

# Rebuilding a Marriage After Betrayal<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Robert D. Jones

## Introduction:

1) What do we mean by betrayal?

2) A nightmare, tragedy, and crisis, but also. . . .

3) Determine in advance your biblical convictions and procedures about handling conflict and about betrayal, divorce, and remarriage.

## A. Crisis Intervention Phase:

1. Understand how the betrayal was discovered and its immediate impact on each spouse.

What type of betrayal?

When did it occur? How often? For how long?

How was it discovered? When?

What is the offended partner's attitude/condition/intentions?

### Case Situation

Scott, age 33, and Kim, age 31, have been married eight years, have two young children, and are members of your church. They attend worship regularly but are not active in small group life or in ministry, although Kim does serve on the Sunday nursery rotation and she occasionally comes to women's social activities. Last night Kim discovered that Scott was having an affair with a woman she knew. Kim called the church office to ask for a recommended counselor. So the secretary called you to see if you were willing and able. You agree to help.

Question: What is Kim experiencing?

What is the offending partner's attitude/condition/intentions?

---

<sup>1</sup> See also my booklet, *Restoring Your Broken Marriage: Healing After Adultery* (New Growth Press, 2006, 2009). For further application of various truths in this workshop relating to pleasing God, confession/repentance, and forgiveness, see also my book, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Crossway, 2012).

2. Give God's hope: God can restore such a marriage, if both spouses are willing to follow Christ.

a) God is present, gracious, and powerful in the situation to comfort the offended spouse (*Ps 46:1–2,7,11; Isa 41:10; 1 Cor 10:13*) and to forgive the repentant offending spouse (*Ps 32; 51; 130*)

b) God in his sovereignty, goodness, and wisdom has a positive redemptive purpose in this situation for both spouses. *Rom 8:28–29; Gen 50:20; Jer 29:11; Joel 2:12–13,25; Hosea 1–3.*

(1) For the individual spouse who seeks to follow Jesus, God guarantees to use this bad thing to make him more like Jesus, even if his spouse does not follow Jesus.

(2) If both spouses seek to follow Jesus, God not only will restore the marriage, but will make it even stronger than it was.

### **B. Recommitment Phase**

3. Secure commitment by each spouse to please God, respond God's way, and deal with the betrayal.

Beware of . . .

- ◆ Anger, bitterness, revenge
- ◆ Rash decisions
- ◆ Gossip, involving others
- ◆ Competing counsel
- ◆ Despair
- ◆ Cynicism

4. Lead each spouse through specific steps of biblical repentance, confession, and forgiveness, in light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The two paths:

#### **a) Offending Partner's Path**

(1) Immediately and fully discontinue the betraying activity. If adultery, break the relationship immediately (*Matt 5:27–32; 2 Tim 2:22*).

(2) Initial confession: honestly disclose the needed facts to spouse, elders, and counselor.

(3) Thoroughly confess both the betrayal and any deception/lies to God, your spouse, and appropriate others (e.g., church leaders, older children), and seek their forgiveness (*Ezra 9; Neh 9; Dan 9; Ps 32; 51*).

(4) Develop and implement a godly, thorough action plan of change (*Prov 28:13–14*)

(5) Believe the gospel and grow in faith and obedience

*b) Offended Partner's Path*

(1) Find your security and identity in Christ, not in your spouse or in marriage (*Ps 27:9–10; 73:25–26; John 16:32; Gal 3:26–29; Luke 10:20; 10:38–42*)

(2) Adopt a biblical view of trials and mistreatment, including God's sovereign, wise, loving purposes (*Rom 8:28–30; 1 Peter 2:21–23; 4:19*)<sup>2</sup>

(3) Cultivate attitudinal/heart forgiveness (unconditional)<sup>3</sup>

(4) Grant transacted/granted forgiveness if your spouse repents (conditional)

---

<sup>2</sup> Consider Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts*; D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord*; David Powlison, *God's Grace in Your Suffering*; John Piper and Justin Taylor, eds., *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*; or my booklet, *When Trouble Shows Up: Seeing God's Transforming Love* (New Growth Press, 2013)

<sup>3</sup> For the distinction between attitudinal (Mark 11:25) and transacted forgiveness (Luke 17:3b–4), including differences among biblical counselors, see my *Pursuing Peace*, 131–136, 196–198. For addressing resentment and bitterness, see chap. 9 or my booklet version, *Freedom from Resentment: Stopping Hurts from Turning Bitter* (New Growth Press, 2010).

