

# COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

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## Rebuilding Your Relationship After Infidelity.

Is it possible for your relationship to survive adultery? Do you believe there is a way to repair the bond that has been broken? Many couples go through this agony every year in our country. Some end in divorce while others carry on and rebuild their relationship. I believe there is a way for healing to occur if both partners are willing to do the work necessary to mend their shattered marriage. If infidelity has occurred in your relationship you probably believe this is the darkest moment of your life, but if you will allow God to shine His light upon you through His Word, He will guide you to the answers you are searching for. Where should you begin?

### 1. Acknowledge God's first desire.

Your heart may not be ready to hear it; but the Father has made it very clear through His Word and by His actions that He is a God of reconciliation. He longs for His adulterous children to come back to Him. God told the prophet Jeremiah to declare to the nation Israel, who had played the harlot with other gods, "Go and proclaim these words ... and say: 'Return, backsliding Israel,' says the LORD; 'I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful,' says the LORD; 'I will not remain angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the LORD your God, and have scattered your charms to alien deities under every green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice,' says the LORD. 'Return, O backsliding children,' says the LORD; 'for I am married to you' " (Jer. 3:12-14). These words clearly reveal that God's heart is for reconciliation with those who violate their covenant with Him. The only requirement was for Israel to acknowledge and repent of their sin, and God promised to have mercy and receive them back. The last thing the Father

wanted was to divorce them. His first desire was, and always is, to seek reconciliation. I believe God's example reveals that this should also be your first desire.

Many of you are probably thinking, *But, why did Jesus allow divorce for adultery in Matthew 19:9?* He permitted divorce in such cases where the offender refused to acknowledge his or her sin and repent. How can you be sure that this was the deciding factor? Simply return to the context of the passage quoted above and you will find that even God declared His right to divorce Israel because she would not return and repent. God also told Jeremiah: "Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. And I said, after she had done all these things, 'Return to Me.' But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also" (Jer. 3:6-8). Note that the key to this passage is the fact that God called to His people and asked them to return, but they refused. Even though Israel and Judah refused His request, God continued to appeal to them. Finally, because of the hardness of their hearts and many years of rejection He put them away into captivity.

Therefore, this example makes it clear that God's first desire is always to seek reconciliation. Why? "He hates divorce" for it results in the destruction of a relationship and family (Mal. 2:16). He did not want this divorce from His people, but was forced to deliver it because they steadfastly pursued their other lovers.

Consequently, if there is a possibility for reconciliation, why not pursue it? Why miss the opportunity to see your marriage healed and your family restored? Jesus taught that divorce only occurs

"because of the hardness of your hearts" (Matt. 19:8). I've personally witnessed this hardness in both the heart of the adulterer who has refused to repent from the adulterous relationship, and in the heart of an offended spouse who is refusing to forgive and actively seek reconciliation.



*Seek reconciliation!*

Therefore, are you willing to ask the Lord for what He wants? If you are, begin by asking Him for a willing heart to seek reconciliation. If both husband and wife are willing, you can reconcile anything. Remember, Jesus said, "With God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27). Do you believe His Word? If you refuse to seek His heart in this matter or refuse His power, it will be impossible to reconcile your relationship. Make your decision! Are you willing to let the Lord influence your decision-making and help you reconcile? If you are, continue with the following steps.

### 2. Determine your spouse's decision.

Once you've made your decision to seek reconciliation, the question is: has your spouse made the same decision? So often, the offending partner isn't willing to reconcile because he or she hasn't made the decision to cut off the adulterous relationship. At this point the offended spouse usually makes one of two fatal errors. Some become harsh and arrogant and demand reconciliation, forgetting that a relationship is built on the choice to love, which cannot be forced. On the other hand, some are too timid and afraid to require a decision from their spouse because they are fearful their mate will

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

choose to leave. The key is to remember it takes two willing partners to reconcile any relationship.

