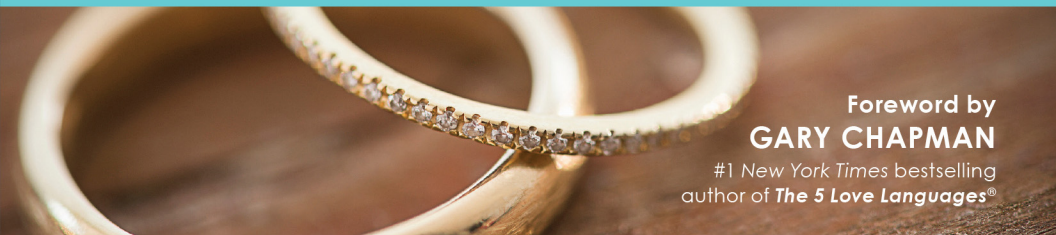


# NO MORE PERFECT MARRIAGES

REAL

Experience the Freedom of Being **REAL** Together



Foreword by  
**GARY CHAPMAN**  
#1 New York Times bestselling  
author of *The 5 Love Languages*®

MARK & JILL SAVAGE



## BEWARE THE *Quicksand*

### THE SLOW FADE OF NAÏVETÉ

*T*he young mom chatted with me after the Hearts at Home conference where more than five thousand moms had gathered for a wonderful weekend of laughter, encouragement, and education for the challenging job of being a mom. “Have you ever thought about having a conference for dads?” she asked.

Before I could reply, she continued, “There’s a stay-at-home dad in our neighborhood and he’s become my best friend. We take the kids to the park together, shop together, and even do our once-a-month cooking together. He’s a great guy!” She continued to chat, but my unspoken thoughts now overshadowed her spoken words.

Sirens, whistles, and red flags were going off inside my head. I

wanted to scream, “No! Don’t be naïve. Remove the blinders! Please put some boundaries in place and build a hedge of protection around your marriage!” It was obvious she had no idea about the danger of this seemingly harmless situation.

Naïveté is to knowingly place ourselves in a position of relational danger downplaying the possibility that it could lead to compromise. Years ago, that primarily meant being careful about not being alone with someone of the opposite sex other than your spouse. Today, social media has opened up a whole new arena of relationship circles where seemingly innocent connections can lead to not-so-innocent relationships.

Mark and I spend countless hours each month mentoring hurting marriages. We counsel others based on our own “back from the brink” experience when naïveté set the fade in motion, infidelity occurred, and our own marriage seemed hopeless. Many of the couples we meet with are also dealing with damage caused by infidelity. The story is the same every time: the unfaithful spouse develops a relationship that started innocently. It was someone to talk to, someone who listened and cared. In most of those stories, naïveté allowed the interaction to happen in the first place. Then the fade began.

Here’s our story:

**Mark:** I’ll be the first to confess that for most of our marriage Jill has always been very intentional about making advance decisions to protect our marriage. While I accommodated her requests to a certain extent, deep down I felt in control and that “rules” were ridiculous. As I write those words, I think of their foolishness. I also think of quicksand, which has the appearance of the ground or terrain being normal and

safe. Yet when an individual steps on quicksand, the person begins to sink. It is the same with naïveté. I hate that it took a tragedy for me to realize how foolish I had been in resisting wisdom and not putting boundaries in place to protect myself and my marriage.

**Jill:** My commitment to keeping temptation at bay came from a situation I experienced early in our marriage. We'd been married five years and had two children. Mark was in Bible college and I was doing day care during the day and working at a dinner theater several evenings a week. Mark and I were meeting each other coming and going, and before I knew it, I was enjoying the conversations I was having and the attention I was getting from a man I worked with at the theater. Temptation set in and I realized the dangerous place my head and my heart were in. Thankfully I got honest with Mark, quit the job, and from that point on, established predetermined boundaries in place to keep temptation at bay.

