

COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

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Re-establishing trust in your relationship.

Trust within a marriage is the most fundamental ingredient necessary for two people to live together with assurance and commitment. Just as trust is the foundation of your relationship with God, you must also have trust for the person that you are committed to in your earthly life. When trust has been violated in a marriage, you begin to question the basis of your partner's commitment and their promises to you on every level. Without a dramatic change in this trend the entire relationship is in jeopardy.

There are many behaviors that can destroy trust in a marriage relationship. A breach of trust can result from being caught in a lie or a series of deceptive actions, by breaking commitments, flirting with another person, or from engaging in an adulterous relationship. If any of these offenses have occurred in your marriage the confidence between you and your spouse will be shattered. When the Jews went after other gods, our heavenly Father described a similar sense of heartache and betrayal. God said, "I was crushed by their adulterous heart which has departed from Me, and by their eyes which play the harlot after their idols" (Ezekiel 6:9). Clearly, God knows the pain you feel when violations of trust break your heart. He understands the sense of betrayal and your reservations about the future of your relationship.

If your marriage is to survive, trust must be restored, and a new relationship must be established. But you may be wondering, *Is this realistically possible?*

Is it possible to restore trust once it has been violated?

The answer to this question is yes! Scripture reveals many such examples of restoration of relationship and trust after serious offenses have occurred. Consider the enormity of the cold and heartless act of Peter's denial of Jesus. Peter had been granted intimate access to Jesus as his disciple and friend. He had made public confessions of undying faithfulness to Jesus. Yet, when given the opportunity to save himself, Peter denied Christ not once, but three times. In spite of Peter's betrayal, Jesus personally sought to find Peter after the resurrection in order that He might reconcile with him. What a display of the mercy and grace of God toward this broken and condemned man! After Jesus reconciled with Peter, he went on to restore him to full usefulness in the work of the ministry. Obviously, reconciliation and the restoration of trust within a relationship are quite possible.



Trust is a fundamental key to a lasting relationship!

I would encourage you to consider the many examples you will find throughout Scripture on this subject. Other examples that will be very enlightening are: (1) God's restoring of His adulterous people, Israel (Jer.

30:17; Joel 2:25). (2) The restoration of the relationship between Paul and John Mark after the later had a serious failure of commitment (Acts 15:36-41; 2 Tim 4:11). (3) The tearful reconciliation between Jacob and Esau after years of separation caused by Jacob's deception (Gen. 27:41; Gen. 33:4). (4) The heartfelt reconciliation between the prodigal son and his father (Luke 15:11-32).

However, do not assume that just because people in history have been able to restore their relationship that it will be *easy* to do. Solomon declared that "A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle" (Prov. 18:19). Therefore, be assured that there will be hard work ahead for both parties in this relationship. The bars that separate you and your spouse must be removed if fellowship and trusting companionship are to be restored.

How can you begin to re-establish trust?

1. Honest Confession. The first step in restoring trust must be honest confession by the offending spouse concerning the failure that has occurred. Truthfulness is always the first step in all reconciliation. Scripture clearly states that if anyone wants to abide in God's house and have fellowship with Him, he or she must "*speak truth in his heart*" (Ps. 15:2). King David also found that an honest heart was the first step on the road to reconciliation with God after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. David understood what God truly wanted: "*Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom*" (Ps. 51:6).

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

If you want God's wisdom and help in reconciling your marriage then truth is where you must begin. Remember, the only thing that the Holy Spirit can bless is truth, because He is called the "*Spirit of Truth*" (John 14:17). Only when a person becomes completely honest about the facts of an offense will the confession be treated as sincere. Solomon declares, "*An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips*" (Prov. 24:26 NIV). However, continued deceit is like slapping your spouse in the face. It hurts deeply.

If you tell half-truths or doctor information to make yourself appear innocent, and your spouse finds out later that you've lied, it will be as if you had done the same sin all over again. Therefore, you must be truthful to God and your mate. This does not mean that you have to reveal all the details of your sin, especially if you have committed adultery. Remember, the specific details of the sinful action should not be mentioned. When Paul refers to such sinful acts he explicitly declares, "*It is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret*" (Eph. 5:12). Remember, all we know about King David's adultery is that it occurred.

2. Humility. Your attitude when you confess is just as important. If you try and justify yourself and shift the blame to your spouse, you will set up an immediate roadblock to reconciliation. You need a healthy dose of humility if you ever expect to receive your mate's forgiveness. You must understand that your arrogance is one of the fundamental reasons your relationship has deteriorated in the first place. Begin by being honest about your haughty heart. You must realize that, "*Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, and before honor is humility*" (Prov. 18:12). Therefore, humble yourself before God and your mate.

If you refuse to humble yourself, you will not experience God's personal grace in your life, your only hope of change. Peter said, "*Be submissive to*

one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

Truthfulness is always the first step in all reconciliation.

