

AFFAIR RECOVERY TIMES

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THE FOUNDER'S CORNER

THE GIFT OF FORGIVENESS

Long ago I had a friend who abused and misused me. The circumstance was simple (as is most of what happens in childhood). He told me he had a new best friend, and in the blink of an eye, I was on the outside, crushed by the fickle state of relationships. At first I felt devastated and alone. I wondered what was wrong with me that he would choose another? My pride felt destroyed and shame washed over me like a roaring river. Feelings of inadequacy and insecurity were my constant companions. Would I ever have another best friend? Would anyone ever want to hang with me again?

Then I began to catch my emotional breath and gain perspective. No one was going to treat me that way. I found that each time I rode by his house anger flooded my soul. I imagined hurting him in the same way he'd

hurt me. I'd ignore him when we met in public. If we were both outside, I'd move to the other side of the street. If I encountered him in the store, I'd leave. If I saw him at school, I'd move to the other side of the room and pretend he wasn't there. I wanted to make sure he'd pay for what he'd done. I was going to make sure that I would never be treated that way again. If someone had suggested that I forgive him, I would have laughed. In my mind he didn't deserve forgiveness! He deserved death, pain and suffering! I wasn't interested in getting even- I wanted to get ahead. I was sure that the antidote to bitterness was revenge.

I find that to be a common belief, even for adults. The incredible pain of the betrayal may create a near impossible

situation for the betrayed. To forgive or not to forgive, that is the question. If you forgive and give your mate what they want, what will keep them from doing it again? Will they have suffered enough or even long enough to discourage them from doing it again? Bitterness and anger are the weapons used to inflict the pain necessary to discourage future indiscretions. As you withhold forgiveness, you may even notice your mate working harder to reconcile and gain forgiveness. For many, granting the gift of forgiveness is their last point of control. How can you maintain safety once you release your anger and bitterness?

What we don't realize is that **FORGIVENESS IS A GIFT YOU GIVE YOURSELF**. This is one of those issues where the teach-



Founder Rick Reynolds

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HARBORING HOPE

Each month, we feature the true story of a couple and their journey to recovery. In November, we introduced the narrative of Jeff and Bobbye. This month, we conclude their story with the end of Bobbye's tale.

Bobbye's Story

Compiled by Leslie Hardie

The next six months seem like it lasted years and years. Besides vocabulary lessons for me, Jeff's recovery involved 9 weeks of celibacy (which seemed so unfair to me), attending support groups, telling the mission team we worked with about Jeff's addiction, and lots of reading and talking and crying. During these months he only confessed his involvement with pictures.

Our counselor told me I had to tell two people so that I would have someone to talk to. This was an amazing area of God's protection for me. If you are struggling with where to go for support, pray hard about the people you share with. I almost told some friends that I know now could not have handled that kind of responsibility, but God led me to an acquaintance who had endured the same "vocabulary lessons" and a wise, understanding friend. Both of them assured me of God's plan and protection.

Perhaps one of the greatest fears of someone married to a sex addict is that there is more that they haven't told you. And when Jeff finally confessed that there was more than pictures, that he'd had sex with a prostitute, I wondered if there would be an end to the revelations. In counseling session after counseling session new information sur-

faced—erotic massages, topless bars, nude models and on and on—things I didn't know were possible anywhere, much less in my own home. My husband has an honest face and a gentle spirit. I could never have imagined him to be capable of such deception over such a length of time. I had a whole range of emotions—fear, anger, shame, and doubt.

This was where the healing for my struggle with anger began, too. Our marriage had been polluted by a force that I couldn't see. Giving the demon a name and recognizing it for the deceiver that it was, and learning to speak the truth and



walk in the light healed every aspect of our lives.

The affair recovery group we joined was an incredible blessing. The prayers the women in that group prayed for me were precious blessings that changed my life. It was a place to embrace the power of confession and to have a fellowship of sufferings.

The hardest day was when I had to tell my closest friend that we were not going to join them in the mission field. By then I was confident about Jeff's healing, but this seemed like a permanent loss. Her

husband blessed us with honest expressions of anger and support for Jeff.

I discovered that God's promise to "repay what the locust has eaten" (Joel 2:25) is true—four years later I was given the opportunity to help start a missions organization that has allowed me to not only visit my dear friend, but to minister to her needs as a missionary.

I cannot imagine a force more powerful than forgiveness that is rooted in the promises of the Mighty God. I am grateful daily for the opportunity to forgive and be forgiven. After our counseling ended, Jeff found an accountability partner among our closest friends. Jeff has had two solid years of sobriety in these last eight years; though the struggle has resumed in these last few years, Jeff is not giving in. His continued commitment to be transparent and seek help is a blessing and a challenge.

Jeff is my closest earthly friend! I can honestly say that I am proud of the man that he has become.

One of my favorite verses about Jesus is John 2:24-25: "But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man." Though it might be nice to have the luxury of putting my trust and security in my husband, I have learned that people fail us. This is not cynicism—it is reality of life east of Eden. There is joy—great joy—in putting Jeff in God's hands, praying that God will protect us both, and trusting that He who promised is able to keep His promises!

