

CRISIS SUPPORT

The First Steps to Recovery

Hope & Healing Ministries Inc.



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Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. 2Corinthians 1:3-5 (NIV)

We recognize your pain

The fact that you are holding this book in your hands tells us a bit about where you are. You (or someone you love) have been launched on a journey you never thought you'd travel. And that is true for most of us who find ourselves in adultery recovery—whether you were the one betrayed or the betrayer. We at Hope & Healing have also been on this journey and clearly remember the early days of confusion and pain. May we begin by saying our hearts grieve with you and we pray that God may use this to help you through your journey to full recovery.

Most of you who receive this book have met with a Hope & Healing couple. Real people who are healing or have healed from infidelity and can say they are glad they did. We are not special; rather we have a special and sufficient God. He is there with you even when it doesn't feel like it. We believe that if you will follow Him and do the work required, you too can heal. It can be done! It is worth it!

If you find it difficult to believe you can heal, we understand. And that is okay. We're not so sure we would have believed it either when we were where you are now. What we've done here is to simply put in writing some things that can help you on your journey. Most will be a repeat of what your Hope & Healing couple shared, but since many of us are unable to think clearly during this time, we thought this book might come in handy.

We'll be sharing with you ten truths that can help you begin your healing. Truths many of us found helpful in our recovery. Each truth is followed by an "Insight." These are stories from people in recovery sharing a time when God spoke to them personally about their healing journey. These can be used as devotions and we've included a few more at the back of this book.

However, we do need to remind you that we are not counselors but rather peers who have also walked this road. We don't pretend to have the answers for you, but we can share what we've learned going through our own adultery recovery and coming alongside many other couples in recovery. We'll also add some of what we've learned from those who are experts in the field. Adultery recovery is intense and it takes time, but as we recover, we have the ability to make the journey smoother or more difficult. Just being here is bad enough—so let's talk about some of the things that can help make the journey to healing a little less difficult.

You are not alone

...He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,"
Hebrews 13:5 (NASB)

Some of the loneliest people in the world are married. The revelation of infidelity pushes each of us into this realm. Never did we imagine we would be here. And never has it been clearer that others are truly incapable of penetrating that loneliness. It feels overwhelming and unrelenting. The pain is unbearable and indescribable.

But there is also a truth we want you to remember. One we needed to be reminded of many times in our recovery. You are not alone. The God of the universe is there with you. We know that there are many times you cannot feel Him or sense Him, but He is there. Where was God while your life crashed down around you in pieces you can't even recognize? Right there beside you. We don't pretend to understand why this has happened in your life, but what we do know is He is there with you. And we know that He is sufficient for even this. Did we know this when we stood in the midst of our own pile? Sometimes. Sometimes not. The important thing we learned was that our God is real and He is really there. We learned that we would survive, no matter what did or didn't happen with our marriages. And somewhere deep within ourselves, we knew we'd be okay because He was there. But we didn't go through it alone. And neither will you.

You may ask "what difference does that make?" We can only assure you it made a huge difference. We encourage you to take a few moments each day and sit with Him—take your Bible. Talk to Him as if you could see Him. Tell Him what you're feeling, what you're fearing. Then open that Bible. If you don't know where to begin, may we suggest the Psalms? Perhaps Psalm 42, 51, or 62. Psalms is written by people, like you, sitting at God's feet and crying out to Him their confusion and pain. If you can only read one verse, so be it. But read it. And then ask God to help you. Don't worry about doing it "right", just do it. Some days you may leave wondering why you even did it. But, oh, some days will bless your heart and soothe your troubled soul.

God can and does bring benefit to each one of us when we follow His lead. You are not alone.

Insight

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."
Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV)

I was alone. Accompanied only by my fear.

Fear my husband would decide to quit working on our marriage. Fear I'd eventually quit trying. Fear we couldn't heal. Fear I'd be alone and unwanted.

I sat with my Bible obediently doing what my counselor had suggested. "Look up the word 'fear' in your concordance. Read the verses listed until you find one that speaks to you. Then write it down on a 3x5 card. Carry that card with you and every time you feel fearful, pull it out and read it until the fear eases off."

I had to do this so I could go back and tell the counselor it didn't work. I needed to know my husband was here to stay and no Bible verse could guarantee that.

I read verse after verse with no effect. Then I read Deuteronomy 31:6. Here one word did penetrate—them.

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them..."

It hit me. I was terrified because of "them." Images that played out in my brain because of "them." Fear I would never recover from choices "them" made. Today "them" was my husband, the woman he'd had an affair with, those who thought he should leave me. And it dawned on me. "Them" was always going to be there in some form. A thief, a car wreck, a disease. Yet God was telling me to be strong and courageous when it came to "them." And then He reminded me that no matter what any of "them" did, He would not leave me. The one thing that would never change, no matter what, was His being with me.

Is your presence really enough to calm my fears? Oh, God can I be strong and courageous? Are you enough for me?

I printed that verse on my 3x5 card and put it in my pocket. And when the fear began to rise in my consciousness, I pulled it out and read the words.

My card got very crumpled that day.

I did not prove the counselor wrong. Because God's Word is truth. That truth penetrated into my heart and ate away at my fear.

I began to know, to believe, I was not alone nor, would I be.

You are not hopeless

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.

Ephesians 3:20 (NLT)

Most of us don't know a couple that has healed from infidelity. If we do, it's often because they're miserable. Then we add to that our own unique circumstances and it's not a far leap to assume that our situation is hopeless. That this injury is just too huge. That the circumstances are too complicated. That our husband or wife won't do the work required to heal. We feel hopeless and the world echo's our fears. Very few people advise a person who has been betrayed to stay in their marriage.

