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Key Concepts for Recovery

During more than thirty years of helping husbands and wives recover from infidelity, I have found that several critical concepts have aided couples in surviving this catastrophic marriage event. You may find some of these concepts not easy to swallow; in fact, you might have quite a reaction to them. That's OK. But give careful thought to the frequency of their acceptance in couples who recover fully before you abandon them. In addition, be sure to read chapter 4 of the book *Torn Asunder* before you proceed with this chapter of the workbook. Please read those pages now.

In this chapter, you will receive your first homework exercise, the “Marital Satisfaction Time Line.” You'll come face-to-face with the issue of divorce and the freedom each spouse has to stay in—or leave—the marriage. If you are the infidel, you will be faced with numerous questions that you must answer frankly and openly. You will assess the affair pattern, you will consider the personality and history of the “other woman/man” involved in this marriage, and last of all, you will learn some techniques for anger management and recurring depression issues.

Now let's look at some of those difficult yet crucial concepts mentioned earlier.

Shared Contribution

The most common form of marital deterioration is one to which both spouses have contributed. The subsequent marital infidelity is what I call the “entangled affair,” or “Class II affair.” In this workbook, we will not be concerned with the exact percentage of each spouse's contribution to a marriage's fracture, and neither of you should be, either. Arguing over who contributed more to the destruction is useless toward rebuilding this marriage. What's done is done, and now you must spend your energy

on processing the past and building for the future. It is necessary to acknowledge a shared responsibility so that each spouse has equal influence to shape the marital outcome, the future pattern. If you see the affair as the sole fault of your spouse (as though you were perfect), you will have no influence over the future shape of this marriage. How can you improve upon perfection? Do not let your spouse either blame you completely for the affair or, conversely, assume total responsibility for it.

We need a balance here. As a marriage deteriorates, both spouses are at risk for infidelity. It is just a matter of time to see who falls first. Each of you has had “close calls,” and by admitting it could have been you, instead of only the infidel, you help level the playing field.

Spouses less than happy with the marriage send out signals that give off news of their dissatisfaction. There are interested individuals out there who are “scanning” for these signals, both men and women. No one ever forced a spouse to have an affair at gunpoint; rather, both of you contributed to a marriage pattern which made an affair almost inevitable.

Having said that, let me add this truth: If you’re the spouse of the infidel, realize *you don’t need the infidel any longer*. A premature commitment to the marriage at this point will stifle the work necessary for recovery. You are free to leave the marriage. Jesus said so (Matthew 19:3–9). You must see yourself as free to leave, so that you can make a choice whether to return to the marriage and to not come back merely because you feel obligated to do so.

Asking Questions

The faithful spouse has a right to know the answer to every question he/she has asked. It is important to bring secrets to the light. If this marriage stands any chance of being saved, both parties have to fully know this bit of their *shared* history.

Often the infidel seeks to protect the spouse by sharing information in a guarded or careful manner. To continue this behavior will make it almost impossible to rebuild trust between the two of you. It is too late to be careful, to be “discreet.” At this point “discreet” sounds like “dishonest” to the spouse. Share exactly what the mate asks for—no more, no less.

To the faithful spouse I would say that even given all the painful information you learn about the affair, your task is to forgive and let go of your urge to seek revenge, to hurt the infidel back. On the other hand, I’m not saying that you should keep your head in the sand; being ignorant is not the answer. Rather, you need to eventually give up your need to exact payment from the infidel.

With that in mind, both spouses need to address the fears they feel about asking and disclosing information about the affair. Please complete the appropriate blanks about your fears.

For the spouse: My fears about asking—

For the infidel: My fears about telling—

CAUTION: *Infidel:* If you force your spouse to ask the “perfect question” in order to receive the answer they are looking for, you will be perceived as hiding something and there will be no trust as long as this perception exists.

Spouse: Remember, the infidel was “drunk” with infatuation. An individual in this state does not always recall sequences perfectly. They often don’t remember details. There is difficulty in recalling experiences. Just remember what it was like when you had an inappropriate crush on someone in junior high or high school: The world stood still, you forgot to do your homework, you were lost in the dream world of “love.”

It is common for the spouse to become obsessed with certain details and questions, asking the same ones over and over. The person is looking for a reason to either ease a lack of awareness prior to the disclosure or to provide justification for the affair. Some obsessing can be normal and OK, but it can also be overdone. If this obsession lasts more than two or three weeks, it will become a defensive posture, keeping a spouse from working on his/her own issues and causing the recovery process to bog down.

On occasion, *after* the marital fact-finding process, specific questions may need to be asked. If so, here is a ritual that often proves helpful to both spouses.

When the urge to ask a specific question arises, the spouse is to ask God out loud in prayer if this question is permissible to ask of the infidel and then wait for an answer

from God. For example, the spouse would say, “God, I am going crazy wondering how my (wife/husband) _____ (insert here the action that is agonizing to the person praying) with the partner without me knowing. Is it important for me to know this to heal our marriage?” It is amazing how well this works, and it makes the process safe for both spouses.

