



KEYS TO FAMILY HAPPINESS

Rebuilding Trust

Steve*: “I never imagined that Jodi would commit adultery. I lost all trust in her. Words cannot describe how difficult it was for me to forgive her.”

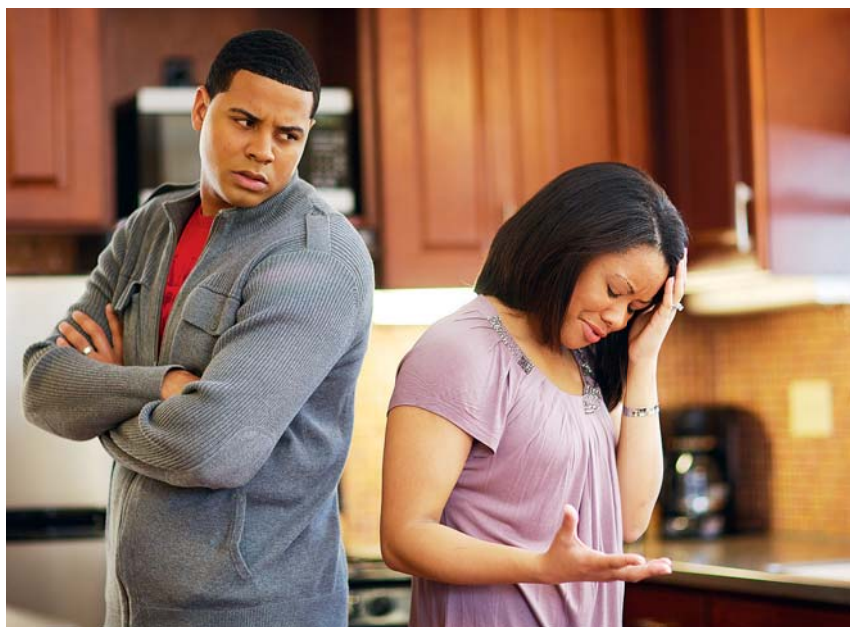
Jodi: “I understand why I lost Steve’s trust. It took many years for me to prove my regret.”

THE Bible gives victims of adultery the option to decide whether to divorce or not.[#] (Matthew 19:9) Steve, quoted above, decided not to get a divorce. Both he and Jodi resolved to save their marriage. They soon learned, however, that this meant much more than just continuing to live together. Why? Because, as noted in their comments, Jodi’s infidelity shattered all trust between them. Since mutual trust is vital to marital happiness, they had work to do.

If you and your mate are striving to save your marriage after as great a setback as adultery, you obviously face a difficult challenge. The first several months after the news is broken may be especially trying. But you can succeed! How can you rebuild trust? The wisdom found in the Bible can help. Consider the following four suggestions.

* Names have been changed.

[#] For help in making such a decision, see *Awake!* issues of April 22, 1999, page 6, and August 8, 1995, pages 10 and 11.



1 Be Honest With Each Other. “Now that you have put away falsehood, speak truth,” wrote the apostle Paul. (Ephesians 4: 25) Lies, half-truths, and even silence undermine trust. So you need to speak openly and honestly with each other.

At first, you and your mate may be too upset to discuss the infidelity. Eventually, though, you will need to talk candidly about what happened. You may choose not to dis-

cuss every detail, but avoiding the subject itself is not wise. “Initially, I found talking about the affair incredibly difficult and distasteful,” says Jodi, quoted above. “It was something I deeply regretted and just wanted to lock away and forget.” However, this lack of communication caused problems. Why? Steve says, “Because Jodi didn’t want to talk about the infidelity, I remained suspicious.” In retrospect, Jodi acknowledges, “Not discussing it with my husband hindered the healing process.”

Without a doubt, any discussion about the betrayal will be painful. Debbie, whose husband, Paul, committed adultery with his secretary, says: “I had a lot of questions. How? Why? What did they talk about? I became an emotional wreck, thinking about it constantly and asking even more questions as the weeks went by.” Paul says: “Understandably, at times the conversations Debbie and I had became heated. But we always apologized to each other later. Those honest discussions drew us closer together.”

How can you take some of the strain out of such discussions? Remember that your primary purpose is, not to punish your partner, but to learn from the tragedy and to strengthen your marriage. For example, Chul Soo and his wife, Mi Young, examined their relationship in the light of Chul Soo’s infidelity. “I discovered that I had been too busy with private interests,” says Chul Soo. “I was also overly concerned with pleasing others and meeting their expectations. I had been giving them most of my time and attention. As a result, I had been spending little time with my wife.” This insight enabled both Chul Soo and Mi Young to make changes that, in time, helped strengthen their marriage.

TRY THIS: If you are the unfaithful mate, refrain from making excuses or blaming

your spouse. Take responsibility for your actions and the hurt you caused. If you are the injured mate, do not scream at your spouse or use abusive language. By avoiding such speech, you will encourage your spouse to continue talking openly to you.—Ephesians 4:32.

2 Work as a Team. “Two are better than one,” states the Bible. Why? “Because they have a good reward for their hard work. For if one of them should fall, the other can raise his partner up.” (Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10) That principle is especially true when you are working hard to rebuild trust.