Ask God to give you a humble heart. Come to your mate acknowledging only your own faults. If your spouse also needs to confess, God can reveal this to him or her. You must first make your own humble confession and let God take care of the rest.

3. Complete Repentance. Once an honest and humble confession has been made, you must now turn from whatever behavior has destroyed trust. If you've been lying, stop. If you have carried on an inappropriate relationship or have actually committed adultery, cut off this relationship immediately. If you have broken your promises, turn and begin fulfilling them. If you ever hope to restore trust with your spouse you must demonstrate complete and total repentance now. If you commit any further actions or it even appears that you have, your mate will correctly assume that you do not want to truly reconcile the relationship. This is why Paul insisted that those who sincerely wanted to follow Christ "*should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance*" (Acts 26:20). Are you doing the works that confirm your repentance?

4. Re-establish Relationship. When there has been a violation of trust in a marriage it reveals that there is a fundamental weakness in one or both partner's relationship with Christ as well as in the marriage. Therefore, after you have reconciled the issue that destroyed trust, you must now proceed to re-establish and develop a deeper relationship in both spiritual and marital arenas.

First, I would encourage both husband and wife to personally examine yourself and your own walk with

Christ to determine why your relationship has been deficient. Whenever His disciples had a failure Jesus always insisted on asking why. He asked the disciples "*Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts*" (Luke 24:38)? Jesus also challenged His followers to determine why they weren't obeying Him. "*But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say*" (Luke 6:46)? Therefore, you must endeavor to understand why you have doubted or disobeyed God and caused this breach of trust. As you determine why you have failed, you will discover exactly how to reverse direction and restore your relationship with Christ.

Second, you must also examine your marital relationship and determine exactly where changes need to be made. For example, if adultery has occurred in your relationship, you should determine the cause. Solomon in his wisdom asked his own son this simple question. "*For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress*" (Prov. 5:20)? If you read the entire context of this passage, Solomon instructs that the best safeguard against being enraptured with an immoral woman was to have an intimate and enrapturing relationship with your own wife. Ask yourself, are you experiencing true intimacy with your mate? Are you developing intimate friendship spiritually, emotionally, communicatively, and physically with your spouse? If you aren't experiencing this depth of relationship you must determine why? As you develop true intimacy between you it will greatly help you to restore trust in your relationship.

If the violation of trust was a lie or a series of lies, you must determine why this occurred. Were these lies the result of personal weakness in the life of the one who lied or were there other issues that contributed to this behavior? For example, was there a lack of communication in the rela-

tionship or a lack of freedom to express differing opinions? Were these lies aggravated by possessiveness or excessive control, or verbal harshness or mocking within the relationship? These issues and any other contributing factors must be fully addressed before there can be a solution to the overall relationship problems.

5. Walk in Love. Another of the consequences of violating your mate's trust is the resulting fear that this behavior will be repeated in the future. To eliminate this fear you must both choose to walk in love. Why? Re-establishing your relationship in love has the profound effect of driving all fear from your heart. The apostle John declares the power of love: "*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love*" (1 John 4:18). Therefore, it is essential that you ask God to fill you with His love and help you to demonstrate this love to your mate in real and practical ways. Demonstrating sincere love toward your spouse assures your partner that you have made real changes. Only love removes the underlying fear that he or she will be betrayed again. In addition, when the offended spouse chooses to love it assures the offending spouse that he or she has truly been forgiven.

Come to your mate acknowledging only your own faults.

Consider these practical demonstrations of love: (a) Verbalize and demonstrate sincere forgiveness for all past and present infractions. God demonstrated His love toward you by His forgiveness. Jesus declared His heart and desire when He prayed from the cross, "*Father, forgive them*" (Luke 23:34). (b) Verbally confirm your love for each other regularly. Paul taught the Corinthian church that this was their responsibility

toward the one who had violated their trust. He commanded: "*This punishment which was inflicted ... is sufficient ... you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him*" (2 Cor. 2:6-8). (c) Sacrificially give in those areas where you've struggled and been at odds with each other. Sacrificing for your spouse demonstrates that you truly want a different relationship with your mate. God demonstrated His love "*toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rom. 5:8). Therefore, forgive, confirm your love, and begin to sacrificially serve one another again.

6. Time. Common sense tells us that if time is required to heal a physical wound, it will also take time to heal an injured heart. Jesus said that He came to heal the brokenhearted (Luke 4:18). This declaration should assure you that this is exactly what He wants to do in your life. But, it takes time. Don't be unrealistic and expect things to change overnight. Scripture points out that we are all slow at heart to believe anything (Luke 24:25). Most likely both partners will be slow to believe that things can really change in their marriage. But, you both must take a step of faith and work to save the relationship. Remember, Jesus is in the business of changing lives and reconciling the estranged. He does it every day of the week with those whose hearts are willing to obey. Will you be patient and give God time to work? The need for sufficient time is clearly implied in the word patience. Obviously there would be no need for patience if problems were all rectified instantly. Let patience have its perfect work in you and your marriage (James 1:4).