(5) Realize the process nature of these matters and grow in faith and obedience, including submitting to God the understandable desire that this “will never happen again.”

5. Secure their recommitment to the marriage covenant and to rebuilding the marriage through biblical counseling.

6. Help them decide at each point what they will report to others – the “joint press release”

### **C. Rebuilding Phase:**

7. Lead them the couple to identify, agree on, and commit to dealing with the individual and marital fruit and root problems that precipitated and attended the betrayal.

<b>Husband Issues</b>	<b>Couple Together</b>	<b>Wife Issues</b>

8. Proceed with normal biblical marriage counseling.

a) Begin with an issue that is serious and that requires the offender to demonstrate the reality of his repentance and commitment to the marriage.

b) Be prepared to return often to renew the above steps (esp. main points 4 and 5) and give hope.

### **Conclusion: Possible Outcomes**

Appendix One  
**Rebuilding Your Life and Marriage After Betrayal**  
*Robert D. Jones*

1. Based on the saving work and promises of Jesus Christ in the gospel, believe that God can restore and rebuild your life and marriage. In one sense, your marriage can become stronger than it was before the betrayal.

- *Psalm 46:1–2,7,11*
- *Romans 8:28–29*
- *Genesis 50:20*
- *Joel 2:12–13,25*
- *Hosea 1–3*
- *Jeremiah 29:11*

2. In light of this hope, commit yourself to pleasing God and following Jesus. This means believing and doing what God calls you to believe and do, even if your spouse does not. We can and will help you become the person God wants you to be, whether or not your spouse changes. Here are the paths for each spouse:

<b>The Offending Partner’s Path</b>	<b>The Offended Partner’s Path</b>
1) Cease immediately all aspects of the betraying activity (e.g., break the adulterous relationship)	1) Find your security and identity in Christ, not in your spouse or in marriage ( <i>Ps 27:10; 73:23–26; Luke 10:38–42</i> )
2) Initial confession: honestly disclose the needed facts to your spouse, elders, and counselor	2) Adopt a biblical view of trials/mistreatment, including God’s sovereign, wise, loving purposes
3) Thoroughly confess both the betrayal and any deception/lies to God, your spouse, and appropriate others, and seek their forgiveness	3) Cultivate attitudinal/heart forgiveness (unconditional), in light of the Gospel
4) Develop and implement a godly, thorough, specific action plan of change ( <i>Prov 28:13–14</i> )	4) Grant transacted/granted forgiveness (conditional, if the offender repents)
5) Believe the Gospel and move forward, continuing the action plan in faith and obedience	5) Realize the process nature of these matters; deal with continuing memories

3. Recommit yourself to the marriage covenant and to working on patiently rebuilding the marriage relationship through biblical counseling.

4. Identify and commit yourself as a couple to dealing with the individual and marital “root” (heart) and “fruit” (behavior) issues that precipitated and attended the betrayal.

Husband Issues	Couple Together	Wife Issues

*There is help and hope for you today! God can rebuild your life, and your marriage, if you are willing to do it his way. He has done this with countless others. Your biblical counselor can guide you in this.*

Appendix Two

**Some Frequently Asked Questions About Counseling Adultery Cases**

1. Should the offender be tested for a sexually-transmitted disease?

- Yes, he should be willing to go through medical testing and to refrain from full sexual activity.
- She can choose to risk sex if she wants but I would support her abstaining, pending test results. Until then, if she wants such, she can invite him to minister to her sexually (or vice versa) in other ways.