The Purpose of the Marriage

A second key concept for the spouses to understand is the purpose of their marriage. Why did you select each other in the first place? There are two primary assumptions here:

1. You were *not* psychotic when you chose each other (although probably both of you at one time or another have said that to yourself!).
2. Most Western marriages are not arranged by parents. (Wouldn't it be nice to have somebody else to blame right now?) Therefore we must assume sole responsibility for choosing the other.

It sounds self-evident, but spouses in crisis often forget why they did choose each other. Here are some common reasons—see if some of them fit your pattern.

Maybe you made your choice to:

- Round out your individual shortcomings
- Finish off a family-of-origin relational deficit
- Heal pain existing at the time you met each other
- Provide escape from some current problem or difficulty
- Feel needed or necessary for your spouse's existence or development
- Find someone different than yourself to complete you

Maybe your spouse offered you a needed factor, such as security, time, money, or status. Whatever the reason, it has proven insufficient to keep your marriage safe from infidelity. You need to identify the original reason(s) for your selection so that you can determine some new purpose, later on, for reconciling this marriage. You have space below to record what were some of your purposes for selecting the spouse you did.

What are some of the reasons I chose you to be my spouse?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Personality and History of the Partner

This is the only section of the work that will look at the partner, “the other woman/man” in this affair. Understanding the partner is a key concept; it can hold some important clues as to why and how the affair took place and can even assist in the forgiveness process. Be warned: It will be painful.

Often the partner has a long history of promiscuity, a personality prone to this kind of pattern, and has demonstrated that they are better at what they do (through repeated seductions) than the infidel was at what she/he did (resisting temptation). This discrepancy in abilities doesn’t make it easier for either of you, but it will help in the understanding of how this affair happened.

Write about your feelings if you think any of this is true of the partner. Then write why you think it is true.

CAUTION: When a wife has been unfaithful, often the husband would like to view his wife as being seduced—which is really another way of saying she’s innocent in this affair. Be careful of jumping to that conclusion. It might be painful to admit that she was a willing partner, but the truth is what matters. No one held a gun to her head, and this fact must be embraced by husbands (or wives, for that matter) who offer this objection to admitting the truth.

The Partner’s Personality Patterns

Some personality patterns, especially those of some females, are prone to act out sexually. This workbook is not the time or place to explore all this, but if you suspect this to be true of your circumstance, I strongly suggest that you read *The New Personality Self-Portrait* by John M. Oldham, MD (Bantam). The first few pages of that book include a survey that your spouse and you can fill out on the partner to see if he/she matches the personality pattern prone to infidelity. Your scores will point you to the right chapters to read in that book. While you are at it, take the survey on both yourself and your spouse. This information will be quite helpful in an assignment that appears later in this workbook.

The Partner's History

Was this the partner's first affair? Did the partner get over this affair with the infidel by getting involved in another affair? Did the partner pursue the infidel? Was the infidel aware of this pursuit? Did the spouse sense this pursuit and voice caution about it early on? (This might make the forgiveness process a bit more difficult.) Write out your responses to these questions below:

The Partner's Marital History

Individuals involved in affairs have a tendency to criticize their spouses. Who started the kind of provocative conversation that led to this affair? It could have been the soon-to-be infidel, the partner, or both. At this point, let's focus on the partner. Did the partner see his/her spouse as "all bad" and the infidel as "all good," or perfect, "meant for each other?" Was the infidel drawn into this relationship to help the partner with his/her bad marriage?

Write below some factors in the partner's background, and the interaction between the infidel and partner, that may have played a role in this affair.

Though painful, this kind of information is important to talk about together.

CAUTION: Sometimes the infidel perceives the need, at least early on in the recovery process, to protect the partner. The infidel feels responsible for some of the pain that he or she generated in the partner's life and might even feel an obligation to reimburse the partner for expenses he or she might have incurred during the affair. This is usually a huge source of anger to the spouse. If this is some of what you are experiencing as a couple, write about it below and share with each other later.

Concerning the above caution, keep in mind this process of recovery will never be fair. In fact, the faithful spouse will have to “pay” for this affair twice—once at disclosure and again through this painful recovery process. So, in a sense, this is just the way it is, even though it feels inherently unfair.

Anger Management and Depression Concerns

Anger management is one of the largest issues you will deal with; the main book has an entire chapter devoted to the topic (“Anger in Affairs,” chapter 9), with some exercises that are often helpful to the spouse. One of the exercises that can be incorporated here is to write out one’s feelings as opposed to acting them out. Write out your feelings below, and also have an additional journal available, since it is doubtful that these few lines will contain all your feelings! If you are unable to share them with your spouse, maybe a same-sex friend would be available. Let it all out.

One of the signs of the relationship’s return to health is when the infidel finally feels that he/she has the right to get angry or irritated again at the spouse. Initially, most infidels feel like they deserve everything that is dished out to them, that they have no “legs to stand on” when it comes to a disagreement. Yet to continue to allow this practice escalates the spouse’s apprehension, who fears driving the infidel back into the partner’s arms. It is always healthy to write about your anger prior to talking about it. Later in the workbook, you will begin a dialogue model that will allow you to process the anger in a safe environment.