In addition, as time passes you will have the opportunity to observe your mate. You will see if he or she is merely making hopeful professions or if the changes are real. Again, true repentance is always demonstrated

by action that will either confirm your faith or reveal that it's misplaced. Scripture explains that it was "*in the process of time*" that the fruit of Cain's heart was revealed by his actions (Gen. 4:3). You always know the tree by the fruit that is produced in the process of time (Matt. 7:20). Don't forget this valuable truth!

7. Beware of Self-righteousness.

Finally, let me give a word of warning to the offended spouse: beware of being self-righteous. If this attitude takes root in your heart it will short-circuit all your attempts to re-establish your relationship. In addition, if you look down on your mate with a self-righteous and condemning attitude you will not only hinder your attempt to restore your relationship but you will also frustrate your own fellowship with God. Remember the self-righteous Pharisee who prayed and thanked the Lord that he wasn't like other men? Note that the passage reveals that this man wasn't praying to God, but was only talking with "*himself*" (Luke 18:11). Why? Because God always resists the proud and the self-righteous. None of us has any reason to be lifted up or arrogant about anything that we *have* done or *have not* done. We are saved by grace and we are kept by grace. Don't ever forget that we are *all* sinners. We are very much *like* each other. There is no temptation that is not common to man (1 Cor. 10:13). Paul warned all believers: "*Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*" (1 Cor. 10:12). If you think that you could never sin or fail in the same manner as your spouse, you are only deceiving yourself.

The best way to keep your attitude correct is to regularly examine yourself and remove from your heart this plank of self-righteousness (Matt. 7:5).

A Word of Caution.

If after the violation of trust has been exposed and you still don't see the above attitudes and actions occurring (except of course, self-righteousness), you know that some-

thing is radically wrong. If your mate is justifying his or her actions, blaming you for the failure, or continuing to pursue similar immoral behavior, this means several things. (1) It reveals that your spouse has no real sense of conviction or sorrow for the sin that has been committed (2 Cor. 7:9-10). (2) It means that your spouse does not sincerely desire reconciliation and a changed relationship with God or you. God doesn't forgive people's excuses or blame-shifting. He only responds to honest, humble, and sincere confession that results in complete repentance. "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). God Himself refuses to dispense mercy when a person excuses and covers his sin. Therefore, you should not consider yourself unspiritual or unloving if you take a similar action. Yes, you must forgive your spouse from *the heart*, but reconciling the relationship will be impossible until there is an honest and humble request for forgiveness (Matt 18:35; Luke 17:1-3).

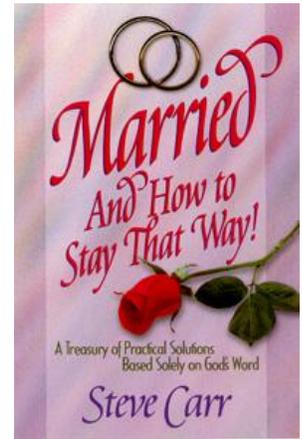
(3) When a person is unrepentant and chooses to justify his or her sin, it is only a matter of time before another breach of trust will occur. God has not called you to be a doormat for another person to use and abuse. Therefore, make your decisions based on the total fruit of the attitude, words, and actions of your mate. If these indicators are contrary to Scripture and common sense, you should not trust any profession made. But, you may be thinking that the Bible teaches that we should "believe all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). This passage must be taken in the context of the Bible's teaching as a whole. Of course you should believe all things, unless you have clear and obvious evidence to the contrary. For example: If you have evidence that your spouse is still involved in the same behavior that caused the violation of your trust, it would be foolish to believe this person's professions of faithfulness. Someone once said, "Love believes all things, but love is

not stupid." Even Jesus will refuse to believe mere professions on the last day. He will base His judgment solely on how people live. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matt. 7:21-23). Be assured, Jesus is surely not a fool. Note that Christ makes these statements right after He warned His disciples about examining the fruit of false prophets. In addition, Paul made it absolutely clear that those who ask for our trust must "be found trustworthy" (1 Cor. 4:2 - NAS).

If you are unsure about the sincerity of your spouse or you observe confusing and contradictory behavior, ask your pastor or an elder of your church to call and talk with your mate and get a second opinion. If you are already in counseling with your pastor, he most likely already knows the answer to this question. Finally, ask God for His divine wisdom (James 1:5). He knows the heart of every man. "There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13). May God guide you as you seek to re-establish trust in your relationship!

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