“Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, nor let her allure you with her eyelids...Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?”* (Prov. 6:25,27).

She is your companion and your wife by covenant Mal. 2:14

Lustful thoughts and desires are powerful. In fact, your lust is stronger than your will to resist. Paul recognizes his own weakness as he struggles with these impulses. *“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find”* (Rom. 7:18). Paul had the will to resist his fleshly desires, but he lacked the power to actually perform what he knew was right. The good news is that he later came to understand that the power of the Holy Spirit ruling in his life was his only path to victory. He reveals this truth as he encourages the Galatian church to *“walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh”* (Gal. 5:16). The only way to effectively resist the desires of your flesh is by acknowledging your own weakness and by being filled daily with the Holy Spirit. You must live and walk in total dependence upon His mighty power if you are to overcome. Be confident, the Holy Spirit is stronger than your nature to sin. Have you experienced this overcoming power?

5. Denying the voice of conscience. At the same time that a person is choosing to play with an unholy attraction and failing to resist lustful desires, another fatal error is occurring. All of these choices entail a further decision to resist that jab of conscience which occurs every step you take toward the door of adultery. This denial of the voice of conscience is what causes a person’s heart to slowly harden and assures that he or she will finally fall.

The conscience is like a warning light on the dash of your car that flashes to let you know something is wrong with your engine. This warning light of conscience is within your mind. Paul describes this mechanism of conscience as operating through your thoughts either accusing you or excusing you (Rom. 2:15). If you choose to violate God’s Word or what you know is correct behavior, your conscience accuses you. If you obey God, your conscience excuses you and you feel good inside. If people deny and resist this inner conviction long enough they will ultimately *“suffer shipwreck”* in their faith which results in disobedient behavior (1 Tim. 1:18-20).

Therefore, if you are sensing your conscience accusing you right now concerning any attraction you have, or you know that you have thoughts and desires toward someone that are inappropriate, you have

a decision to make. Will you receive this conviction or will you turn it away? I can assure you that what you are reading right now is God’s outstretched hand attempting to turn you away from the pathway of moral failure that will destroy all that you care about and love. Won’t you respond now before it’s too late?

6. Believing lies. There are many lies that a person must believe before an adulterous relationship can occur. What are they?

First, you must believe that this action is somehow the only way you can experience the love and affection that you are not receiving in your present marital relationship. Solomon warns his son that an adulterous woman would say, *“Come, let us take our fill of love until morning; let us delight ourselves with love”* (Prov. 7:18). In reality, this action is not love, but an act of selfishness and lust. I can also guarantee that your spouse will surely not interpret your adultery as an act of love.

In addition, you must also believe the lie that you can get away with this behavior and that no one will find out. At some point, you will think: *“My husband is not at home...and will come home on the appointed day.” With her enticing speech she caused him to yield*” (Prov. 7:19-21). However, in my experience with counseling marriages, sooner or later this deceit comes to light. It is extremely rare for adultery to remain hidden for very long because God in His mercy and great love for you exposes it to the light, so that you will repent.

Don’t believe that you can commit adultery and bear no consequences. There are always consequences to sin. Solomon explains the consequences to this sin: *“Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, till an arrow struck his liver. As a bird hastens to the snare, he did not know it would take his life”* (Prov. 7:22-23). If you commit adultery, it will become like a noose around your neck that will choke the life from your relationship with God and any that remains in your marriage.

Solomon ends his warning to his son by pleading for him to listen to his wisdom. *“Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways. Do not stray into her paths; for she has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men.*

Her house is the way to hell, descending to the chambers of death” (Proverbs 7:25-27).

Brothers and sisters, please don’t think you will be the only one who will be able to violate God’s commands and come out unscathed. All who yield to immorality think they are strong and that they will escape the consequences. Please don’t be deceived by these lies.

7. Unmet personal needs. One of the fundamental reasons adultery occurs is because people believe their partner is not meeting their spiritual, emotional, or physical needs. Consequently, when another person begins to show some interest and affection, the unfulfilled spouse believes all the lies that I have previously described and takes the opportunity to find what is missing in the marriage.

This issue of meeting your spouse’s needs in marriage is the fundamental purpose of marriage. The prophet Malachi explicitly teaches that your partner is to be *“your companion”* (Mal. 2:14). The word *companion* means someone with whom you are knit together, describing a oneness in which both partners’ needs are met. In the same verse, Malachi equates failing to fulfill this need for companionship with dealing *“treacherously”* with your spouse. The word *treacherously*, means to behave unfaithfully.