We want to be that opposing voice. We, couples who have healed from infidelity, will tell you that it is far from hopeless. Many of us began our own journey feeling hopeless, so we do understand the tendency, but the truth that healing is possible is one we live with every day. We are the betrayed. We are those who betrayed. We are those whose circumstances seemed insurmountable and unlike anyone else's. We healed. We watched a Holy God not only heal our marriages but also heal our hearts and the hearts of those we stayed married to. We would be lying if we said it wasn't difficult. In fact many of us would tell you it was the hardest thing we ever did. But we will also tell you it was worth everything it cost.

It is possible to rebuild love, trust and respect after adultery. It is possible to build for the first time in a relationship love, trust and respect after adultery. The depth of this crisis often penetrates many of the defenses we have put in place to protect ourselves. Adultery's arrow whizzes right past them and for some that creates the opportunity and motivation to finally address some of the issues we had let go on in our marriage for far too long. Fear of creating more problems kept us immobile. Adultery took care of that.

One absolute truth is that whether or not your marriage stays intact and healthy, you as an individual still need to heal from this trauma. And if you and your spouse have children you need to heal so that you can co-parent as best as possible under the circumstances. The alternative is to become bitter and hard. None of us wants to do that and the good news is that you can choose not to.

Insight

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, " plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Jeremiah 29:11(NIV)

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD

Sitting in church that day I inwardly groaned when I heard Pastor begin his sermon with these words. I knew the verse. I knew the words that followed—words like *prosper, not harm, hope and future*. Since the revelation of the affair none of those words applied to me.

Pastor explained that the prophet Jeremiah had written these words to people who'd been conquered by a foreign nation and taken away to live as slaves. Pastor went on to say, "God wanted them to know He had not forgotten them. And He hasn't forgotten you either. He is fully aware of your circumstances. *Plans to prosper you and not to harm you*. He's saying His plans for you are not evil or hurtful, even though sometimes what we endure feels that way. Rather He has planned for you things that will bring you satisfaction, fulfillment and peace. The Hebrew word translated 'prosper' is 'shalom' and it's often translated peace. It is a harmony of soul and mind that comes not from our circumstances but rather in a relationship with our God."

As I listened to Pastor's words, I remembered one of the worst nights of my life. I had been in torment, no peace, questioning everything. I had hit bottom. In the midst of my cries I had sensed the presence of God. I had felt the peace Pastor was talking about. It had been one of the most spiritual experiences of my life and I remembered being able to sleep that night. My friend, upon hearing this story had said, "When God is all you have, you find that He is enough."

Plans to give you hope and a future. Could this be true too? I certainly didn't see any "hope and future" right now.

Pastor went on to say, "Those who face physical death find their hope and future in heaven with their Lord. That is a promise to all of us who believe and no one and nothing can take that from us. But another truth is that we can also realize a hope and a future here on earth. This was true for the people who received the message from Jeremiah. After some time in slavery they were allowed to go back to their own country and rebuild their lives."

Maybe it wasn't foolish to hope for a healed marriage after the adultery. God did offer me a future and a hope and I could trust Him to provide it. Maybe I didn't know what it'd look like here but I could know God's plans for me are good. Maybe I could hope.

You will not always feel this way

I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. Jeremiah 31:13 (NIV)

The revelation of infidelity can take on a surreal atmosphere followed by a roller coaster ride of emotions so strong they frighten us. It is not uncommon to hear “I never realized I was capable of that kind of anger” or “This is the worst pain I’ve ever experienced.” As time goes on it begins to feel like this will never change and you wonder if you’re destined to be forever caught in this tidal wave of emotion or, for some of us, in a state void of emotion. The truth is you will not always feel this way.

Revelation of adultery is a shock, a deep trauma, and most of us are blown away either by our own reaction or the reaction of our spouse. As you heal there will be a gradual reduction in the intensity, duration and frequency of the emotional tsunamis. If you find yourself numb, you will gradually begin to crawl through that numbing barrier as you heal. And in both instances, there will probably be some detours along the way. We often tell couples they don’t sound crazy to us because what they’re describing is normal for the abnormal situation in which they find themselves. Don’t try to make sense of it but trust that with healing will also come more understanding of what’s happened.

Another truth is that both of you will be on an individual journey too. The one who was unfaithful began this journey probably before the actual infidelity. The one who was betrayed typically begins their journey when infidelity is admitted or undeniably discovered. You are not at the same place on the recovery timeline.

Those who were unfaithful are also surprised to find themselves here. The spouse who has been betrayed often finds this hard to believe, but it is a truth expressed by too many to be ignored or discounted.

We, at Hope & Healing, see a couple in crisis. A marriage that needs help. We do not assume the one who was unfaithful is the bad guy and the one who was betrayed is the good guy—or vice versa. Adultery is too complicated and people are too complex for simple statements like those.

Walking through a healing journey will walk you through the way you’re feeling. The emotions and the vacillating thoughts will stabilize. You will not always feel this way.

Insight

Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation, And sustain me with a willing spirit.
Psalm 51:12 (NASB)

Psalm 51 records David's prayer after his adultery with Bathsheba. He tried to hide his sin in multiple ways that culminated in murder. Finally, God got through to David's heart and he experienced repentance. David did not confess but was confronted by the prophet Nathan and this occurred after the birth of the child produced by this adulterous relationship. A hardened heart can take time to soften.

David's cries to be cleansed resonated within my own heart after the revelation of my infidelity. This passage helped me get my brain around the fact that God was there to forgive me when I didn't know if I was forgivable. I felt dirty and ugly, unworthy of forgiveness. How could a Christian do what I had done? Yet David asked God to restore to him the joy of his salvation. David's willful sin had deprived him of this joy but not of God's gift. I had to remind myself that salvation is a gift given in response to our acceptance of Jesus and what He'd done—not something I could either earn or lose. Grace. I had a fuller understanding of what God had given me.

This was followed by ever fluctuating emotions like gratitude, pain, thankfulness, regret, relief, and shame. Was this to be my life from here on out? Would I ever be able to move past the recriminations?