2. What if your counselee is an adulterous husband who impregnates the other woman?

- Seek to ascertain paternity. A paternity test may be wise, especially if she is married or sexually active with other partners. (We will assume below that the adulterer is indeed the biological father.)
- At minimum, the repentant adulterer must assume proper financial responsibilities (what courts would require or family law guidelines recommend, if not more). Biblical repentance includes restitution.
- The adulterous man should urge the other woman to keep and not abort the baby. The sin of abortion is not a God-honoring response to the man and woman's sin.
- If the other woman is married, I encourage that woman and her husband to view the baby as theirs. If necessary, that husband should seek to adopt the child, despite the child not being biologically his. I think it is best for the child to have one dad and for him to be the birth mother's covenant husband. Sin, of course, complicates things, but this seems the wisest path if all parties can agree.
- If the other woman is unmarried, then consider the usual options for an unwed mother: remain unmarried and raise the baby as a single mom, remain unmarried and place the baby for adoption, or marry someone else. In each case, the adulterous man should take proper responsibility. If the other woman chooses to raise her baby or place her baby for adoption, then I suggest some form of a one-time, lump sum financial assistance and the severing of their relationship. I think it unwise for the adulterous man and his wife to adopt the baby—the emotional connections with the birth mother might be harmful to their marriage.

3. What if your counselee is an adulterous wife who becomes pregnant?

- Per above, seek to ascertain who the father is. A paternity test may be wise. (We will assume below that the other man is indeed the biological dad.)
- It seems best for the husband and wife to view the baby as theirs and to raise the child as theirs. If a legal step of adoption is needed, the husband should adopt the baby. It is best for the child to have one dad and for that dad to be the birth mother's covenant husband. Abortion is not an option.
- If the man who impregnated her wants to share in some one-time costs, that would be honorable but not something the husband and wife should demand. Your counselee couple should treat this pregnancy as they would any other unplanned pregnancy.

4. What if the adulterer is a pastor? All of the above truths apply. But, in addition. . . .

- He must confess his sins to God, his spouse, and the congregation, and renew his commitment to love, trust, and follow the Lord. The other church leaders and counselor(s) should preview and approve the statement the offending pastor will read to the members. Unity here is vital.
- He must resign immediately, even if some supporters object (for various reasons), and he must carry no hope, expectation, or presumption of ever being restored to pastoral ministry.
- He must find a secular, non-ministry career to honor and serve God and to provide for himself and his family. He must not think of "finding something until" he can one day return to the pastorate. This may require vocational/career counseling, further education or training, and relocation.
- While his church employment and pastoral ministry are over, he must realize that, if he repents and follows Jesus, a new ministry will have now begun. There will be people he can minister to, including 2 Corinthians 1 opportunities to comfort those who have sinned and suffered in similar ways.
- He must submit to the counseling and accountability of his church. This might involve relocating to another church that can serve as an intentional "restoration" church with specialized resources to assist. (Ask God to raise up more churches with this vision of becoming a restoration church!)

- The counselor(s) need to be someone with experience, maturity, and backbone. Pastors can be defensive and difficult to counsel. They skillfully can use their biblical knowledge and conversational skills to deflect needed heart probing.
- He must deal biblically with any bitterness he may have toward the church, the church members, his fellow church leaders, his spouse, his friend, his adultery partner, or her husband for exposing his sin and for their roles in the church deciding to dismiss him or accept his resignation.
- In all this, do not forget the pastor's wife and children. They have to suffer all the usual gut-wrenching problems associated with a husband/father's infidelity, plus the additional problems specific to pastor's sin, including his job loss, the likely loss of their church family and their need to relocate. (A layman who commits adultery and his family do not necessarily lose all this.) Specific Christ-centered counseling must be provided for the wife and for the children as needed.

#### 5. Can a repentant pastor ever be restored to some form of pastoral ministry?

- This is not a question to ask at this stage. We must insist that the offender not ask it or contemplate it.
- If, however, the above steps have been in place and he consistently follows Jesus, then in time, under the right circumstances and under the above accountability, I see nothing in Scripture that would necessarily prohibit a repentant adulterer in all cases from being restored to some form of pastoral ministry. (Please note all the qualifiers and tentativeness in that sentence!)
- The leaders of the restoration church, of course, and his counselor(s) must be able to recommend him for this pastoral ministry.
- In such cases, he should inform the elders of the prospective new church, or the parachurch's executive director or board, about his past sin and his path of restoration, and allow these new prospective leaders to contact the leaders of the previous church, the restoration church, and the counselor(s). I do not think the congregational members must be informed of the man's past; if a member finds out, the member should talk with the church leaders. They, not the pastor, are responsible for the church's decision to bring him on.
- How long might such restoration process take, if it might ever happen? I cannot stipulate the number of years, but long enough for him to develop a new career and for his repentance to be settled and beyond doubt. Consider Spurgeon's perspective (especially the John Angell James quote):