*Our human nature has a way of remembering what we need to forget and forgetting what we need to remember.*

**Mark:** I remember the night Jill confessed to me her attraction to her coworker. Amazingly, I handled the conversation well. I was so glad she was being honest. We both talked about what steps we needed to take to get her out of this place of temptation, including upping the investment in our own marriage. If only I could have kept this situation at the forefront of my mind so many years later when I faced my own temptation. Our human nature, however, has a way of remembering what we need to forget and forgetting what we need to remember.

Twenty-three years later, as I was nearing my fiftieth birthday, my inner life took a nosedive. In all areas of my life: in ministry, in my job, in my marriage, and with God, I didn't feel like I was "good enough."

It felt like I was falling short in every relationship I had. I was disappointed, frustrated, burned out. I had left pastoring so Jill and I could do ministry more closely, and even that didn't feel like it was working out as I imagined it would. I was angry and came to the conclusion that the only answer I could figure out to stop that feeling was to be done with it all.

I was done trying to be what everyone wanted. I was done trying to be what Jill wanted. I was done being what God wanted. It was all impossible, and I was a man without hope. To be naïve when you have so much turmoil going on inside of yourself is even more dangerous and volatile. Eventually I moved from innocent conversations, to an emotional affair, to a physical affair. I postured myself to leave my marriage and start a new life. I told myself the kids would be okay. They would be resilient. They would survive. I had already secretly set up an apartment weeks before. I walked out the door feeling free, but I would later come to realize it was a false sense of freedom. You see, I was leaving, but I was still taking me with me.

**Jill:** I knew that Mark was struggling, but I had no idea the turmoil going on inside his head and his heart. Without self-imposed guardrails in place, social media opened the door for the beginnings of an illicit relationship.

**Mark:** My naïveté fade started with “this won't hurt anyone” (**naïve**) to “I deserve this. I need to let off some steam” (**rationalize**) to “another relationship just might be the answer” (**compromise**). This is a real-life picture of James 1:14–15 (ESV): “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth

death.” My misplaced desire led to sin, which led to death. Not a physical death, but emotional, spiritual, and relational death.

**Jill:** We stop naïveté with **wisdom**. First Corinthians 13:7 says that love “protects.” It is our job to protect our marriage. These days I’m as committed as ever to the wisdom of accountability. If I need to go to a business meeting or a business lunch with a man, I ask someone else to come along. As the emails have come in from both men and women whose relationships are hurting, only Mark is responding to the ones from men, and I am responding to the ones from women.

**Mark:** These days I’m embracing wisdom. I’m a contractor who is often in people’s homes during the day. I work hard to make sure I have another crew member with me while working in someone’s home. When I’m traveling, I ask a friend to travel with me. I’m also no longer on Facebook. I’ll admit that I miss it, but my family is too important to me to risk the temptation. When I disregarded healthy guardrails for the lure of Facebook, I was not accepting wisdom that I had been given for protecting my marriage. There is an enemy that is out to steal and destroy. He tickles our flesh into temptations that become decisions of devastation. Engage wisdom, protect your marriage, and be reminded of who the real enemy is.

## SOUL MIRAGES

We’ve all seen them on a hot day. Up ahead, it looks like there’s a sheet of water on the road. As we get closer, we realize there’s no water there at all. It’s a mirage caused by the heat mixed with light in just the right way.

We’ve all experienced soul mirages in some way. We tell ourselves, “In the fall when all my kids are in school, I’m going to get all the

closets cleaned out.” Or, “Next month, I’m going to sit down face-to-face with my spouse for a few minutes every night after the kids are in bed.” Or, “When we got married, I knew I’d found my soulmate. What happened?” Or, “I’m done with this relationship. I’m going to pursue this other person because we’re made for each other.”

These mirages are really illusions. They appear real, they seem possible, but in real life they actually don’t exist or can’t happen the way we ideally hoped. Soul mirages are the lies we tell ourselves. Some soul mirages are true fantasies—they don’t exist—and others are simply unrealistic expectations—things that exist but not to the level we are expecting in our mind.

