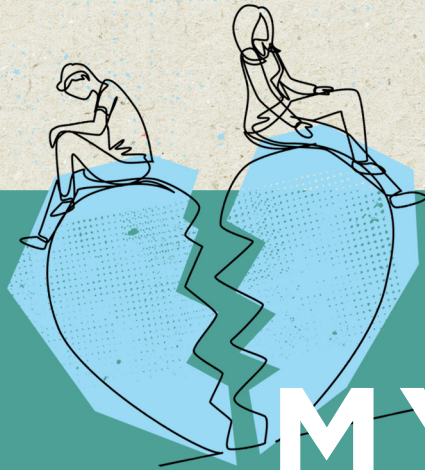




ASK THE
CHRISTIAN
COUNSELOR



MY SPOUSE WAS UNFAITHFUL

FINDING STRENGTH
IN GOD'S PRESENCE

ROBERT D. JONES

“Betrayal in marriage is unfortunately a common struggle in churches today. *My Spouse Was Unfaithful* provides practical, compassionate guidance for those walking the painful path of heartbreak, deceit, and hurt. This book offers sufferers hope, helping us wisely navigate this raw and vulnerable situation by pointing us toward God’s sovereignty.”

Shauna Van Dyke, Strategic Advisor, The Association of Biblical Counselors

“*My Spouse Was Unfaithful* was written by a biblically saturated pastor who knows how to use the Word of God to minister to others. It is full of honesty, truth, and practical help. This book will guide you on how to both recover and grow to be more Christlike and will also be a useful tool for counselors.”

Ernie Baker, Pastor of Counseling Supervision and Equipping, First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL; chairman of the online BA in Biblical Counseling, The Master’s University; author of *Marry Wisely, Marry Well*

“Robert Jones, in this wise and compassionate work, helps us traverse the searing pain of marital infidelity. He reminds us that God’s grace and God’s truth can sustain us in the hardest times. A valuable work both for those suffering from infidelity and those counseling them.”

Thomas R. Schreiner, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Associate Dean, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“When your spouse has betrayed you, you will be disoriented and overwhelmed. Robert’s short book is a wise companion that will be a reliable guide into God’s heart for you.”

Edward T. Welch, Faculty and counselor, The Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation (CCFEF)

“My Spouse Was Unfaithful is a timely, encouraging, and thoughtful text on walking through the aftermath of adultery. Robert Jones brings his decades of counseling experience to bear in this book, providing a concrete, gospel-centered, and Christ-honoring approach to responding to infidelity. It is filled with biblical wisdom that seeks to understand the unique struggles of each individual while bringing true Hope to believers. It’s a must-read for anyone counseling others through this struggle.”

Kristin Kellen, Associate Director of EdD Studies and Associate Professor of Biblical Counseling, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

“In the moments after adultery, we scarcely envision a day when marriage can be restored, not to what it was, but to something more, to something only the grace and power of the gospel can accomplish. Robert Jones shows how the Lord Jesus helps you take wise, faith-filled steps in restoring a marriage broken by adultery. I gladly commend this resource to you.”

John Henderson, Associate Professor of Biblical Counseling, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; associate pastor, University Baptist Church; author of *Catching Foxes*

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Robert D. Jones



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Dedication

I am grateful to the many men and women who have allowed me, as your pastor or as an outside counselor, to enter your life after suffering some form of marital infidelity. You privileged me by letting me weep with you and bring the light of God's Word into your dark places. Thank you. You have reminded me (and my co-counselors who assisted us) of the empowering grace of God, and you have demonstrated a remarkable love for Christ that has encouraged and inspired my own faith in our Savior.

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Chapter 1

MOVING FORWARD WITH GOD-GIVEN HOPE¹

How do we deal with the devastating disappointments that infidelity brings? One response is vengeful anger, mirroring the country song about a woman who dug her keys into the sides of the man's car and carved up its leather seats.

Sadly, that song reflects not merely understandable anger but calculated revenge. For other sinned-against spouses, the response remains more inward. Some are crushed, immobilized, feeling hopeless and helpless. Others try to press on, carry out their other duties, and pursue normalcy, but fears, doubts, and questions nag them.

As we move forward we'll consider other responses. But first I want to describe a different way to respond, one expressing God's work in a sinned-against spouse. Cassie tells her story:

If you had told me one year earlier—when my husband's affair was uncovered—that we

would be together today, I would have laughed at you. If you told me our marriage would be strong, I would have called you cruel. But that's exactly what God has brought out. All is not ideal; he is far from being a perfect husband (or me a perfect wife), and doubts and memories still invade me. But what we have learned about ourselves and about our Lord is priceless. Praise God, who really does redeem dirty things and makes them shine!²

By God's grace, Cassie³ and her husband experienced restoration in their marriage. The Lord used counseling and many of the biblical concepts in this book to not only help them individually but to grow and strengthen their marriage after his adultery.