We were working hard to heal. It was so difficult. My spouse's pain was ever present and I wondered if either one of us would make it through this valley. Could we heal after such a devastating sin?

David's next words, *sustain me with a willing spirit*, answered. I needed help to get through this recovery, to persevere. One day I felt strong and able, the next weary and incapable. I knew that recovery would take time—time that for me dragged by ever so slowly. I knew my desire to simply feel good for a change, to quit trying, was encouraged by the enemy who didn't want my marriage to heal. David sought his strength from a God that could sustain him with a willing spirit. I too would look to God to strengthen me for the battle I was facing. The battle I was fighting for my marriage was worthy. Sustain me with a spirit of willingness to just hang in there and keep going for today Lord. I will find joy in my salvation and in the healing to come.

You can take your time

...for there is a time and a way for everything, even when a person is in trouble.
Ecclesiastes 8:6 (NLT)

We at Hope & Healing encourage you to take your time. The emotional roller coaster we just discussed is not a good place in which to make life altering decisions. The truth is you won't feel better soon. It will take time for your emotions to stabilize. Now, before you allow that statement to discourage you, we would encourage you to look at it from another perspective. Because you comprehend the emotional trauma you are experiencing, it is good news to not feel pressured to make major decisions in a hurry.

However it is also true that some of those who love and care about you, may encourage just the opposite. May we be that other voice? This is not the time to decide whether or not your marriage will continue. Obviously, things will change and indeed they must change. But the trauma of infidelity has been compared to that of experiencing the death of a loved one. With good reason, because much of what we go through in adultery recovery is a grieving process and there are many correlations. What is one common piece of advice given to those who have experienced the death of a loved one? Don't make any major changes quickly. The reason that is common advice is because people make decisions based on how they're feeling at the moment, and in the case of grief (or adultery) those "feelings" change over time and some have ended up in a situation they did not really want. The good news for those of us in adultery recovery is that unlike a death, the end result has not yet been determined and we can have other outcomes.

A healthy marriage can be an attainable goal, but it will take time to get there. And the truth is that as you ride this emotional roller coaster, you may well waver over whether or not you even want to heal your marriage. Many of us vacillate as we walk through this healing process—another reason to take your time before making permanent decisions.

One more piece of information you may want to know is that statistically, you actually have the best chance of ending up with a happy and healthy marriage with the spouse to whom you are currently married. The truth is that each successive marriage has a decreasing chance of surviving and being healthy. Your best chance is right here, right now.

Insight

So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. Galatians 6:9 (NLT)

Adultery recovery was hard. Days seemed like weeks, weeks like months, and months like years. I wanted to be done. And when a certain amount of time had gone by I began to think we needed to do something better, something bigger, to bring this to an end. Maybe we had tried and failed. Maybe that's why God gave us what many consider to be an out—divorce in the case of adultery.

In Galatians 6:9 believers are encouraged to not grow weary doing what is good. The word used in the Greek for good can also be translated worthy. Was my marriage, working to heal my marriage, a worthy cause? I was convinced it was. I knew that not only my children, but I as an individual, would benefit more if we could heal. But not get tired? I was exhausted. Yet the tense of the Greek of this phrase meant it was something I would need to continue to do—which indicated a need to do so. It wasn't that I wouldn't get tired, rather that I wouldn't give in and give up.

Then I finally heard the why. Why would I keep on this worthy path? Because God tells me “at just the right time” there will be a blessing if I don't give up. I thought of my aunt and uncle. Twenty years ago everyone knew he'd had an affair and she'd immediately divorced him. I'd watched my aunt go from hurt, to angry, to lonely, to bitter over the course of time. What might have happened if they hadn't given up?

Just the right time. God's timing, not mine. I thought about the changes both I and my spouse had gone through over these past few months. Both of us had wavered, both of us had been strong, yet rarely at the same time. It seemed to be a delicate balancing act. I thought about the ways God had been working on me specifically. I wasn't the same person. Would God's right time be when we were both ready to see things from His perspective? When we were both ready to move forward?

A harvest of blessing. It didn't sound like the promise of a healed marriage, but it did sound like something that would enable me to move on with my life and not be ashamed. Maybe giving this more time would be worthy. Not only worthy, but worth it.

You lose nothing more by trying

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,
Colossians 3:23 (NIV)

Trying to rebuild a marriage after infidelity is difficult but it is possible. And it doesn't mean either one of you become a doormat the other walks on. Hope & Healing advocates the option of healing the marriage. Where the marriage you end up with honors God and blesses both of you.

There are only two requirements in our opinion to begin the process of trying to rebuild. First is that both of you agree to try. You as an individual can heal from this alone, but it does require both of you working together to heal the marriage. The agreement to try will result in tangible actions as the work progresses, but to begin you only need to agree to try. We found we could do for the Lord when we had no desire at all to do for our spouse. The illicit relationship must end and thoughts of revenge or payback must be denied.

The second requirement is honesty. Truth as best you can communicate it to one another. And the truth can be delivered with an attitude of kindness and respect. We encourage you to convey what you know—what you did or what you feel—and allow your spouse the same privilege. And either of you withholding the truth will sabotage the process.

Some fear that trying will cause more pain. We suggest that trying can actually help you heal from the pain even if your marriage doesn't survive. You will not be able to escape the pain. Even if you bury it under other emotions or activities, it will come back. And we've heard therapists say that in terms of getting back to personal life satisfaction and enjoyment, it's shorter when the marriage is rebuilt than it is following a divorce. The other truth is that studies have shown children do not get over a divorce, so it is definitely in their best interest if you try.

But what if it doesn't work? What if your spouse doesn't do their part and the marriage doesn't heal? The truth is you will be no worse off than you are now. You will have lost some time. But you will also know in your heart that you chose the best thing and did your part. We don't think you'll regret trying, but you will regret not trying. You have nothing more to lose and everything to gain.