Soul mirages are a part of the slow fade of naïveté. They set us up for disappointment, contribute to our tendency to rationalize, and too often lead the way to compromise. As I (Mark) shared earlier, I tend to have a lot of idealism inside of me. When unrealistic expectations linked arms with naïveté, I was in trouble and desperately needed to get out my God-tools. I wish I had five years ago. Yet you can bet I do now.

I will never forget the look on my youngest son’s face when I told him that I was leaving. The look of shock, horror, devastation, and betrayal still haunts me when I think about it today. You see, I’d told myself a lie—I believed a soul mirage—that my children would be okay if I left. I told myself they would understand. Here’s some perspective from our oldest daughter, Anne:

*I picked up the phone thinking it was any ordinary call from my dad. We chatted for a minute and then he dropped the news on me. It was a quick conversation. He shared that he had moved out and if I had any*

*questions he would be happy to answer them later but that he needed to call my siblings now. He didn't mention the affair at all. He just shared he was "done."*

*Mom called me a few minutes later and we just cried. She asked me if Dad had shared the reason why he had left, to which I shared the reasons he gave me. She then said, "I've given him the opportunity to be honest with you and I can't protect him anymore." She then shared about the other relationship. I was sick to my stomach. My family had always been a source of stability and that was crashing around me.*

*Honestly, we kids had known for a while that Dad was struggling. He was just off. We'd often talk about how Dad was no longer the same. My dad has always been caring, wise, and discerning. He was the one I would turn to if I wanted to be heard or think through things. But he was no longer these things consistently. He was distant and distracted. While we knew he was struggling with life, we had no idea the magnitude of it all.*

*I struggled with my role in all of this. I was married and pregnant with my second child. I lived four hours away. I was removed from the situation, but the disappointment and tears were still the same.*

*The following weekend, all of the siblings came home. It was beyond strange, sad and hard. A piece was missing in the house. And not just that, my daughter Rilyn, who was almost two at the time, was very confused. She kept asking, "Where's Pappaw?" How does one answer that to a two-year-old? I was angry that my dad put us in the position to have to deal with the aftermath . . . not only ours but our child's as well.*

*Matt and I asked my dad to meet and talk. (Can I just say that I hated having to schedule time with my dad?) Never have I prayed so fervently for someone. I kept asking God, "What do I do here? Do I call him out*



on stuff? Or do I just love him through it?” I was so nervous and anxious. How was I supposed to act in this situation? As soon as I gave him a hug, I knew that I needed to be straightforward and honest with him. I was so grateful for the peace God gave me entering into this conversation.

I shared with him that I still loved him but was disappointed and hurt. The more we talked, the more evident it was that the man I sat across from was not my dad. This man was tired, hardened, skewed, and selfish. And while he thought this new relationship and new life was the answer, I knew that wasn't the case.

As the conversation wrapped up, I shared that ultimately we still wanted relationship with him. I still wanted my children to see and know my dad through this all. But, it was going to be with some boundaries, which included us not going to his new apartment and being cautious with Rilyn. We scheduled a time for him to come to the house to see Rilyn the next day. That interaction was hard. It was hard to see my dad walk into his own house as a guest. It was hard to have to say hello and goodbye in such a short time. It was hard to explain this all to Rilyn. . . . “Why is Pappaw leaving?” It was hard to watch my dad hug Rilyn goodbye with tears in his eyes. This was all just really hard.

Three of us were married and lived away from home. Two of my brothers still lived at home. For me, I was able to separate myself a little bit because of distance. I can't imagine the emotions my brothers felt. I can't speak for my other siblings, but for me, it was still incredibly difficult to journey through this as an adult child.