However, you may be wondering, *Is it truly biblical to require this decision from your mate?* The best answer to this question is to view how Elijah confronted the people over their adulterous worship of Baal. He made a simple request: *“How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him”* (1 Kings 18:21). Jesus also made it clear that people must be on one side or the other, revealing that there is no middle ground with Him: *“He who is not with Me is against Me”* (Luke 11:23). It is quite obvious by these examples that people need to make a decision, and there is nothing wrong with asking for one. Unless a person is challenged to make a decision you can’t even begin the reconciliation process. In addition, those who refuse to make a decision are in reality making one. No decision, is a clear choice to continue with the current behavior. That means that there will probably be another adulterous relationship in the future, or at the very least, a stalemate in the marriage relationship.

When your spouse refuses to make a decision what should you do? The best thing is to wait for a short time and seek God for direction as to what your response should be. Remember, God always gave His people *“time to repent”* (Rev. 2:21-22). But, don’t allow an indefinite time to pass. Why? Because then you are communicating a contradictory message. You are declaring with your words that you want reconciliation, but by allowing the status quo you are declaring that you will accept the relationship the way it is. Therefore, make it clear where you stand and require that your spouse do the same.

**3. Seek godly counsel.** I suggest contacting your pastor or an elder in your church because the issues that have divided you are very difficult and will require a total restructuring of your relationship. The primary issue you will need help with is understanding how your relationship has gotten into this condition. You will also need instruction concerning how to reconcile and forgive these past offenses. In addition, you will need someone who can keep you both accountable to fulfill what you’ve promised to do. Solomon gave great insight into the wisdom of getting counsel: *“The*

*way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise”* (Prov. 12:15). What’s right in your eyes may not be the best course of action.

In addition, be sure your counselor is well versed in the Scripture and can apply it practically to your circumstances. If you want God’s solutions for your problems, then you need God’s wisdom. You must heed the exhortation: *“Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors”* (Prov. 8:34). Are you waiting and listening at the Lord’s gates or are you only hearing what your friends are telling you?

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### **Are you willing to let the Lord influence your decision-making and help you reconcile?**

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Once you’ve heard the biblical counsel necessary, then you must apply the instruction you’ve received. The best counsel is worthless unless you put it into practice and make the changes necessary. Jesus said, *“Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock”* (Matt. 7:24). If you want your house to be rebuilt on a solid foundation, turn to God’s Word along with a biblical counselor who can help you heal your relationship.

**4. Choose to forgive.** After reading this heading you are probably thinking to yourself, *I don’t know if I can forgive. Is it really possible?* Yes it is! Take these steps:

(a) First, consider all the things that God has forgiven you for in your past. Then meditate on all the areas in which you are presently failing and consider the rich and free forgiveness that flows from the Father. By first looking at your own faults you are obeying the command given by Jesus in Matthew 7:5: *“First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”* Obedience to this command will greatly aid you in finding the willingness to forgive.

(b) Now ask God to give you the same tenderness of heart to forgive your spouse as God has demonstrated toward you. The Bible commands, *“Be kind to*

*one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you”* (Eph. 4:32).

(c) Next, make the choice to forgive your spouse. Remember, forgiveness is a choice you make from your heart simply because it is a command. Everything in the Christian life hinges on the choice to obey God’s commands. For example, service to the Lord is a command, but you must choose to yield yourself to do it (Joshua 24:15). Faith is also a command that must be obeyed. *“This is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another”* (1 John 3:23). Forgiveness works the same way. You are commanded: *“Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses”* (Mark 11:25-26). The words *“if you do not”* specifically refer to your choice.

In addition, don’t think that you first have to feel like forgiving your spouse before you actually choose to do it. Forgiveness must first be granted from the heart before it will ever be felt in your emotions (Matt. 18:35). Simply choose to do what is pleasing to the Lord and the feelings of forgiveness will follow (Is. 56:4).

(d) Once you’ve chosen to forgive, you must now keep your promise. Understand that when you forgive you make a promise to erase the sin off the internal ledger in your mind and never bring it up again. This is exactly what God does when He forgives you. He declared: *“I am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins”* (Is. 43:25). The words rendered *blots out* mean to wipe clean or obliterate. The word *remember* means to mention or recall. Therefore, when you forgive you are promising to never mention or recall this sin as a weapon in the heat of an argument. You obviously can’t forget or erase the sin from your memory, but you can refuse to remember it against your mate. This is a decision you must make every day and sometimes every hour.