Both spouses will go through bouts of depression in the recovery process. Depression robs the individual of energy that is desperately needed to focus on the work at hand. Sleep disturbance especially is a concern. The mental confusion, the short-term memory loss, the decrease in productivity, the increasing fear of not making it—these all cooperate to rob both individuals of the strength to go on. Often the short-term additional use of an antidepressant medication is very helpful. If either of you finds yourself spiraling downward, it might be wise to seek a physician for some help. Most of the newer antidepressants take several weeks to be fully effective, so don’t wait until you get to a point from which recovery is going to be difficult.

CAUTION: The infidel's depression often is due to a loss of his "medication," that is, the mood-altering experience he/she found in being with the partner. A good illustration of this is in the Old Testament story of Samson and Delilah. Samson knew that Delilah was trying to kill him, but he could not stay away from her. She made him feel better than normal, and he continued to see her in spite of the danger to himself. In the first few weeks after disclosure, the infidel does not feel normal and often yearns for that euphoric feeling that the partner provided. Actually the depression is a good sign that a healthy separation process is taking place. This is especially true if the infidel felt "in love" with the partner.

You might want to read the book text where the grieving process is described as alternating between the two of you (pages 136–39). There is also a discussion about how to best care for each other during this time.

How do you think you and your spouse are doing in the anger and depression areas? Write your thoughts below.

Having a Monologue

Now we begin the monologue process, a technique that has benefited many couples. A monologue occurs when you sit *knee-to-knee*, and one person talks for twenty minutes nonstop. The other spouse gives full attention to the presentation but is not allowed to ask questions, make comments, or evaluate in any way what is being said by the talking spouse. A watch (or a timer on the microwave) is a good way to maintain the twenty-minute time. When the twenty minutes are over, the two of you separate and let the conversation "percolate" in each of you. Much like the old percolating coffee-makers moving water through the coffee grounds, reflect and absorb the comments. Let them drip through your life experience; don't react right away.

Occasionally, if you are both enjoying the monologue and mutually agree to do so, either spouse may continue beyond the twenty-minute guideline. Later on in this

workbook, you will be given some additional instructions for “tweaking” this model; but for now, keep it a simple monologue.

A Monologue

The topics are biographical in nature. Below is a list of topics that you can use to stimulate your recall for this discussion.

- The homes you lived in
- Your bedroom appearance
- Your schools; favorite and worst teachers
- How you spent your allowance and other money
- How your family celebrated holidays and birthdays
- Family vacation
- Pets
- How you spent your afternoons after school
- How you spent your weekends
- Favorite TV shows
- Best/worst decisions, experiences
- Best/worst dreams, pastimes
- Earliest memories (from birth to age nine)
- Chores
- Relationship with friends during this period
- Relationship with relatives during this period
- Sunday morning activity at your house
- Your family car during this period
- Parental conflict—over what and when
- Mealtimes at your house

This list is not set in stone; you may add anything of a biographical nature to this list. Your first monologue will be from birth to nine years of age; the second monologue from ten to fifteen years of age; and the third monologue from sixteen to twenty-one years of age. In this last monologue, you will want to add age-appropriate experiences like part-time jobs, proms/dances, cars, college experiences, and sports teams you played on. One of you will do the monologue birth to nine on Monday; the other spouse birth to nine on Tuesday; the first spouse will do ten to fifteen on Wednesday, etc., until you complete the biographical monologue.

Below you can write some ideas that you want to bring up when it is your turn.

Birth to Nine Years:

Ten to Fifteen Years:

Sixteen to Twenty-one Years:

Marital Satisfaction Time Line (MSTL) Exercise

Here is your first homework exercise. This will take some time, so get out the old photo albums and have lunch or dinner with your spouse as you work on it. You will complete a separate sheet of paper for each five years of marriage. Each spouse will have a complete set (e.g., if married thirty-five years, each of you will have seven pages), so each would photocopy seven empty time lines for this exercise. You will fill out the bottom squares identically. You can do this one of two ways: Either fill out one set (usually used when one person's handwriting is more legible than the other's), and photocopy a second set; or you can each write your own set, but you must do them together and they must be identical.

In the boxes at the bottom of the chart, note all the significant events in your marital history, such as:

- Births
- Moves
- Deaths
- Health issues & major illnesses
- Any marital difficulty
- Counseling experiences
- Significant vacations
- Job promotions or losses
- Major accidents

- Financial/legal issues
- Any living situation that included people beyond your nuclear family
- Any significant pets
- Any significant hobbies

Make sure you place the same events in the same box. The dotted lines represent six-month markers, the solid lines represent year markers. Be sure to put the respective year in the smaller; box to show a clear chronology. After you have the history recorded in the boxes, get some privacy (i.e., work separately from each other). Individually then, place one dot on each vertical line that would represent your marital satisfaction at the time the events in the box below (attached to the vertical line) were taking place. Though your current circumstances might make it difficult for you to recall any of your marriage as “good,” you must put yourself back into that time period and ask, “How would I have rated that time period back then?” Connect the dots and tape the sheets together to develop a time line. In the next chapter, you will use this time line to sort through your marital history and the likelihood of saving this marriage.