Therefore, when a spouse commits adultery, both parties usually have fault. However, please do not misunderstand. I am not saying that because your spouse is unfaithful in meeting your needs that you are justified in being unfaithful. There is no justification for being unfaithful in God’s eyes. Yet it is important to recognize the fact that Scripture also defines unfaithfulness as not meeting your mate’s needs as sin too. The ultimate solution to this problem is to simply look for every avenue possible in which you can deepen companionship with your mate by meeting his or her needs in order to safeguard your marriage.

What keeps a person from an adulterous relationship?

1. Don’t over-estimate your strength. If you want to keep yourself from a moral fall in your personal life, beware of this error. Paul warned the Corinthian church that over-confidence in themselves is

what caused many of the moral problems they experienced. *“Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”* (1 Cor. 10:12).

What do you think about yourself? Do you think you are strong and unable to fall in the area of immorality? Remember, many “strong” individuals have yielded to this temptation (Prov. 7:27). Think of King David. He was a man who sought God with his whole heart. Yet, in the latter part of his life, he grew over-confident and fell with Bathsheba. Therefore, beware lest you think that you can allow yourself to get into tempting situations and not get entangled.

What causes this over-confidence in self? It begins with a proud, self-reliant attitude. You will think, *Not me. I would never do that.* Remember, Scripture teaches that *“pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall”* (Prov. 16:18). Therefore, examine your heart and humbly ask God for an honest appraisal of yourself.

This haughty attitude is usually fueled by an inadequate understanding of the power of your sinful nature. We all like to think that we are stronger than we are, even though we fail so often. Think of the areas in your life right now in which you are struggling with the power of your flesh. This should convince you of just how weak you are when it comes to resisting the passions of your fallen nature. Therefore, don’t ever get over-confident, but recognize that your fleshly desires are stronger than you are.

2. Deal with your lustful thoughts and desires quickly. The speed with which you deal with your thoughts and desires is essential for victory. Lustful thoughts and desires are where all your troubles begin; therefore, resist them immediately. Paul encouraged Timothy to *“flee...youthful lusts”* (2 Tim. 2:22). This is the only way to deal with your desires effectively and victoriously. How do you flee these thoughts and desires?

First, recognize these thoughts as sin. When you are having sexual or romantic thoughts about another person, violently reject them. Solomon warned that even *“the thought of foolishness is sin”* (Prov. 24:9 KJV). James explained that when we are tempted, we have two issues to deal with: 1.) being drawn away by our own desires and 2.) enticed (James 1:14).

Paul the apostle, therefore, teaches that

your mind is intricately connected to the desires of the flesh. He explains that as you *“put off”* these fleshly thoughts you will be *“renewed in the spirit of your mind”* and kept from fulfilling evil, which is our very nature (Eph. 4:22-23).

Third, resist Satan in prayer. The Devil, called the tempter in Scripture, is constantly seeking to entice you to fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Matt. 4:3). Therefore, when you are being tempted, continually *“resist the devil and he will flee from you”* (James 4:7).

3. Confess to a trustworthy friend and ask for prayer. As you confess your struggle with temptation to a trusted friend, you receive help in many ways. First, your confession allows a friend to counsel and encourage you with the Word of God. As this friend applies the Scripture to your life, light exposes this work of darkness for what it is, a lie. Sin always promises something that it can’t deliver. That is why Paul called sin deceitful (Heb. 3:13). *“The entrance of Your word gives light; It gives understanding to the simple”* (Ps. 119:130). In addition, once you ask for help, you now have someone who can keep you accountable if the temptation persists. However, the most important strength you receive will be from his or her prayer support. James commands: *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another...the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much”* (James 5:16). If you want the energetic and caring prayer support of a trusted friend that has the ability to avail much, you first must take the step to confess your need. Don’t neglect this assistance!

4. Flee the situation. Once you’ve dealt with your lustful thoughts and desires and found some good counsel, you must then take action to remove yourself from the actual temptation. Not only do your thoughts and desires lead you to sin, your behavior does also. If you find yourself alone with a tempting person, you must flee from the situation. This literally means to put as much space as possible between you and him or her. In some circumstances taking this action will be quite easy. However, in other situations it may involve taking drastic action such as: not hiring a secretary that you are attracted to, not taking a job where an interviewer has made sexual or inappropriate comments, or not talking to someone at church who always wants to hug

you.