**5. How did you get here?** After you have forgiven one another you must now get to the business of rebuilding your marriage. How can you start this process? When any structure collapses,

the first thing a safety engineer will do is go in and find out why the building failed. This is exactly what must be done in your marriage. Determining how your relationship got into such a weakened state is fundamental for knowing how to strengthen and resolve the issues that have divided you. You need understanding so this won't happen again. Solomon declared that the lack of understanding was one of the fundamental causes of adultery: "*Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he who does so destroys his own soul*" (Prov. 6:32).

Here are some questions to ask yourself and discuss with your spouse to gain this valuable understanding. Was the adultery due to a shallow or complete lack of a personal relationship with Christ? Were there issues in your marriage such as: built up resentments, pride, lust problems, failure to communicate, or other issues? In other words, what are the underlying issues that must be addressed?

In addition, did you as the offended spouse have any responsibility in driving your mate away? Were you uninvolved in the relationship? Were you controlling and manipulating or aloof and uncommitted to your spouse? Were you a silent partner or was your communication style offensive in other ways? Were you overbearing sexually or constantly putting off intimacy with your spouse?

Wherever the responsibility rests, receive it. Don't blame shift! Take responsibility for your part, confess your fault to your mate and ask forgiveness. Whatever the problems were, you need to allow the Lord to personally transform your life.

**6. Seek radical changes.** Another fundamental error couples make when trying to reconcile after adultery is to only make superficial changes in their relationship. However, this is very foolish because when only cosmetic changes occur several consequences result. First, both partners realize that nothing fundamental has changed and therefore one or both partners will lose hope that things will ever be different. Without hope there is no motivation to do the work necessary to alter the relationship. Both partners then begin to retreat back into their old habits and the marriage returns to the way it was before the adultery occurred. If this is happening in your relationship right now, read this section to your mate and choose to make the

changes necessary. Remember, the rebuilding process will require a daily labor of love that requires humility, honesty, denying selfish desires, and hard work to reconcile (1 Thess. 1:3; Matt. 16:24; 1 Peter 5:5-6).

If you want the best for your marriage ask God for a heart to *radically* repent. Paul taught that when you repent you should "*turn to God, and do works befitting repentance*" (Acts 26:20). The works that are befitting real repentance will always be radical. The word *repent* means to completely change your mind and heart about your sinful behavior and reverse directions. This means not only turning from the sin, but also fully turning your heart toward God. The Father's help and power are your only hope for the radical changes necessary. If this is what you want, first cry out to God for His Spirit to come and flood your heart and ask Him for the power to completely reversed direction from your past behaviors (Luke 11:13). Then, keep the promises you've made to your spouse to change whatever has been lacking in your relationship. Only these steps will ensure a complete healing in your marriage.

**7. Renew your relationship.** Jesus gave a simple and yet profound insight into how to renew your first love with Him. He said, "*Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent*" (Rev. 2:4-5). Jesus wanted His people to begin this renewing process by remembering what it was like when they fell in love with Him, repenting, and returning to the behaviors of that first love experience.

Therefore, if you want to renew your relationship with your spouse, apply this counsel to your marriage. Remember what it was like when you first met and fell in love. Ask God to forgive you for your selfishness, pride, and whatever has divided your relationship. Then go back and begin spending time with your spouse the way you used to when you first met. Take some walks together, make time for meaningful daily communication, start dating each other again, bring a special gift home, or leave a love note with some heartfelt words of your commitment and care.

Ultimately, your renewed love for one another is one of the best ways to know that you have made the radical changes

necessary to truly restore your relationship. Look at the level of intensity in your love for one another. Has the romantic attraction returned? Can you hardly wait to see one another at the end of the day? Do you long to spend time with one another? If the repentance between you has been sincere, if you have dealt with the real issues in your relationship that have divided you, then the love should return. If not, determine why it hasn't by identifying what still needs to occur, and if need be speak to your counselor about this issue.

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## Once you've chosen to forgive, you must now keep your promise.