Insight

Many of his disciples said, "This is very hard to understand. How can anyone accept it?" ... (Jesus) asked, "Are you also going to leave?" ...Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life.

John 6:60, 66, 68 (NLT)

I'd never imagined adultery would be something with which I'd have to deal. I didn't want to believe it'd even happened. A big part of me wanted to do what I'd always said I'd do—leave. But I couldn't.

There was a voice inside my soul that said the same words Peter said to Jesus when asked if he was leaving with the others who'd walked away because staying had become too difficult. Where would I go?

In the midst of my confusion and pain, I sensed God telling me to try. To trust Him when I could no longer trust the person I'd married. Something deep inside me told me if I left, a part of me would be leaving God too. It didn't make any sense but I knew it as surely as I knew how much I wanted to leave.

I didn't understand. I couldn't accept it. Just like those disciples who'd walked away from Jesus when they didn't understand and couldn't accept what was happening in their world. But what did I have to lose if I did stay and try? My marriage? Gone in my eyes. My pride? Demolished with the wrecking ball adultery had yielded. The worst thing that could happen would be we couldn't heal and the marriage would be lost. I'd end up where I was now.

But what if there was hope? What if we could heal? What if I trusted in my Lord and tried, just tried, to do this His way?

So I stayed. And I kept my eyes on the prize. Peter kept his eyes on the prize of eternal life. I kept my eyes on the prize of a healed marriage. In truth, I doubted healing was possible. But like Peter, I couldn't walk away from God. I would trust Him, my faith put to the ultimate test. I would follow and trust Him to guide my steps—whether the marriage healed or not. For now, the one thing I knew was that God was telling me to stay and try for this moment.

Those moments added up to a long, painful and convoluted journey. But God did guide me through many moments I didn't understand or couldn't accept. The God I believed in, the God I had faith in, did guide us into a marriage that honored Him and became one we are both glad was saved.

You can base decisions on truth

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

John 8:32 (NIV)

We have seen many people make decisions based on what they thought they knew or what they thought their spouse was thinking. We do not all respond to strong emotions in the same way. Nor do we all interpret behaviors the same way. Assuming that your spouse knows why you're behaving in a certain way can lead to decisions based on false assumptions. We've sat with way too many couples to know how true this is. What one sees as pain, another can see as anger. What one sees as feeling rejected, another can see as rejection of them. What one sees as processing information, another can see as not believing. The point is to clearly communicate what it is you are thinking and feeling, and to also ask your spouse if what you are seeing is what they intended to communicate. This whole process is too important to risk basing a decision on an assumption.

The second area of truth deals with questions and answers between husband and wife about what happened. This is an area on which even therapists cannot agree, although most do agree full disclosure is necessary for healing. Hope & Healing's recommendation is that the betrayed spouse determines what they need to know. One therapist says without those answers, it's like trying to put a puzzle together in the dark. The fact is the spouse will put a picture together. If necessary, they will create their own pieces and often our imagination is worse than the truth. And truth dribbled out slowly is more like slow torture and impedes the healing process.

The other side of that coin is the responsibility of the one who asks the questions. If you are unsure of what you need to know, take your time. You cannot erase information from your brain. And truth is not to be used as a weapon. The purpose of sharing truth is so the marriage and the people in it can heal.

Repeated questions are also common due to the fact that the trauma of revelation makes it difficult to absorb and process information. Comprehension and understanding are truly impaired. Give each other grace as this is difficult for both of you.

Making decisions based on truth will ensure that the healing you accomplish is being built on a foundation that will be strong in the future.

Insight

A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare. Gentle words are a tree of life; a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.

Proverbs 15:1&4 (NLT)

If I answered a question honestly, I knew the end result would be pain and weeping. No matter how hard I tried that's where we'd be. Maybe a little less honesty would circumvent this pattern. I was continually told to be honest but I didn't see much benefit to that. And this continuous cycle was making me angry too!

But what right did I have to be angry? I brought this into our lives. I was the adulterer here. Maybe this was my punishment.

These were the thoughts running through my mind as I sat early one morning to spend some much needed time in the Word. Some days it helped. I opened my Bible and just started reading, hoping for some insight, something that could help our situation. God got my attention when I read these verses in Proverbs 15. A gentle answer. And truth. Who could do that? Maybe God but not me. Then again, maybe God could help me do this. I certainly wasn't finding any other answers.

This combination of a gentle answer in response to anger, with the truth, was to become a valuable tool in our recovery. Inevitably one of us would flare with anger. Understandable? Yes, but non-productive for the most part. And when we both flared, nothing got accomplished. So I decided to try this. It was difficult to not respond emotionally, but when I took God's path with "a gentle answer", this would indeed bring some calm to the situation.

My gentle answer consisted of acknowledging the reality of our situation, the pain caused by my betrayal. It also accepted my culpability for what I'd done but focused on what we were seeking, a healed marriage. Often this diluted the emotional response and we could continue the conversation, resulting in a much more fruitful outcome. A gentle answer did turn away wrath and I didn't have to dilute the truth.

I asked God to help me to do this. To reach down deeper, beyond my feeling confronted or attacked, and past my natural inclination to defend myself. It certainly didn't come easy, but I knew my tongue could become an ugly weapon and cause even more damage. My Father, through His wonderful Holy Spirit, enabled me to follow these instructions in Proverbs. A gentle answer. And truth.

Gradually the times tempers flared decreased. Deceit lost its power to crush the spirit. God's way moved us towards healing.

You are worthy of care

"You were tired out by the length of your road, [Yet] you did not say, 'It is hopeless.' You found renewed strength, Therefore you did not faint.

