



Keep your marriage affair-free

Nobody just wakes up one morning and decides to have an extra-marital affair. Nobody simply decides to hurt their spouse and family and possibly end up in a divorce court. Yet, many marriages, Christian included, suffer devastation through one spouse having an extra-marital affair. The devastation happens across the board – men and women, young and old, leaders and ‘ordinary’ people. How do we spot the warning signs that tell us we are entering dangerous territory? If you recognise some of these signs happening to you in what seems like an innocent friendship, know that you can find your way back to safe ground.

Spot the signs of becoming too close to someone other than your spouse

Affairs usually start when two people make a series of choices over time that brings them closer together emotionally. At this juncture, the two people may begin to make wrong choices, but entering into an affair can be avoided by applying certain conscious decisions that have already been decided previously. These decisions need to be applied now. It is possible to avoid the heartache and pain that accompanies an affair and to stop it before it takes root.

Listed below, you will find some signs that you should watch for in your life, if you want to avoid having an affair. Healthy decisions to bring about change in your life that are consistent with growth are not what we are talking about here. The emphases on these changes below are that they are dangerous and usually sudden and radical, although they may also be gradual. This list is merely a guideline. Be perceptive to the Holy Spirit, as He leads you to notice changes in your life that may lead you into dangerous territory.

- 1. When you begin to change your behaviour.** Ask yourself, “Why am I doing this? Is there someone other than my spouse that I am trying to impress?” If the motive for your change is to be more attractive to someone other than your spouse, this is a sure warning sign that you are headed for dangerous ground. Deal with your heart and emotions immediately and concisely, in such a case.
- 2. Your attitude towards your spouse begins to change.** Do you find that you are irritable with your spouse, picking fights, criticising him/her over things that didn’t bother you before?
- 3. Feeling emotionally distant.** Emotional distance is a sure giveaway of an impending affair, as it is very difficult to be emotionally invested in two people simultaneously. You cannot be emotionally intimate with your spouse while you betray their trust. Be completely honest when you examine your heart in this regard.
- 4. Guilty behaviour.** Do you find you are having moments of unusual, spontaneous generosity, such as giving gifts, flowers, compliments etc. to your spouse? You may be trying to compensate for your emotional reliance that has strayed.
- 5. Secretive, unusual behaviour.** Are you covering up your movements, being secretive about where you’ve been and with whom? Do you withhold conversations or omit parts of them? Is it

becoming difficult for your spouse to reach you? Is your phone switched off when he/she would normally have been able to contact you?

6. Listen to yourself. Whose name is frequently foremost in your thoughts and/or conversations? Why is this? Be truthful with yourself and with God.

Unhealthy emotional affection is also an affair

An unhealthy emotional attachment to someone other than your spouse is more difficult to realise than a physical affair. That is why such an affiliation is more difficult to resolve. It is crucial to pinpoint when your friendship crosses the line into emotional attachment. How do you know whether you are getting too close to someone outside your marriage?

1. Content. What do you share with this person? If they know more about what is happening in your life than your spouse, you are already in dangerous territory! Do your words or actions border on intimate or inappropriate? If so, step back! If you would feel uncomfortable at any moment for your spouse to see or hear your interaction with this person, then you are violating the trust in your marriage relationship.

2. Secrecy. Do you hide interactions you have had with this person from your spouse? Do you withhold the content of your discussions? This is a clear warning sign.

3. Emotional inclination. When you experience a crisis or a moment of joy, who do you want to tell first? Who is the first person that comes to your mind? This will indicate where your emotional attachment lies – to your spouse or to someone else.

Prevent yourself from becoming emotionally vulnerable to someone other than your spouse

Now, let's move on to how you can guard yourself against becoming emotionally attached in an unhealthy and ungodly way to someone other than your spouse. Here are some guidelines that you may find useful. Again, be perceptive to the Holy Spirit's voice as He speaks directly into your personal situation.

1. Meals. Don't go out for a meal, an event or an outing alone with a person of the opposite sex, unless they are a blood relative, or unless a third person accompanies you. There is no reason to be alone with a person of the opposite sex, other than your spouse, for a meal. If the meeting is work-related, include a third person to accompany you. Meet in a public setting or preferably the office. Adding an additional person offers protection for yourself and your marriage.