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Another essential aspect to renewing your relationship is the need to trust your mate again. If you are the offended partner, I realize that your trust has been shattered and you are probably thinking, *I trusted once, how could I ever commit myself again like that?* I agree that restoring trust is difficult, but it can be done! How? Fundamentally, trust can only be rebuilt after all of the issues previously discussed in this article are whole-heartedly addressed in the marriage. It will take time. However, as you persevere and work at restoring your relationship the love between you will be renewed. Love is the key to trusting again. Paul declared this quality about love: "*Love ... believes all things*" (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

A more in-depth look at learning how to trust again can be found in Vol. 7, Issue 3 of this publication entitled, "*Re-establishing Trust In Your Relationship*" at [www.covenantkeepers.org](http://www.covenantkeepers.org).

**8. Control your thought life.** One final element that is essential for the lasting restoration of your relationship is a controlled thought life. The reason for this is that both partners will be tempted to go back and dwell in the past when things get tough, which will greatly hinder the rebuilding process. The offended partner usually struggles with resentment over what has happened or the fear that this will all happen again. The offending partner usually battles with the guilt and condemnation of his or her failure. Therefore, you must bring every thought into the captivity of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

You can't look backward! You must keep your eyes fixed on the road ahead. To illustrate this truth, just imagine what would happen if you tried to drive your car down the road while continually looking in your rear view mirror. You would obviously crash! If you fail to control your thought life your relationship is bound to hit a brick wall spiritual-ly and emotionally.

But, you may be thinking, *How can I control my thought life? Is it even possible to bring my thoughts into subjection to Christ?* The answer is yes! God would never command you to do something that was impossible. But, you are wondering, *How?*

(a.) First you must recognize the reason why it is important to bring your thoughts into captivity. It's very simple; your thinking directly controls how you feel toward your spouse. Consequently, you can't dwell in your mind on your mate's failures and at the same time have great emotional feelings of love. Neither can you dwell on the condemning thoughts of how you've destroyed your marriage and then be overflowing with joy in the Lord. This would be an impossibility. Note the direct correlation between Peter's thought life and his emotions after his denial of Christ: *"A second time the rooster crowed. Then Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.' And when he thought about it, he wept"* (Mark 14:72). After reading this passage, do you see how your thought life affects your emotional state?

(b.) Next, once the infidelity has been forgiven, make a choice to not dwell in your mind on this failure anymore. When the thoughts begin to come, reject them as something that has come to destroy you and draw you back into despair or resentment. Consider these thoughts and deal with them in the same manner as if someone was trying to gossip to you and destroy your relationship with information that is completely inappropriate for you to hear. This is what Paul did with his own thoughts concerning his past persecution of Christians. He said, *"But one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead"* (Phil. 3:13). The word *forgetting* means to neglect or put out of your mind. Is this what you are doing with your thoughts of the past? Are you deli-

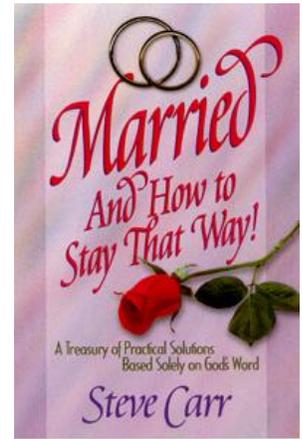
berately and willfully choosing to put them out of your mind or allowing them to stumble you?

(c.) Last, choose to think on the good changes that have occurred since your reconciliation. This again was Paul's solution while he was in prison after being held for over four years on false charges. Put yourself in Paul's position. Don't you think that he might have struggled in his mind over the unjust circumstances occurring in his life? He declared to the Philippian Church how he found peace: *"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things"* Phil. 4:8). You must make a conscious decision to dwell on the good things that have come about in your relationship with your mate. Choose to meditate on these things, not on the past. This is what it means to look forward. Are you daily dwelling on these thoughts?

In conclusion, as you take the above steps, may the God of all grace and comfort grant to you the strength and perseverance to work through every issue. Don't allow the sins of the past to hinder your complete reconciliation. Your marriage and family are truly worth it! Remember the promise that Jesus made to Paul in his hour of struggle: *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness"* (2 Cor. 12:9). May you find His strength today!

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