Five years later, I am so grateful for the choices my dad has made. He chose God. He chose my mom. He chose family. The midlife crisis certainly took its toll on all of our family relationships. I would say we are

*much more aware of relational dynamics now. It certainly has made me more aware of that in my own marriage. More than anything, I've learned that love is more than a feeling—it's a series of choices and commitment.*

Just reading Anne's words is very hard for me (Mark). I wish with my whole heart that I'd made different choices and that I had handled my challenges differently. I'm grateful for how God has redeemed the brokenness I caused in our family. I now know, however, that my determination that Jill and I were just "too incompatible," that "this new relationship will be better," and that "the kids will be fine," were all soul mirages. They were lies from the enemy that I believed hook, line, and sinker.

## BUILDING HEDGES

We have a line of trees along the west side of our country home. The previous owners wisely planted the trees to provide a hedge of protection against the winds that gust across the cornfields of central Illinois. Those trees serve as a visual picture of another hedge of protection we need to plant in our lives: a hedge of protection around our marriage.

On the day we say, "I do," we fully intend to fulfill every promise we make. But marriage is hard work, and our feelings ebb and flow with the ups and downs of life. When our life is fast paced, or our spouse is less attentive, or our marriage is placed on the back burner of life, we can easily slip into a mode where we begin to think that maybe "the grass is greener on the other side of the fence."

No marriage is immune from temptation. Hedges are advance decisions we make to protect our marriage. They keep temptation at bay,

stop naïveté, and keep the marriage relationship a top priority. Let's look at some specific hedges we all need to plant around our marriage.

**Hedge #1: Stay clear of unnecessarily spending time with someone of the opposite sex.** For instance, if you are interested in securing the services of a personal trainer at the local gym, choose someone of the same sex. You're simply being wise to not put yourself in a place where you're consistently alone with someone of the opposite sex. Many an affair has started with the "harmless" act of enjoying an evening jog together. If your spouse can't participate in the activity with you, do it alone, with a friend of the same sex, with a group, or not at all.

What if you had a friendship with someone of the opposite sex before you got married? Then spend time together in family settings. When you said, "I do," your spouse and protecting your marriage took a higher priority than your pre-marriage friendship. If I (Jill) have to text, email, or call another man for any reason, I let Mark know. Recently Mark hired a female home designer for his remodeling business. He came to me first and talked about hedges he was putting in place. When our kids were little, I, rather than Mark, drove babysitters home. All of these advance decisions have nothing to do with insecurity in our relationship. They protect our hearts and those of people of the opposite sex with whom we come into contact.

**Hedge #2: Share carefully.** If you find yourself sharing things about your marriage or yourself that you haven't or wouldn't share with your spouse, that's a red flag to warn you to turn away from the relationship rather than toward it. Not all affairs are physical — an emotional affair is

as damaging as a physical affair. The more we share and begin to console each other, the more we begin to build an emotional bond. While the shared sympathy feels like needed comfort, it becomes a dangerous slope that can lead to a surprising mutual attraction. Then what once was a difficult marriage becomes an unbearable one in the contrast of newly discovered intimacy and attraction.

**Hedge #3: Stay in large, public settings.** Determine not to meet one-on-one with anyone of the opposite sex, even in the workplace. If your coworker of the opposite sex asks if he or she can join you for lunch, ask a third person to join you as well. If necessary, share the boundary you and your spouse have agreed upon in your marriage. You just might lead by example.

**Hedge #4: Don't be naïve.** Most people who end up in affairs don't set out to have an affair. Infidelity usually begins with an innocent relationship with someone of the opposite sex that, in time, moves to an emotional depth that draws us to cross a line of fidelity. Fades happen in marriage. Not understanding the reality of those feelings and not doing anything about them is naïve.

**Hedge #5: Increase your investment at home.** No marriage is designed to last a lifetime if left on the back burner. Solid marriages are built by spending time together, laughing together, and playing together. If you are not currently dating your mate, set up dates for the coming months and make spending time together a priority. Then *stick to your plan!* Lots of “urgent” needs will come up. Don't take the bait!

There's nothing more urgent than protecting your marriage.