This principle of fleeing from a tempting situation is not a sign of weakness, but of wisdom and strength. This what Joseph did with Potiphar’s wife. He knew this was his only hope if he was to overcome the situation (Gen. 39:7-12). Proverbs warns us that the wise man *“sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it”* (Proverbs 22:3 NIV). Are you involved in a dangerous relationship or have an acquaintance that poses temptation? If you do nothing and continue in the same direction, be assured, you will suffer for it.

5. Feast on the Word of God. Another fundamental key to victory over immorality is a strong personal relationship with the Lord. After Paul the apostle warned Timothy to flee temptation, he encouraged him *“to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith...”* (1 Tim. 6:11). The pursuit of God is your greatest safeguard against the temptation of immorality.

One of the best ways to pursue righteousness and godliness is by planting God’s Word in your heart on a daily basis. Notice that this is exactly what Solomon tells his son to do, *“My son, keep my words, and treasure my commands within you. Keep my commands and live, and my law as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; Write them on the tablet of your heart... that they may keep you from the immoral woman, from the seductress who flatters with her words”* (Prov. 7:1-5).

How does treasuring God’s commands keep you from immorality? It’s very simple. Paul teaches that Scripture is useful for *“teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”* (2 Tim. 3:16 NIV). In other words, if you will spend time studying God’s Word on a daily basis, the Holy Spirit can use it to teach you by rebuking and correcting your thoughts and heart attitudes. As the Word of God works inside you everyday, you will be drawn to what is good and convicted of evil thoughts and behavior. Don’t miss this important weapon.

6. Consider the consequences. Consequences are one of the important issues addressed throughout the Proverbs of Solomon. Consequences of our actions are essential to learning God’s ways. If you choose to disregard the warnings and instruction of God’s Word, the consequences will bring you back to reality the

hard way. Solomon wanted his son to think realistically about any possible immoral actions by saying, "Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared?" (Prov. 6:28).

Therefore, the next time the thought comes into your mind *What would it be like to sleep with him (or her)?* Think again, *What would it be like to have to face my spouse and children, to confess this moral failure? What would it be like to lose a lifelong partner just for a few minutes of pleasure? What would it be like to lose my ministry and witness as a believer? What would it be like to forfeit the respect of my friends and family?* These are the real life consequences you would have to face. Therefore, face the reality of the consequences now. If you don't want the consequences, then don't start down the immoral path.

7. Make your relationship with your spouse fresh and exciting. The simplest and most important safeguard revealed by Solomon is given to us in Proverbs 5:15-20. There Solomon's son is encouraged to work hard at finding complete satisfaction in his physical relationship with his wife. He is told to "rejoice with the wife of your youth...let her breasts satisfy you at all times and always be enraptured with her love. For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress?" (v 18-20). The word *enraptured* means to be intoxicated and stimulated.

Solomon's reasoning is very simple. If you are intoxicated and satisfied at home with your spouse, why would you ever look outside your marriage? When you have a companion at home that excites you, an unholy attraction has much less appeal. But, the question is, are you promoting this kind of relationship with your spouse? If you don't want your mate attracted to someone else, then your daily responsibility entails giving yourself to becoming a companion that is attractive spiritually, emotionally, and physically. You should labor to keep your relationship exciting, romantic, and fresh. To create this kind of relationship you will have to get out of your routine and work hard to stay imaginative in your marriage. Don't ever underestimate the power of excitement and romance to keep your relationship fresh and alive. This excitement for each other is what drew you together and it can electrify the rela-

tionship again. All you need to do is simply begin doing the same things you did when you first dated. Spend time with each other, communicate your love and affection, pray with each other, meet one another's needs, and watch the excitement return and your relationship grow. Remember, if you love each other like this, the attraction for a substitute will always pale in comparison.

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For more information concerning the ministry of Pastor Steve Carr or for additional marriage resources for couples and counselors, please contact us at our web site www.covenantkeepers.org or by email at ccag@calvaryag.org or at 805-481-2320.

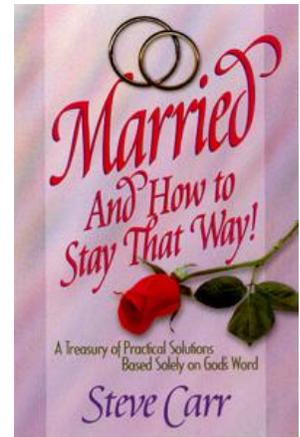
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