Isaiah 57:10 (NASB)

Adultery recovery is intense. We are often overwhelmed not only by the circumstances in which we find ourselves but by the depth of the emotions and the physical toll taken on our bodies in response to this trauma. We encourage those in recovery to treat themselves as if they had been in an accident. If you were injured in an accident, you would not assume, nor even try, to continue on as if your body was not injured.

Yet those of us in adultery recovery often try to do just that. We are already in a depleted state emotionally and physically, and then expect ourselves to perform as if we weren't. We encourage you to focus on the essentials of life. Eliminate those things that are not necessary so you can conserve what energies you have. Your marriage is now your priority and you have indeed been injured.

You must nourish your body if you expect it to perform well during this healing process. Many of us are not hungry under this kind of stress but, just as if you were ill, do your best to get adequate nutrition daily. Make sure what you do eat provides the nutrients to supply what your body needs to function.

Rest is also essential. We cannot cope or think straight without rest. In fact studies have shown that drivers who are sleep deprived are as impaired as those impaired by alcohol. We don't function well without sleep. We can all get by for a few days but if your inability to sleep continues, you may need to consider getting some help to attain this much needed refreshment.

Abusing drugs or alcohol may numb the pain for a time but they don't help in the long run and in fact can do much to complicate an already convoluted situation. Reach for healthier options. Exercise, for one, stimulates chemicals to combat depression and can give you the refreshment you need.

Finally, we would also suggest it's healthy to take breaks from the work of healing. Enjoy your children, nature, even your spouse when you can. Taking a break to renew your energy is healthy. Just don't quit. Remember one of the reasons you're taking care of yourself is so you can work through this trauma and truly heal.

Insight

Then Jesus said, "Let's go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile." He said this because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn't even have time to eat. Mark 6:31-32(NLT)

I thought I could do this. I'd served in the food ministry for a long time. I could stand behind the counter and serve food. Yet with each passing plate, every spoonful given, the greetings and the thanks, I felt a little bit more of me slipping away. My hands shook, my legs became rubbery, and then completely overwhelmed, I ran out of the room.

My friend found me in the bathroom sobbing loudly. "I can't do this. I can't be here. It's all gone. Nothing will ever be the same again." And I went home.

I realized I was not okay. And there were some things I could no longer do. Self pity slipped in. If someone had died, I reasoned, no one would wonder why I was gone. But with adultery, I'd tried to prove I was okay for those who knew, and protect our secret from those who did not. I hadn't comprehended the extent of the physical and emotional cost infidelity incurred.

Later I came across this verse. I'd always known Jesus had taken some time for Himself, to go off and be with His Father, but somehow I'd missed this. He knew His disciples needed rest from their ministry to others. They needed to eat. They needed to rejuvenate. My attitude changed after seeing this. My Father knew what I needed too.

I had to rest. I had to take care of my body. I had very little strength and simple activities used it up completely. Stamina seemed to be a thing of the past. And the truth was it didn't matter if anyone understood or not. If I was to heal, I had to give myself the opportunity to do so. Just like when I'd had surgery.

Over time I began to see the benefit. I learned to say no and to resist the temptation to explain why. I had to focus on healing so I could function again.

We were able to take whole days off from recovery too. It had frightened me at first because I didn't want to pretend I was healed. But I soon appreciated the moments I could smile at my children, laugh at the dog, or enjoy the aroma of the forest. It wasn't pretending, it was strengthening. And just as the disciples would go back to ministry after their rest, we too would go back to working on rebuilding our marriage after ours.

You can find help

A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel. Proverbs 1:5 (NASB)

Most of us need help to walk through adultery recovery. Even though we each experience our own unique set of circumstances, having access to someone who is knowledgeable about what we're experiencing can bring a sense of stability when your world is unstable.

We encourage Christian counseling because most of us find that to be a valuable resource. A good counseling environment is one where both of you feel you're being heard and that the counselor can be trusted. Give all of you a few sessions to develop that. But counseling is also a "fit" and sometimes, through the fault of no one, it's not a fit. That's not a failure, but finding a counselor that does fit can be a rigorous process. We can only encourage you to go through the effort it takes because the benefit is worth it. We have information on our website to help you locate a counselor.

However, you do need to be aware that not all licensed or pastoral counselors agree on the best way to heal from adultery. This can be confusing at best for those of us going through the process, detrimental at worst. The bottom line is that whatever you implement to help your healing process must work for both of you. Hope & Healing advocates if it works for *both* of you and it's biblical, legal, moral and ethical—go for it. If it's not working for both of you then seek something that does. Often that seeking can be done with the aid of your counselor. Help him or her understand that what you're currently doing isn't working and explore options that can.

We also encourage you to educate yourself about adultery recovery. We certainly didn't know anything about it before we were here. And often we found what we thought we knew didn't ring true in practicality. We have some suggestions for books at the back of this pamphlet and more recommendations on our website. The more you understand the fewer complications you're likely to encounter. It also helped to know that some of the stumbling blocks we were encountering were common to the process and not a result of one or both of us not doing something right.

Looking for and finding help can be daunting but it is vital and we believe, we know; there is help out there that can benefit your recovery.

Insight

Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. ...For the Lord grants wisdom!
Proverbs 2:2 & 6(NLT)

Oh how I needed wisdom. And yet I felt bombarded by opinions. Few of those who were openly discussing the latest celebrity scandal dealing with infidelity knew that I was also experiencing the same thing at home. But they weren't shy about sharing their opinions as to what the betrayed spouse should do and what should be done to the one who was unfaithful. At the break table today, all six present agreed divorce was the only answer and that "once a cheater, always a cheater." I'd had to get up and leave before anyone noticed me losing what little composure I was able to maintain.

I needed help. I knew the advice handed out in break rooms wasn't going to be helpful. I knew God was the ultimate source of wisdom. If He is indeed the God of the universe, creator of all, knowing everything, then He would have to be my source. Wasn't God sufficient for all our needs? But I also knew that sometimes God spoke through other people—providing that human contact even Adam had needed while God was present.