The highest moral character must be sedulously maintained. Many are disqualified for office in the church who are well enough as simple members. I hold very stern opinions with regard to Christian men who have fallen into gross sin; I rejoice that they may be truly converted, and may be with mingled hope and caution received into the church; but I question, gravely question whether a man who has grossly sinned should be very readily restored to the pulpit. As John Angell James remarks, "When a preacher of righteousness has stood in the way of sinners, he should never again open his lips in the great congregation until his repentance is as notorious as his sin." Let those who have been shorn by the sons of Ammon tarry at Jericho till their beards be grown [RDJ: 2 Sam 10]; this has often been used as a taunt to beardless boys to whom it is evidently inapplicable, it is an accurate enough metaphor for dishonoured and characterless men, let their age be what it may. Alas! the beard of reputation once shorn is hard to grow again. Open immorality, in most cases, however deep the repentance, is a fatal sign that ministerial graces were never in the man's character. Caesar's wife must be beyond suspicion, and there must be no ugly rumours as to ministerial inconsistency in the past, or the hope of usefulness will be slender. Into the church such fallen ones are to be received as penitents, and into the ministry they may be received if God puts them there; my doubt is not about that, but as to whether God ever did place them there; and my belief is that we should be very slow to help back to the pulpit men, who having been once tried, have proved themselves to have too little grace to stand the crucial test of ministerial life.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "Lecture I: The Minister's Self-Watch," *Lectures to My Students*.

Appendix Three  
**God's Perspective on Violence within Marriage**

We know that various evangelical Bible scholars and biblical counselors hold various views whether God ever allows divorce and remarriage and, if so, under what conditions. And we know that Old Testament scholars and English Bible translations differ on whether Malachi 2:16 says that God “hates divorce”<sup>4</sup> or that God opposes the man who “hates and divorces” his wife.<sup>5</sup>

But whatever our views on these matters—whether or not, for example, God allows for divorce for the victims of serial, unrepentant, spousal violence<sup>6</sup>—we do know this: God hates sinful violence and his Word condemns it:

- Psalm 10:7–10, His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue. <sup>8</sup> He lies in wait near the villages; from ambush he murders the innocent, watching in secret for his victims. <sup>9</sup> He lies in wait like a lion in cover; he lies in wait to catch the helpless; he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net. <sup>10</sup> His victims are crushed, they collapse; they fall under his strength.
- Psalm 11:4–6, The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them. <sup>5</sup> The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates. <sup>6</sup> On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot.
- Proverbs 3:31–32, Do not envy a violent man or choose any of his ways, <sup>32</sup> for the LORD detests a perverse man but takes the upright into his confidence.
- Proverbs 6:16–19, There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: <sup>17</sup> haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, <sup>18</sup> a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, <sup>19</sup> a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.
- Proverbs 8:13, To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.
- Proverbs 13:2, From the fruit of their lips people enjoy good things, but the unfaithful have an appetite for violence.
- Proverbs 16:27, A scoundrel plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire.
- Proverbs 16:29–30, A violent person entices their neighbor and leads them down a path that is not good. <sup>30</sup> Whoever winks with their eye is plotting perversity; whoever purses their lips is bent on evil.
- Proverbs 16:32, Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.
- Proverbs 21:7, The violence of the wicked will drag them away, for they refuse to do what is right.
- Proverbs 28:3, A ruler who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain that leaves no crops.
- Proverbs 29:10, The bloodthirsty hate a person of integrity and seek to kill the upright.

---

<sup>4</sup> As understood and translated by the older RSV, NIV84, and NASB95 versions.

<sup>5</sup> As understood and translated by HCSB/CSB, ESV, and NIV2011, the three most recent trustworthy, evangelical, scholarly English translations.

<sup>6</sup> I believe God does allow for divorce by such as sinned-against spouse, based on 1 Cor. 7:15–16, properly applied.