MARRIAGE BUILDERS

By Dr. John Mark Haney

I must confess that I have always had a sort of love-hate relationship with Valentine's Day. When I was a kid, I loved the school parties where we exchanged Valentine's from those little boxes you got at the grocery store, but as a teen, I often joined the throngs of those at school who didn't have a sweetheart while the ones who did paraded their sappy gifts around like war trophies.

Now as a married adult, I can't help but notice how the media plays on people's weaknesses around this holiday. For guys, the message sent is that you had better find the perfect gift for your wife OR ELSE! For the person who has been on the outs with their spouse, the jewelers would have you believe that the right diamond will erase all ill feel-

ings. And too often, the message is sent that the extent of your love is directly proportional to the amount of cash you spend on your spouse. In this convoluted way of thinking, a person who devotes hours writing the perfect love poem and putting it on a homemade greeting card for their spouse might be seen as being less attentive than the person who spends three minutes hastily ordering a last-minute, \$300 flower bouquet on the Internet.

If gift-giving has gotten to the point where it seems more about obligation than love, I would encourage you to take a step back and as a couple re-

examine how you celebrate this holiday. While Valentine's Day can be a wonderful symbolic celebration of love,

it can also be a source of guilt, coercion, bitterness, and greed that has nothing to do with love.

This year, my wife Leslie and I made the decision together that we would not exchange anything that we had to buy, but rather, would seek other ways to express our feelings for one another. So instead of heading dutifully to the mall, I am having fun thinking about how I can make the day special for her. While Hallmark and Zales might disagree, thoughtfulness does not have to come with a price tag.



THE FOUNDER'S CORNER (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

ings of Jesus are very clear. Forgiveness is not optional. It is not for the benefit of the betrayer, but rather for the benefit of the offended that forgiveness is given. As a child, I discovered that my unforgiveness affected me far more than my friend. As long as I held a grudge, he had control of my life. When I saw him, I had to alter my plans to make sure he knew I was still angry. I lost my peace. Just the very sight of him stirred deep emotions of hatred and ruined my day. It stole my joy. Nothing made me more miserable than seeing him living well while I still suffered. My unforgiveness served no good purpose other than to harm me, and in reality, I had already been harmed enough.

Now, don't think I'm saying that forgiveness is quick or cheap. In fact it's far more than the offender deserves. Again, though, it is not for their sake that we forgive. We

forgive for God's sake, and for our own benefit. Bitterness and unforgiveness will never bring peace or joy. They are the poison I take to kill another.

I'm also not saying that forgiveness is synonymous with trust or reconciliation. I'm not even saying that the anger and hurt should be gone. The forgiveness I'm writing about is between you and God where you (like Jesus) say "Father forgive them, they don't know what they're doing". It's releasing them to God and allowing Him to forgive them through you. This is to set yourself free, not your mate.

If you are the betrayer reading this note, then please don't use this to say to your mate "you have to forgive me". That's between them and God. In fact, if you feel you need your mate's forgiveness in order for you to be ok, then I'd like to invite you to consider the possi-

bility that your mate may be your god. Those from whom we seek to gain forgiveness in order to find peace, or to relieve our fears, are the ones who we actually look to in order to fulfill us. For the betrayer what this normally reveals is that they fear people far more than they fear God. If you have been able to receive God's forgiveness, and He's the one you live for, then whether or not your mate forgives you will not affect your peace. If you've received the forgiveness you need from God, then you'll be free to assist your mate in finding healing rather than pressuring them to forgive you for your own benefit.

I realize that there is much more to be said on this crucial subject than can fit in this brief column, so if you have questions, please feel free to write me at rick@hope-now.com.

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A Community of Hope and Healing

We're On the Web!
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Affair Recovery Center is a community of counseling professionals and couples. Our professional counselors are dedicated to the restoration of marriages crippled by infidelity. Our organization includes numerous couples who have experienced the abundant blessings of reconciliation and renewal.

Our mission is to offer hope, support, and recovery for couples and individuals who have suffered the pain resulting from infidelity, betrayal, or sexual addiction.

A FINAL WORD ABOUT FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is one thing when someone has hurt our feelings or let us down. It feels like a completely different prospect when one has experienced a spouse's betrayal. As Christians, however, God doesn't really make it optional. One of the ways that I look at forgiveness is as a process, an event, and then a process on the other side. I

believe we must sit down and prayerfully consider what it is we are really forgiving. Numerous losses are experienced with betrayal: loss of the idea of who are mate is, loss of hope for the future, loss of friendships— the list goes on and on. Ultimately, it involves no longer holding the other in indebtedness to us for what they have done.

One definition of forgiveness is "giving up the hope of having a better past." The event can be freeing for us. The process on the other side of the event is to remember I have forgiven the particular offense when bad feelings pop into my mind, or when the person does something else hurtful in the present.

By Leslie Hardie

THE BULLETIN BOARD



Be watching for the Affair Recovery Center's next EMS (Emergency Marital Services) weekend, which is an intensive couple's seminar that has helped countless marriages. Call us or log on for more information, to register, or to request a brochure. Weekend lodging information is available.

THE PROFESSIONALS AT THE AFFAIR RECOVERY CENTER OFFER NUMEROUS SEMINARS FOR GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS. CALL US OR VISIT US ONLINE FOR A LIST OF LENGTHS AND TOPICS. WE CAN ALSO TAILOR A SEMINAR OR RETREAT TO YOUR NEEDS.