So how would I go about gaining wisdom, acquiring wise counsel? This verse seemed to answer that question.

Tune my ears implied that I was an active participant. I was to listen which meant I had to be available to hear. Wisdom meant knowledge, experience, judgment. I needed to find someone who first knew our God, but also one who knew about infidelity and how to heal. I thought about the time our son needed a specialist. We'd verified the specialist was knowledgeable about our son's problem. He was and it worked out great. I needed to apply the same principles to those whose knowledge we sought to help with this problem.

Concentrate on understanding. I needed to exercise prudence, insight and discernment. I had to be willing to learn and be honest about what worked and what didn't work. There are few easy answers in this world, and I figured even fewer when rebuilding a marriage.

Before me lay an enormous task. One I knew I couldn't accomplish by myself. But the truth was there's a source for wisdom and I had a way into that source. God guide me, guide us, to those You have in mind to help us on this road.

You can make wise choices about sharing with others

Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.
Proverbs 12:18 (NIV)

Once infidelity has been revealed, often one of two things follows. Any and everyone are told what happened or attempts are made to hide the fact that an atom bomb just detonated in your home. Neither choice is conducive to healing. So let's discuss some alternatives.

One of the first things to seriously consider is if anyone who should hear this news from you could hear it from someone else. Your children, your families, your closest friends. Do not assume that the other players in this drama—the partner and their family—will make the same choices you make. And the truth is that those closest to you will know something is wrong just by being with you. We suggest the two of you sit together and determine who you both believe must be told. Then decide what information will be given and what words will be used. Young children don't necessarily need words like adultery when something like a broken promise that caused a lot of pain can suffice. We encourage you to then go together and do the telling, emphasizing that you're going to do your best to heal from this. You have the freedom to decline giving details—it really is between the two of you—but leave the door open for them to come to you if they have concerns. Leave them with the job of praying for you.

Avoid making anyone the bad guy and saying ugly things—even if they're true. Those kinds of words injure many more than just the intended victim. Try not to make this any harder for those who love you.

What if revelation was very public and these things have already happened? People know too much, heard too much or saw too much. It is never too late to take the steps we suggested above. You can go back to those who are close to you. You can apologize for an attitude or behavior you wished they hadn't witnessed. As unfortunate as it is for those who love us to witness our falls, it also gives us an opportunity to allow them to see how Christians handle it when they do mess up. Because the truth is we all do mess up.

When you make wise choices about sharing with others, you effectively block one of the inroads Satan can use to interfere with your healing.

Insight

A fool's proud talk becomes a rod that beats him, but the words of the wise keep them safe.
Proverbs 14:3 (NLT)

When I hung up the phone, I prayed. The woman who had called wanted me to know the “truth.” Her goal was to make sure we would no longer support her son and daughter-in-law in their infidelity recovery. It wasn’t the first time a loved one sincerely believed divorce would be better than trying to heal.

We’d had several meetings with this couple and saw many hopeful things. True repentance on the part of the betrayer. A desire expressed by both to do the work of healing. The willingness to explore the how’s and why’s. Seeking and accessing godly counsel. The peer support we were offering was only one piece of their recovery process.

The marriage had been in trouble for a long time according to both husband and wife. They’d known some family members would question their decision to reconcile. And this mother had witnessed many incidents. Arguments where angry and bitter words had been used. Confused and scared grandchildren. A son hurt and lonely. And when the infidelity had been revealed, her son had moved back home and she’d listened and agreed with every word his pain spewed about the affair and his wife.

That had all been several months ago and time had allowed both this son and his wife to evaluate what they wanted. What would be best for their children? Adultery is a grievous sin but we’ve seen it be the catalyst to get the attention of many people. Unfortunately, way too often their friends and family can’t appreciate the work God is doing in their hearts. When her son moved back home, his mother had been grieved.

God’s word assures us that foolish talk can cost dearly. There are many verses on the power of the tongue—like a rudder guiding a great ship or a spark igniting a forest fire. (James 3:3-6). But He also assures us we can use our tongues wisely. And that same great power can be used to repair damage done by a foolish tongue.

There is no one size fits all answer when it comes to what and who to tell in a crisis like infidelity. But we can choose wisely before we speak, or even after foolish words have already been spoken. Those wise words will preserve, guard, protect and keep safe.

Lord, give this concerned mother wise words to replace the foolish ones and may she over time see your power to heal.

You can have an advocate

Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.
Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NLT)

An advocate is one who supports, one who defends or pleads for a cause. In the case of adultery, an advocate would be someone who would come alongside and support you. In adultery recovery that would be someone who'd encourage and guide you towards healing. The best outcome would be a reconciled marriage but whether or not that happens; this person would help you towards the goal of healing from this wound.

That may well mean it is not someone who is more concerned about you getting what you think you want or need. Rather it would, for a Christian, be someone who would point you to the Lord and help you focus on the long term effects of your efforts. Someone who could think objectively.

Hope & Healing is an advocate for those in adultery recovery. Our goal is to support you as peers who have also experienced adultery recovery. To encourage you and offer you hope with truth. And to provide practical strategies based on biblical principles and life experiences. We will help you remember why you're even trying to make it through this.

We also encourage you to consider enlisting another person to come alongside you. Someone you can share thoughts and ideas with, know they will keep your confidence, and not judge. Someone of the same gender, who is spiritually mature, and that your spouse trusts and considers safe. Someone who values you *and* your marriage—not just you alone.

Neither this advocate, nor Hope & Healing are there to tell you what to do or advise a specific action; rather an advocate focuses on helping you make the best decisions for the best reasons. In an extremely emotional state it can be difficult to recognize the potential an action has to impact our lives, but an advocate can help by asking questions that lead us to consider that impact and expand our perspective.