Together, you and your mate can make a stand against the mistrust that has infected your relationship. However, you *both* need to be committed to saving the marriage. If you try to cope individually, you may be setting yourself up for more problems. You need to view each other as partners.

That is what Steve and Jodi found. “It took time,” says Jodi, “but Steve and I worked together as a team to build a solid union. I was determined never to cause him such pain again. And although Steve was hurting, he resolved not to let our marriage fall apart. Each day, I looked for ways to reassure him of my loyalty, and he continually showed his love for me. For this, I will always be grateful to him.”

TRY THIS: Together, resolve to work as a team to restore trust in your marriage.

3 Replace Old Habits With New. After warning his listeners against adultery, Jesus counseled: “If, now, that right eye of yours is making you stumble, tear it out and throw it away from you.” (Matthew 5:27-29) If you are the offending mate, can you think of actions or attitudes that, for the

sake of your marriage, should be torn out and thrown away?

Obviously, you need to break off contact with the other party in the adultery.* (Proverbs 6:32; 1 Corinthians 15:33) Paul, quoted earlier, changed his work schedule and his cell-phone number so that he no longer interacted with the other woman. However, those efforts failed to break all contact. Paul was so determined to rebuild trust with his wife that he left his job. He also got rid of his cell phone and used only his wife's phone. Has the inconvenience been worth the effort? His wife, Debbie, says: "It has been six years, and I still occasionally worry that she will try to make contact. But I now trust that Paul will not succumb to temptation."

If you are the guilty mate, you may also need to make changes to your personality. For example, you may have a flirtatious manner, or you may enjoy fantasizing about romantic relationships with other people. If so, "strip off the old personality with its practices." Replace former habits with new ones that will strengthen your mate's confidence in you. (Colossians 3:9, 10) Has your up-bringing made it difficult for you to express affection? Even if it feels awkward at first, be generous in your expressions of love and reassurance to your spouse. Steve recalls: "Jodi would often show affection with a touch of her hand, and she regularly said 'I love you.'"

For a time, you would do well to be completely open about your daily activities. Mi Young, mentioned earlier, states: "Chul Soo made a point of telling me everything that happened during each day, even the most unimportant things, in an attempt to show me he had nothing to hide."

* If for a period of time some contact is unavoidable (such as at work), this should be limited to what is absolutely necessary. Deal with the other party in the presence of others and with your mate's full knowledge.

TRY THIS: Ask each other what actions are likely to help rebuild trust. List them, and then put them into practice. Also, add to your routine some activities that you can enjoy together.

4 Know When to Move On. Do not be quick to conclude that it is time to start living as if everything were back to normal. Proverbs 21:5 cautions: "Everyone that is hasty surely heads for want." It will take time—perhaps years—to restore trust.

If you are the betrayed mate, allow yourself time to forgive fully. Mi Young recalls: "I used to think it was strange if a wife could not forgive her unfaithful husband. I could not understand why she would be so angry for so long. However, when my husband was unfaithful to me, I understood why forgiveness is difficult." Forgiveness—and trust—are likely to come gradually.

That said, Ecclesiastes 3:1-3 states that there is "a time to heal." At first, you may feel that isolating yourself emotionally from your spouse is the safest course. However, doing so indefinitely will not help you to rebuild trust in your mate. To heal the breach, forgive your mate and express that forgiveness by sharing your intimate thoughts and feelings with your spouse. Also encourage your mate to share his or her joys and concerns.

Do not nurture bitterness. Work to overcome it. (Ephesians 4:32) You may find it helpful to meditate on God's own example. He was deeply hurt when his worshippers in ancient Israel turned away from him. Jehovah God even likened himself to a betrayed marriage mate. (Jeremiah 3:8, 9; 9:2) But he did not "stay resentful to time indefinite." (Jeremiah 3:12) When his people returned to him in genuine repentance, he forgave them.



Eventually, when both of you are satisfied that the necessary changes in your relationship have been made, you will gain a sense of security. Then, instead of giving constant attention to merely saving your marriage, you can focus together on other goals. Even so, schedule regular periods of time to evaluate your progress. Do not become complacent. Deal with minor setbacks, and confirm your commitment to each other.—Galatians 6:9.

TRY THIS: Instead of trying to get your marriage back to the way it was, think of yourselves as building a new and stronger relationship.

You Can Succeed

In times of uncertainty, remember this: God is the Originator of the marriage arrangement. (Matthew 19:4-6) Therefore, with his help, you can make your marriage succeed. All the couples mentioned above applied the Bible's wise counsel and were able to save their marriage.

It has now been more than 20 years since the crisis in Steve and Jodi's relationship.

Steve sums up their road to recovery this way: "It was after beginning to study the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses that we made the most significant improvement. The help we gained was invaluable. As a result, we made it through those tough times." Jodi says: "I feel richly blessed that we were able to endure through that terrible time. By studying the Bible together, and with a lot of hard work, we now have a wonderful marriage."

ASK YOURSELF . . .

- *What were my reasons for deciding to preserve my marriage despite past infidelity?*
- *What positive qualities can I see in my mate right now?*
- *How did I show love in little ways when my mate and I were courting, and how can I do that again?*