2. Transport. Don't travel alone with someone of the opposite sex, unless you are a blood relative. Rather take your own transport or call another friend of the same sex to take you where you need to go. If this is not viable, then again, invite a third person to accompany you. Even a young child can provide some degree of accountability and protection of the integrity of your marriage. If you end up in a tough spot, consider discussing the situation with your boss or a co-worker in a gracious and honest manner. Speak the truth in love, but speak the truth as needed. It is also helpful to phone your spouse and tell him/her about the situation you find yourself in, so that they will be aware of it. Driving in a car with a person of another sex other than your spouse or a blood relative must be a highly exceptional situation, or in cases of emergency.

- 3. Fantasy.** Do not entertain your fantasy by reading love stories, where immorality occurs or sexual exploits are explicitly described. Such novels are not appropriate for believers. The same holds true for movies. Reading and watching too much romantic fiction, will fill your mind with unhealthy unrealistic ideas of what a relationship entails. You may become disillusioned or discontent with your own marriage relationship if you dwell on these ideals. Especially ladies are at risk of romantic novels and movies becoming an escape from reality, as pornography can be for men. The sad reality is that more and more women are getting involved in watching pornography.
- 4. Flirting.** Don't ever flirt! Not even a little! Treat someone of the opposite sex with respect and distance. Even casual flirting can lead to trouble. Be professional, business-like and distant in a kindly fashion with anyone who is not your spouse. Too often, affairs start between good friends or close family friends. Affairs can even happen within a family when spouses fall into a trap with their brother- or sister-in-law.
- 5. Private conversations.** Do not have protracted phone conversations or online interaction with anyone of the opposite sex that is not a blood relative. Social media allows for the opportunity for unhealthy emotional ties to be formed with someone of another sex besides your spouse. Be careful!
- 6. Counselling.** If you are a counsellor, only counsel someone of the same sex. If someone of the opposite sex approaches you to counsel them, either redirect them, or if this is not viable, make sure you have a third person present. Consider having a door that has a glass panel, so that anyone passing by can see what is happening inside your office. If the counselee is comfortable with the door being left open, that is better. Close the door only if/when it becomes necessary.
- 7. Prayer partners.** Praying alone with someone of the opposite sex other than your spouse is cause for concern. Men must pray with men and women with women. Do not hold the person's hand; do not lay your hand on the person. At all times keep a physical distance between you.
- 8. Accountability.** If you are tempted to have an affair, talk to someone of the same gender that is trustworthy. Ask them to pray for and with you, and grant that they would hold you accountable. Confessing such a situation to a trusted friend can protect you and it may prevent you from damaging your marriage. Likewise, if, on the other hand, you find yourself the object of attention for someone who desires to have an affair with you, do not delay in seeking out a trusted friend to pray for you. Ask them to check in with you regularly as to how the situation is until it is under control and you are free from all temptation. Cut personal contact with the other person as far as possible in an attempt to create a healthy emotional distance between you.
- 9. Reach out.** Make every effort to bond with your spouse. Let it be a constant, conscious effort to build a deeper relationship with him/her. If you aren't spending enough quality time together, you will be much more vulnerable to temptation from someone outside your marriage. If you need love and affection, seek out your spouse. After all, he/she did agree to marry you!
- 10. Reconnect with God.** What is your relationship with the Lord like? Keep a constant check on this. Read your Bible and pray more often. Make time for deep worship. Allow God to fill your empty places. Take every matter to the Lord in prayer. Consider a time of fasting to break an unhealthy tie.
- 11. Pray for your spouse.** Pray for your spouse regularly. When you pray for your spouse, it is very difficult to violate their trust and your responsibility towards them. Pray that they will find fulfilment in their lives, be emotionally stable, and filled with the Holy Spirit. Pray for their protection from extra-marital affairs and pray that they would desire to please God. Ask the Lord how you can support your spouse and pray for them to grow in their relationship with God. Pray for their protection from the evil one.

12. Practical help

- Wear your wedding ring. This shows people that you are married.
- Keep photos of you family on your desk or on the wall in the room where you work.
- Tell people of the positive things about your spouse that you appreciate.
- Never talk negatively about your spouse to anyone!
- Let people know about the good times you have with your family.

Conclusion

We will need to make these decisions time and again, if we are to avoid an extra-marital affair. Temptation is never far away. Adhere stringently to these guidelines and others that the Holy Spirit has made known to you. Stay close to Jesus at all times. Do not blame your spouse when you are unhappy or not experiencing fulfilment in your marriage or life. It is your responsibility to deal with your emotions and issues that trouble you. Speak to someone you can trust and pray together with your spouse, asking the Lord for a breakthrough.

James 1:13-16: And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. So, don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters.