

I Messed Up! Can I Get My Family Back?

A year ago I confessed to my wife that I had had several affairs during our 10 years of marriage. In the last year I have been totally faithful to my wife, but she still doesn't trust me. We've tried counseling, but my wife has not been able to get over my unfaithfulness, although she says she has forgiven me. We are now separated, and she wants a divorce. I have been attending a recovery group for addictive behaviors and have come to realize how deeply I've wounded my wife, my children, and even myself. Is there hope for me to get my family back?

John—Chicago, Illinois

As long as there is life, there is hope—"with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27). With that said, it is important for you to understand that an affair, or affairs, are devastating to a marriage and often leave a marriage so fragile it cannot sustain such a heavy blow. It is emotionally confusing for the injured spouse and leaves that person feeling betrayed and abandoned. Your wife is experiencing deep pain, hurt, isolation, guilt, and shame, and feels she can never trust you again.

Marriage experts assert that it takes approximately two years for the injured spouse to grieve the loss of innocence in their marriage and heal from the wounds caused by an affair. Forgiveness does not take away the pain or the consequences of such an injury. Even when wounds heal, scars remain. Once trust has been broken and sexual infidelity leaves an incredibly deep wound, it will take a lifetime of intentional commitment to restore that relationship.

We firmly believe God can heal any marriage, including one that has suffered the damage of many affairs. In our society, including the Christian

community, we have been led to believe that once there is adultery, it's natural or inevitable to get a divorce.

While the Bible allows for divorce when there has been adultery, if both spouses (especially the injured spouse) are willing to work hard, a marriage can be healed and restored. In fact, not only can a



marriage survive, it can thrive. Regardless of why you had affairs, there are usually underlying issues that can contribute to spousal betrayal. Many of these issues may stem from unresolved loss, pain, abuse, or abandonment. When an individual does not deal with past hurts or certain unfulfilled needs from their early years, those issues follow them into future relationships. Many jump into marriage hoping it will solve their problems or relational gaps left from childhood. When those needs aren't met in marriage, many try to get

those needs met elsewhere.

You must find a good Christian therapist who can help you sort through and identify the issues that led to your unfaithfulness. Ask the Lord to soften your wife's heart and let her know you are sincerely interested in doing whatever it takes to be a better husband and father. In humility, ask her if she can hold off from filing for a divorce while you try to get help with your issues. You must not intimidate, force, or threaten her to take you back. Even if there were things you feel she did in your marriage to hurt or humiliate you, you must remain calm and patient with her.

At some point your counselor will most likely ask your wife to attend sessions with you or alone. Your wife should also seek individual counseling, but you should not be the one to tell her. Continue to pray without ceasing, study Scripture, and read some books, or search online to find out how marriage can heal from an affair. God promises in 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." You can expect the process to be painfully slow. However, if you are willing to invest the time and effort, your family may be restored.

Of course, even with all your good intentions, your family may not be restored to what it was before. We still encourage you to go through the process of becoming your best self with the help of your counselor and God. We would also urge you and your wife to work through your marital issues and take steps toward true forgiveness of each other since divorce does not solve problems—it leaves them in a pile so every time you come to that spot you stumble over them. To continue to coparent your children for future health you and your wife would want to work things out to give them a fighting chance in their own future relationships. We are praying for your success!