Too many parents are also naïve about investing in their marriage when the kids are little. Admittedly, it's a hassle to arrange childcare and often there's not a lot of extra in the budget for "dates" or paying a sitter. However, tending to your marriage is just as important as tending to your children. Taking care of your marriage is one of the best parenting strategies available to you. Don't be naïve in thinking that you will take time for the two of you after the kids leave. There may not be much of a relationship for you to invest in if you wait that long.

**Hedge #6: Step into your spouse's world.** Mark loves it when I (Jill) stop by and see the remodeling work he's doing on a job. I love it when he goes with me to a speaking engagement. I'm not particularly interested in remodeling, but I am interested in my husband. My hubby has heard me speak hundreds of times and he could definitely be doing something else than joining me for another trip. However, he chooses to stay engaged in my world as a way of investing and protecting our marriage.

**Hedge #7: Add fun to your relationship.** Mark once told me (Jill) that I was a terrible flirt. He particularly likes to flirt by text. I admit I was terrible at it until I discovered the Bitmoji app! It's a free app on my smartphone that allows me to send graphics to my hubby that look like me and say fun things like "Thinking of you!" and "You're hot!" and "Can't wait to see you!" (Disclaimer: it's not a Christian app and occasionally some of the graphics contain a spicy word or two.) It's definitely been a game changer for flirting for me!

You can also tuck a note in his lunch box, send her on a scavenger

hunt for love notes you've written, call him over lunch, send her a quick text that simply says, "I'm thinking of you!" Remember sometimes the little things are really the big things and fun in marriage is a little thing that really can make a big difference!

**Hedge #8: Share temptation with your spouse.** Along the same lines, make sure you're safe for your spouse to share temptations with. If you explode with anger or emotion when your spouse communicates a struggle, you'll shut the door on future honest conversation. The night I (Jill) shared with Mark about my attraction to my coworker, he stayed calm and asked questions. I was so grateful. There's something powerful that happens when we move our temptation from the darkness into the light. It often removes the draw of the temptation. In darkness, the temptation grows. When we shine the light on it by admitting it, it slows or completely stops the growth of feelings. One couple I (Jill) know chose not to pursue a friendship with another couple because the wife found the husband of the other couple attractive and simply didn't want that temptation. She was honest, and he made it safe for her to be honest. Thankfully he didn't take her communication personally, and they decided together it was best not to pursue that friendship.

**Hedge #9: No secrets.** There's never a good reason to keep a secret from your spouse. No secrets about where the money goes, where you've been, and what's really going on in your head and your heart. If you're hiding something, that should be a red flag that something needs to change. Honesty and vulnerability are essential in protecting your marriage.

**Hedge #10: Watch for seasons of increased vulnerability.** I (Jill) remember when my friend Becky said to me about two weeks after Mark left, “Jill, you need to be very careful. You’re in a vulnerable place emotionally and you have to make sure you don’t get drawn into temptation yourself now that you’re alone.” I’m so thankful for her wise words. It wasn’t but two hours later when I got on Facebook and an old high school boyfriend reached out to me. If you think that’s coincidence, think again. That’s spiritual warfare and I wasn’t about to play into the enemy’s hands.

Has your spouse been ill? On the road a lot? Have you been dealing with a crisis in your family? These are all places where you’re tired, maybe discouraged, and likely feeling a little disconnected from your spouse because of life’s circumstances. These are high vulnerability times when you need to turn up the heat in your own marriage.

**Hedge #11: Pay attention to your thought-life.** When all you think about is your spouse’s faults, any other man or woman will certainly look better. If you find yourself entertaining destructive thoughts about your spouse, work to turn that around. Make a list of the strengths that initially attracted you to your mate. Increase the encouragement and decrease the criticism you give to your spouse.

**Hedge #12: Don’t play the comparison game.** We are all human. We all make mistakes, have bad habits and annoying behaviors. When we compare a “new friend” to our spouse, it’s an unfair comparison because we are not seeing them in a “living under the same roof, taking care of kids at 3 a.m., struggling to make ends meet” reality. Refrain

from making unfair comparisons. This is where we have to come face-to-face with our soul mirages that aren't telling us the truth.