A base of support that includes a godly counselor and peer support can be those God places around you to enable you to hear His voice and be your advocate.

Insight

Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. ...For each one shall bear his own load. Galatians 6:2 & 5 (NASB)

Did we need help or not? Infidelity presented this dilemma in spades.

I knew too many helpers could cause more damage. Those who care but have little to offer. Those whose interest is misplaced. We didn't need that.

But could we do this alone? We knew nothing about adultery recovery. What if our efforts seemed futile and we lost hope?

I didn't know which way to go. How could anyone help us? The only solution, in my opinion, was for this not to have happened and no one could turn the clock back. Besides, my shame was great and I didn't want anyone to know what had happened. I felt exposed and indecent. And I knew no one could guarantee we would heal.

It was when I studied these verses in Galatians that I came to understand God's perspective on this question.

The word *bear* in both verses means to carry, to support, to pick up. But I'd missed the meaning behind the word *burden* in verse two. The Greek word translated burden denotes weight. It's a heavy burden, one that is crushing—more than a person could carry without help. It was a call to come alongside and lend the support needed. A person moving a heavy piece of furniture needed the hands and strength of another to help move the furniture safely and succeed in accomplishing the goal.

Infidelity felt like the heaviest burden I'd ever been asked to bear. In fact, it felt impossible. Thus this verse applied to me. I needed help. And God had called others to come alongside those of us who needed help. He said it would *fulfill the law of Christ*. But I also realized I wouldn't ask a child or elderly person to help carry a heavy piece of furniture as that would impede my goal. Therefore, the help for this issue, adultery recovery, needed to be someone who had strength to offer. Someone with wisdom and knowledge that could help us attain our goal of a healed marriage.

Verse five does say to bear our *own load*. However it was not a reference to the size of the load but rather to my responsibility in the bearing of that load. I needed to carry what I could and choose wisely who would bear with us.

Enlisting the right help to bear this burden and fulfill my own responsibility could provide the strength we needed to heal.

Insights that helped others

May they lead you to His throne

Insight

...take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

2Corinthians 10:5 (NIV)

... Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

Philippians 4:8(NLT)

My thoughts were driving me crazy. Every day the same. I didn't want to think about adultery and what my husband had done. Then I'd pass by the bathroom and see his towel and wonder what towel he'd used when he was with her and it'd go down hill from there. My thoughts moving rapidly past the inanimate object to the true object of my scorn—my husband. I was so angry. I didn't even know I was capable of feeling this intense vile wrath.

God brought to my mind the verse in 2 Corinthians, *take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ*. I understood that. I even believed that. I wanted to be obedient to my Lord. But this seemed to be impossible.

Just how am I to do this, God? I keep putting all my ugly, evil thoughts in a cage but another one would follow right behind. I'm so busy capturing thoughts it's like an endless task. I keep picturing a kid sitting on the couch but in their head saying "I may be sitting on the outside, but on the inside I'm standing up!" I didn't want to be that kid. I wanted to obey in my heart.

Not long after that I found the answer. I was reading, trying to read, my Bible and came to Philippians 4:8. This was how. And it was so simple. Replace the thoughts I didn't want to have, the ones that were not obedient to Christ, with those He did want me to have.

True, and honorable, and right, and pure. Already, a problem. When I was having ugly thoughts about my husband, I was to turn those thoughts to true, honorable, right, and pure? He was no longer any of those things—at least not to me. But I could find something true, honorable, right, and pure in God's eyes, couldn't I?

Excellent and worthy of praise. Maybe at times I could even call to mind something about my husband that was. He was a good father. A good provider.

This was a turning point in my thought life. Simple, yes. Easy, no. But it did work and as we healed so did my thought life.

Insight

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant
Philippians 2:4 7(NIV)

Those who know me well know I have a tendency to be self-righteousness and therefore would probably never have chosen these particular verses to memorize. One of the first things that I said after finding out about the affair was “but I didn’t do anything wrong.” It was true I had not committed adultery but I also didn’t understand, at that time, what the anatomy of an affair looks like.

Dealing with the deluge of emotions after revelation was exhausting. And I didn’t handle it well. My attitude was, so much of the time, very rotten, ugly and hateful.

So, the Lord continually spoke to me about that attitude. I’d feel bad for a time, then the emotions would take over and off I’d go again. It was during this cycle that He brought these verses I’d memorized long ago to my mind. I hadn’t even thought about looking to the interests of my adulterous spouse since I’d learned of the infidelity. And I’d often thought of a servant as one who was walked upon, forgetting what the Lord taught about a “servant attitude.”

Neither of those things interested me in the beginning. Yet God kept bringing these words to my mind. Slowly showing me He had another way. I knew the Lord was saying, “You need to act as I’m calling you to act, no matter what has happened to you in your life.” I resisted but He was unrelenting until I finally listened and reluctantly agreed to try.

Being a servant in that way looked like this: me not spitting out vile words, me not throwing verbal accusations, me not doing what I knew would hurt. I was so often struggling with those types of temptations, and sometimes fell to them. God allowed me to see the benefit of looking to the interests of others and having that servant attitude. We made more progress when that happened. And I began to see more of the person I’d married and less of the sinner I’d thought had taken up residence.

I also came to realize that God used these verses to teach me that I was to be a servant to Him in whatever He asked me to do. And I could trust Him with the reins of my life.

Insight

Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the Lord." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone. Psalm 32:5 (NLT)

I can read it now without condemnation. Without guilt. Without fear. This verse, this entire Psalm, was one God used to bring my double life to an end. And the one God used to convince me I had to confess.

I never thought I could commit adultery. Never thought it would even be a temptation for me. Yet I found myself feeling lonely. Then someone I saw every day at work eased that loneliness. A friend, nothing more. For a while. Then such a short time later, when I looked in the mirror, I saw a stranger.

