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# WHEN SOMEONE HAS AN AFFAIR

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What do you do when someone has an affair?

Several people I respect through the years have committed adultery. Some of them have been ministers, professors, or board members. Others have been friends, church attendees, or people in the community I know.

I've seen this from the perspective of a young person whose mentor was found to be in an improper relationship, and I've seen it from a denominational authority perspective, dealing with even the legal fallout of a fallen minister. I've also seen it as a pastor when a couple worked through the infidelity, and God worked miracles. And a few of my friends have confessed an affair as well and I've seen it up close from that perspective as well.

Just like the situations you may have faced, each is unique. However, the effect on you is often similar: shock, anger, and a feeling you get in your stomach that is hard to describe, the one the Scriptures call groaning.

After those initial emotions we are left wondering what to do. There may not be much you can do. But you can start by praying. Here are five ways to pray after you find out someone has had an affair.

## 1. Pray for counsel and community to be sought & received.

All too often adultery isolates those involved. Once it is discovered or confessed the one who broke trust is now persona non grata, literally "an unwelcome person." Even more, the spouse cheated unfortunately avoided by some, and even other family members (people feel awkward and don't know what to say, so they callously avoid them.) In reality all these "unwelcome persons"



need to be welcomed into counsel and community to survive this crisis. And I do mean survive. Not only is the marriage and family at risk, much more could be at risk. People's faith is up for grabs in this season, and some even turn to suicide after such affairs.

Pray that wise counsel would surround all involved and that community would be received by them as well. Participate in offering community as much as is possible and appropriate for you (and remember that your counsel may not be sought; they may be getting it from someone else and you need to be okay with that.)

## 2. Pray for marriage trust to be regained.

While this person may be in a position of authority (see #3), the most important thing right now is for the marriage to survive. Yes, someone facing a cheating spouse could in all good conscience seek to end the marriage with what many call "biblical grounds for divorce" \*(see Matthew 5:32, 19:9). However none of us should desire this for the couple.

Let's pray that trust would somehow be regained over time and that the marriage itself would make it through this. If you know about the affair, that

means it is a somewhat public revelation, so pray that the shame would subside and that the offending partner would be able to work through the legitimate guilt in the situation. Most cases of adultery result in a couple that struggles to find trust again. But when that trust is regained it is truly a miracle to watch. Pray that it happens.

### **3. Pray for protection for those influenced.**

If the adulterous one was in a position of influence, then pray for those he or she was in authority over. Those people will feel their trust has been violated as well. We hate to face it--but sometimes even a minister "falls from grace" and has an affair. Remember that while one can fall from grace they are never far from grace. God still offers grace out to these people, and while their position of influence is broken, their position as a child of God can be repaired in an instant of repentance and forgiveness from God.

The influence this person had over others offers an opportunity for the enemy to tempt them and cause doubt. Remember how the scriptures advise us on this point: "Don't put your confidence in powerful people; there is no help for you there" Psalm 146:3. Be sure that your faith is not in the persuasion and charisma of leaders above you, "so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power" 1 Corinthians 2:5. Pray for protection of those influenced so that this does not have wide-ranging impact.

### **4. Pray for restitution to take place.**

The reality is that restitution needs to happen. Restitution is the act of returning something stolen. The one who committed adultery stole trust from their spouse, stole faith from those they influence, and more likely than not stole something even from the one they had an affair with. It is hard to "return" these stolen things as they are feelings not stolen jewels to fence or just return physically. But these stolen things are just as valued as any jewels--more so, in fact. But through the long work of giving back to those violated restitution can happen.

It is important for you to think through whether you have truly been directly wronged in this situation. Part of your own adjustment to this may be to discover whether you have been "sinned against" in this situation. The original language in the passage

about confronting sin in Matthew 18 clearly states that "if your brother sins against you" then you are to go and point out his wrong. This can be liberating to you when you realize that in fact you have not been sinned against. If so, it is not your role to confront, unless you are the designated representative of the person who was sinned against or you are the only person in the position to confront the unjust sin. Our role is instead to pray that appropriate restitution would take place to all who were sinned against.

### **5. Pray for restoration of all involved.**

After a journey of regained trust and a marriage finding its stride again God can restore all those involved to their prior state. This is a beautiful thing. It is not normal. It is not human. Yes, it is more likely for us to never trust a person again who has done this. But this is super-human God stuff here. We can hope for a restoration of the offending partner, to their prior role, even if it is one of authority over others. Yes, they may need to do this in a different place, but that doesn't mean God is done with them.

Pray for each and every person involved. Don't forget the spouse who was cheated on--they should be restored to their prior place later as well. (Ironically sometimes this person is left behind in the care and restoration that can follow an affair, leading to difficult feelings of resentment.) The other offending party in the affair should also submit themselves to a process of restoration too. Pray that God's grace empowers a full restoration so that sin doesn't win this one.

What do you do when someone has an affair? Well, there are many things that might be done. But let's start with this one first: pray. --DD

### **Reflect or Discuss:**

- A. Without betraying confidence or identities, do you know of a story of a marriage surviving an affair?
- B. What impact might Psalm 146:3 and 1 Corinthians 5 have on the way we process our doubt after someone has an affair?
- C. Read Matthew 18:15-20. When you look at this passage in detail, how would you describe the roles of each person in the passage?