**Hedge #13: Communicate your needs to your spouse.** In one of my (Mark's) customers' homes, the book *Fifty Shades of Grey* was sitting on her coffee table. I commented on the book and she said to me in all innocence, "Mark, deep down every woman wants to be led. Everyone thinks this book is all about sex, but it's really all about leadership." She went on to say that "women get tired of leading and carrying all of the weight. I am drawn to the man who leads." I was very surprised at her take on the book. But it still fell in the naïveté category, as she was naïvely using a fictional story to feed her own inner craving for her husband to lead. I wondered if she had ever communicated that craving directly to her husband. When we communicate directly rather than working to get our needs met in a roundabout way, we're actually putting a hedge around our marriage. Even if our spouse doesn't respond in a positive way, we can know we did the right thing by communicating.

**Hedge #14: Push transparent, thoughtful, accountable communication to your spouse.** It's not a sign of a lack of trust for married couples to check in with each other—it's an act of kindness and an effort of intentionality. Your spouse is always on a "need to know" status, and he or she needs to know what you're doing. If you're going to be late, call and let your spouse know. If you're going to stop by the store on the way home, shoot your spouse a quick text to say so. When we find out about these things later, it can cause us to feel left out or to be



frustrated because, “If I’d known you were going to the store, I would have had you pick up razor blades. I used the last one this morning!” Communication is a courtesy to your spouse but also keeps your emotional intimacy a priority.

**Hedge #15: Stay away from pornography and erotic movies and novels.** Viewing pornography is an affair in and of itself. Soft porn in the form of erotic novels and even some R-rated movies can be equally dangerous. Porn draws our mind away from our spouse. It sets up unrealistic expectations. It erodes contentment. Porn is addictive and can become an idol in our life. When I have struggled with porn in different seasons of my marriage, it has fueled my discontent and put unrealistic expectations on Jill. Sex was not good enough, frequent enough, or anything enough when porn was setting the standard.

Men are drawn to pornography because of our own inner drive and need to be wanted. They crave for the woman to seek them, to want them, to need them, to be available for them. This craving for men becomes a fantasy that causes a creeping separateness in marriage that increases over time. Pursuing porn and believing it won’t hurt anyone is very naïve. (Mark’s note: if porn is a huge issue in your life, consider attending an Every Man’s Battle workshop. I did and found it very helpful! [www.newlife.com/emb](http://www.newlife.com/emb).)

**Hedge #16: Watch what you feed your mind.** Some couples make an advance decision not to watch any movie that has infidelity in the story line. Others choose not to watch R-rated movies that are rated R for sexual content.

Years ago, I (Jill) watched the movie *The Bridges of Madison County*. Set in 1965, the movie tells the story of Francesca (Meryl Streep), a mom who is unfulfilled in her marriage. While her husband and kids are away for a few days, she meets a photographer, Robert (Clint Eastwood). Robert stops and asks for directions to the local covered bridges he hopes to photograph. She decides to take him to the bridges herself. They talk and share their lives, and eventually carry on a four-day affair. In ways that only movies can, there was the implication that before the affair Francesca's life was black and white and after the affair it was in color. I was home alone because Mark was out of town and our marriage was in a hard season. I remember after watching the movie, the rationalizing thoughts that entered my mind: *Well, her husband didn't pay attention to her. She deserved a little bit of love.* Then I caught myself and realized what I was doing. I determined then and there that I had to be careful about what I chose to watch and read.

Many of us are naïve about the books that we read and the movies we watch and how they affect us. We innocently pick up a book or pick out a movie for entertainment purposes, not realizing that these stories can easily cause or fuel discontent in our marriage. Romantic sex scenes in movies or books can cause us to think, *It's not that way in my marriage.* Suddenly our normal, real marriage is compared to a vivid, maybe glamorized, but fictionalized account of another relationship, and it doesn't measure up.

**Hedge #17: Watch who you spend time with.** If you spend large amounts of time with someone who is critical of his or her spouse, you'll be affected. If you have a friend who is a flirt, you'll be affected. If

you spend a lot of time with someone who doesn't live life God's way, it will affect you. We need to be lights to a dark world, so this hedge isn't about not interacting with nonbelievers. It is, however, a call to ask yourself if your friendship with this person is good for your marriage or not.

**Hedge #18: Seek truth.** We live in an “anything goes” world; what’s “right” is relative to how we feel. That’s not the way God created things to be. He gave us His Word to spell out right and wrong—not to limit us, but to protect us!

Keep reading the Bible. Wisdom counters naïveté. The Bible is full of wisdom that we desperately need to saturate ourselves with. Our goal needs to be to become more like Jesus every day. The only way we can do that is to spend time with Him and learn more about the upside-down, sometimes unpopular decisions He made when He lived on this earth.

**Hedge #19: Love and respect around the clock.** If you wouldn't say it or wouldn't say it with that tone in public, then don't say it or say it that way at home. We're usually on our best behavior when we're around other people. God doesn't tell us to love when we feel like it. He doesn't say that respect is optional and only when our spouse gets things right. He tells us to love and respect each other, period. This small but important hedge protects our spouse's tender heart.

**Hedge #20: Install an Internet filter.** You don't have to go looking for temptation; these days you can stumble upon it very easily. Don't

be naïve. Install an Internet filter to keep the stumbling from happening to you or your kids. We've used K9 Web Protection the most ([www.k9webprotection.com](http://www.k9webprotection.com)), installing it on all of our computers. It's also available for smartphones though we've personally never used it that way. We're also familiar with Covenant Eyes. This is accountability software where you have a friend or your spouse receive a copy of your Internet history on a regular basis.

One husband we know who struggled with being drawn to pornography decided to remove the web browser from his smartphone. And while we're talking about technology, passwords should never be kept from each other. If you have something you don't want your spouse to see, it's probably a red flag that you shouldn't be involved in it. Both partners in a marriage should be completely comfortable with having their spouse look at any social media accounts, text messages, emails, or other forms of communication. These are all wise decisions to keep temptation at bay.

**Hedge #21: Seek help.** Seek encouragement even in the good times. Find someone today—a Christian counselor, an older married couple—you can talk to about the little things today. If your marriage is struggling, the answer isn't another relationship. Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. A mentor or Christian counselor who will honor your values regarding marriage and commitment can provide valuable perspective and help set new strategies for a marriage that can go the distance.

God's Word tells us that "each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death" (James

1:14–15 ESV). Temptation, enticement, desire, sin, death: those are the steps infidelity takes. Because of that, we have to put boundaries in place that keep us from stepping into situations where step one—temptation—can take place.

When the hedge of trees was planted on our property, each tree was planted individually. As the trees grew in size and strength, they worked together to protect our home from the unpredictable weather and wind. Each hedge that we plant around our marriage will do the same. Each time we make one advance decision to protect our marriage, we are taking an important step to build a marriage that is marked by faithfulness and on its way to lasting a lifetime.

## GET OUT YOUR TOOLBOX

I (Mark) listened as Todd (not his real name) shared about his own marriage and confessed an affair he had that went on for many months. As an outside salesman for a large company, he travels quite a bit for his job. When he said that opportunities for infidelity were everywhere on the road, I asked him what boundaries he had now put in place to safeguard his marriage and himself. His first response was how embarrassing that would be to put limits or boundaries upon himself when traveling. I found his response interesting, because he had just been crying over his affair and yet he wasn't willing to put boundaries in place. Todd needed **courage**. He needed to be willing to be called “old-fashioned” or even “ridiculous” for the sake of his marriage. He needed to be willing to stand up to peer pressure from other on-the-road sales reps. Doing the right thing isn't always easy.

For me, my unwillingness to put boundaries in place was full-on

pride. I had believed that I could do whatever I wanted without any potential compromise. I rationalized that I was strong enough. I was mature enough. I wouldn't be affected. I didn't need boundaries. Like Todd, I thought, *What would people think?* And that, my friend, is pride.

"I can do this on my own!" Yes, that is pride too.

"No one else does this!" Pride again.

I had so much pride coursing through me, and I needed to get rid of it. But I hadn't honestly realized it was pride. You see, I mistook my thoughts and decisions as confidence. For most of my life, I lacked confidence. In not feeling like I "was enough," my self-esteem suffered. This fed my passivity. Suddenly I was standing on my own two feet. I was making my own way. I was telling myself, "I'm done with the old life and I'm taking control and moving on." It felt like I was experiencing confidence for the first time in a long time. What I was experiencing, however, was pride camouflaged as confidence. What's the difference?

Pride never says, "I'm sorry." Confidence says, "I'm sorry. Will you please forgive me?"

Pride isolates and doesn't accept input. Confidence seeks the wisdom of others.

Pride bristles when correction is given. Confidence welcomes feedback.

Pride says, "I know the way." Confidence says, "God knows the way."

Pride says, "I'm doing things my way." Confidence says, "I'm doing things God's way."

Pride says, "Look at me." Confidence says, "Look what God is doing!"

Pride is rooted in lies. Confidence is rooted in truth.

God says it best in Proverbs 11:2: “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.” And Proverbs 16:18: “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (both ESV). We desperately need **humility** to demolish the stronghold of pride in our heart.

**Wisdom** is the third tool needed to address naïveté. Another word for naïveté is foolishness. I think of countless stories where men I (Mark) have mentored have said, “I was so naïve,” or “I was so foolish. I didn’t mean for it to come to this!” Building hedges, tackling soul mirages, and staying steady requires wisdom.

Today, I (Mark) am experiencing real confidence as I keep my eyes on Jesus. It doesn’t mean life is easy or even easier. Just this week I have faced some huge challenges as a business owner. The old Mark would have been off to the races believing lies and chasing mirages. The new Mark is working to stay steady with humility, wisdom, and courage.

We can be naïve about every one of the fades we’ve explored: unrealistic expectations, disagreement, defensiveness, minimizing, and not accepting. We start with one emotion or thought that we feel is harmless. Then we rationalize it, and before we realize it, we’ve slid right into compromise. We can’t let our guard down when it comes to protecting our marriage!

Protect your heart from wandering by not putting yourself in situations of opportunity. Protect your mind from temptation by choosing what you watch and read. Protect your family from heartbreak by staying focused on your marriage and your family. Whatever you give your energy to is what will grow, heal, and flourish. Give your marriage your best

## Beware the Quicksand

investment—not your leftovers. First Corinthians 13:7 says love protects. Commit today to protect your heart, your mind, and your marriage.

### ✦ THINK ABOUT IT ✦

What about you? Is there anywhere you are being naïve in your marriage? Are you rationalizing? A little too close to compromising? What "soul mirages" are you chasing? Where do you need to apply humility, courage, or wisdom today?

### ✦ TALK ABOUT IT ✦

My biggest takeaway from this chapter was \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Looking at the hedges listed in this chapter, the five that are most important to me right now are \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When it comes to naïveté, I realize that I most need to use my tool of \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### ✦ TALK TO GOD ABOUT IT ✦

Lord, I confess that I'm naïve and haven't taken protecting my marriage seriously. Where I want to rationalize, help me to value wisdom. Where I'm afraid of being made fun of for setting boundaries, give me courage. Where I don't want to make the extra effort to do the right thing, give me humility to know that I'm not immune to temptation. Show me how



*No More Perfect Marriages*

to steer clear of temptation. When I'm faced with it, help me to run in the opposite direction. More than anything, show me how to keep fertilizing the grass in my own yard. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

**Today's Truth:** "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

MATTHEW 26:41 (ESV)

Interested in the whole book?  
Select your preferred book seller:

MOODY PUBLISHERS 

AMAZON 

APPLE BOOKS 

GOOGLE PLAY 

BARNES & NOBLE 

CHRISTIANBOOK.COM 

WALMART 