When the affair ended I was glad. I started reading my Bible again. Started getting right with God. That's where Psalm 32 came in. I'd confessed to God and repented. I knew He'd forgiven me. Yet there was a nagging in my spirit. To tell or not to tell. Could I just keep this between God and me? Did I have to tell my husband? I struggled with God over that decision. I didn't want to tell.

Then on a fall day we took a trip to the mountains. There I confessed what I had done. There began a new phase of my life. I didn't know what would happen, but one thing was clear, I no longer had to fear discovery and I knew I had made the right choice in God's eyes.

Over the next year God brought others to help us. Our counselor, godly support. Through the process of healing I finally realized the gravity of what I had done, the treachery of it all. I thought I'd known but the comprehension went much deeper once that sin was exposed to the light. The good news is, as we worked through our healing, that heaviness has been lifted. The promises of this Psalm have become real to me. I have indeed been blessed.

On the anniversary of my confession, we stood before our counselor, pastor, and those who offered peer support, renewing our vows. I looked at my husband and realized how thankful I was to have him and how close I came to throwing him away.

I cannot believe I had the gall to do such a thing. This Psalm helped me to realize that Jesus does lighten the load and indeed take all of it. I can now count this as one of my favorite passages of scripture.

Insight

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10 (NIV)

Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.

2 Chronicles 7:14 (NLT)

As I contemplated the things that helped us during our adultery recovery—and there were many—two stood out.

First I realized almost immediately that the enemy had tried to steal, kill and destroy. I had learned John 10:10 many years ago and God reminded me of this in the early days of our recovery. I did not deny the obvious human choices that, having been made, brought us to this place. I knew both of us had to deal with the reality and the consequences of our situation. But as a Christian, I also knew there was a spiritual reality. Satan wanted nothing more than to see us fail to heal. That realization went beyond human understanding and it gave me comfort in the midst of the devastation and pain. To this day I can still recall it and access it when we get into those “occasional” discussions.

And to my complete joy, I can say to the enemy “You did not win!”

The second thing that stood out to me as playing a major role in our recovery came out of the verse in 2 Chronicles 7:14. It’s difficult for me to read that verse without singing it in my mind. There was always something celestial about that song.

We realized early on our lack of resources to get through this. Fortunately we also realized that help was available through God. He led us to many who played a role in our recovery. But the best place he led us, was to our knees. Literally.

Traditionally, kneeling was a position of humbleness and honor when coming before a ruler. Although that still applies when we pray, I found an equally important thing about kneeling was how it made me feel. It is quite impossible to feel proud and self-righteous in this position, especially when we kneeled together as a couple. It felt awkward and weird at first but that passed as I realized the results. It has never failed to lift the oppression and remind us of who is in control if we will just let Him.

We lived through adultery recovery and we, as a couple, as man and wife, as lovers and friends, have survived.

Insight

He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will not be shaken. My victory and honor come from God alone. He is my refuge, a rock where no enemy can reach me. Psalm 62:6&7 (NLT)

Amidst the pain and anger was a distinct emptiness. I had never felt such disrespect nor had I realized how important being respected was to me. I'd always thought the one I'd married respected and honored me. What was that saying, you never know what you've got till it's gone? Now, I knew.

Then I read Psalm 62:7. I saw a truth I hadn't before understood. I'd worked hard to be the perfect spouse. I was proud of having a "wonderful Christian family." I had reveled in my "good marriage." I had lived in the fantasy world that said those were the things that brought me honor. When I'd learned about the infidelity, it had been like someone came in with a sharpened blade and cut away all those things while I stood there helpless, without anesthesia, and endured the painful separation of my fantasy.

This Psalm reminded me of the true source of my honor. My honor came from God. It was His gift to me and wasn't based on how well I performed. Rather, it was based on His love for me and His ability to keep it safely secured. When circumstances overwhelmed and I felt shaken, I could turn to my God and find a fortress. An unshakeable fortress protected by the very hand of an almighty God. If I believed my honor rested on what I had or didn't have according to the world, it could be stripped away. But if I believed what God said, that He was the source of my honor, then the world could not take what it couldn't access. It came from God alone and rested in a place *where no enemy can reach*.

As I allowed this truth to penetrate into my soul, I also became aware of the other side of this gift. It drew me to a very serious place where I realized my personal responsibility to be honorable before the Lord. No matter how ugly or hateful I was feeling. No matter how difficult the crisis of dealing with the torrent of emotions was. As a person with honor I needed to behave honorably.

I realized it was easier to mourn what I'd thought I'd lost than to live according to what I still had. I had to remember my *victory* also came from God and look to Him for that victory. The view was indeed better from the height of that rock.

Educating yourself about adultery recovery can greatly aid the process. Many have found the two listed below to be very helpful.

Torn Asunder: Recovering from Extramarital Affairs

Author: Dave Carder with Duncan Jaenicke

Publisher: Moody Press

Written by a pastor and counselor widely recognized for his expertise and experience in helping couples through adultery recovery. He conveys insightful explanations and underlying dynamics common to adultery along with tools for recovery. He also has a web site at www.tornasunder.org.

Unfaithful: Hope and Healing after Infidelity

Authors: Gary & Mona Shriver

Publisher: David C. Cook

Written by a couple who has healed from infidelity, they share common elements of the healing process along with Biblical principles and practical suggestions to help guide others through. Also includes a section on emotional affairs and a recovery timeline from a couple's perspective.

We have many other suggested resources on our website.

Contact info

Hope & Healing Ministries, Inc.

PO Box 309

Denair, CA 95316

Phone: 209-667-5012

Fax: 209-668-7673

Web address: www.hopeandhealing.us

E-mail: info@hopeandhealing.us

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Hope & Healing Ministries. Inc.

P.O. Box 309

Denair, CA 95316

Phone: (209) 667-5012

Fax: (209) 668-7673

e-mail; info@hopeandhealing.us



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