Of course, Scripture doesn't guarantee marital restoration. Deanna's experience differed from Cassie's:

My husband had several affairs, and despite sincere, serious, and repeated intervention attempts by our pastors, a biblical counselor in our church, and several godly men, he refused to repent. Yet the Lord used this entire ordeal—over the course of a year or two—to show how much I had been building my life on my husband and not on Christ, my Rock and my Redeemer. So, amid the pain, my husband's sin became the occasion for me to turn toward the Lord and to find in him a kind of comfort previously unknown to me.

As Cassie's and Deanna's accounts remind us, it takes two to restore a marriage. The offender must repent, and both partners must trust and obey the Lord. That happened in Cassie's case but not in Deanna's.

As we begin our journey, we must recognize that God doesn't promise you restoration with your spouse. He only promises to be with you as a Christian—to help you know, follow, love, and enjoy him, however your spouse chooses to behave.

During my near-forty years of pastoral ministry, I have counseled various Cassies (with repentant husbands) and Deannas (with unrepentant husbands), as well as husbands of adulterous wives who did or didn't repent. But however the offending spouses acted, when the sinned-against spouses turned to God, even in small and weak steps, the Lord used this tragic thing to draw them closer to him and bring about a greater good in their life. That's my hope for you, and the hope God guarantees.

MY AUDIENCE

I am writing this book for two categories of readers. My primary audience is those who have been betrayed by their spouse. These principles can also apply to those who have been betrayed in serious dating or engagement relationships. While the focus is on sexual infidelity, the truths can relate to other forms of marital unfaithfulness as well, such as financial deceit, emotional affairs, and intimate partner violence.

The second category of readers are those who seek to love, befriend, and minister to someone who has

suffered such infidelity. If you are in this second category, I thank God for you. The church of Jesus needs you. And those in the first category need you. I hope this book will make you wiser, more sensitive, and more confident to help those whose spouses have betrayed them. You are engaged in a challenging but rewarding ministry that reflects the gospel itself—God’s work of reconciling spiritually adulterous people like you and me to himself. While the sin and the ensuing rift between you and their spouse grieves you, the prospects of God working in your friend’s life and reconciling their marriage can motivate you.

If you are in category one and have been sinned against by an unfaithful spouse, you may find yourself in one of various stages. If you have just discovered the infidelity, your pain is recent and raw. If, however, you have survived the initial shock, perhaps you have begun the process of walking with the Lord in this new reality. Or maybe you are in a place where you have worked through many aspects this book will address, but you want to learn and grow more. While the flow of the book moves from crisis discovery toward growing in maturity, with the help of your pastors, counselors, and friends, you will need to discern which truths are needed most for you right now. But, in general, it’s best to progress along the steps in order.

BEGIN WITH HOPE

Let’s begin with biblical hope. The word *hope* means to desire a future positive outcome, something favorable we want to happen. We typically use it in casual

ways: I hope the weather will be nice; I hope my business will succeed; I hope my children will follow Jesus. In such cases, the verb reflects good desires you want to see happen, but none are guaranteed. We can call this *small-h hope* in contrast to God's *capital-H Hope*—the good desires God has guaranteed.

The enticing problem of small-h hope

Luke 24:13–27 narrates a classic case of small-h hope in which two followers of Jesus are journeying home from Jerusalem after his death. Luke describes their faces as “downcast” (v. 17). Here’s their summary of events:

“He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.” (vv. 19–21)

Why were they sad? Because they had “hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel” (v. 21). They expected a Messiah who would overthrow Rome, restore the Davidic dynasty, and exalt Israel to its proper place. But their anticipated Messiah was now dead and their earthly hopes with him. Of course, they were not entirely wrong. One day God will judge the nations, vindicate his followers, and establish Jesus as our earthly King. But their timing was wrong. As we read this story on this side of the cross, we smile at the irony

in their mindset: *he was supposed to redeem us but instead he died*. They failed to grasp that Christ's death was the precise way he would redeem them. Jesus responded by rebuking their failure to believe their own Old Testament prophets and reminding them the Messiah first had to suffer (vv. 25–26). He then patiently explained the Scriptures, walked alongside them, entered their home, stayed with them, and taught them further (vv. 27–32).

We can take away a principle from this interaction between Jesus and these disciples: Never put your hope in what God has not guaranteed.

What legitimate small-h hopes must you guard against making into capital-H Hopes? First, you must not expect God to remove all your troubling feelings. Your grief, anger, fear, or whatever assorted emotions you feel are common, understandable responses to disappointed small-h hopes. Some might be godly responses, and some might not be; many are mixtures of good and bad because our emotions reflect the Spirit as well as the flesh. In time, the sinful emotions often dissipate, and new Spirit-formed emotions emerge. But you can't rid yourself of those negative feelings directly; you must allow the Lord to help you in his timing.

Second, you must not expect God to restore your marriage, nor should you make that your goal. Of course, it's the best small-h hope you can, and should, have. But you have no guarantee your spouse will repent and follow Jesus. Don't fix your hope on a goal you can't unilaterally achieve.

Third, you must not expect God to undo the consequences of your spouse's sin. You are facing hardships

you neither expected nor deserved. The sooner you conceptualize the adultery and its consequences as a trial and a form of suffering, not some category outside of Scripture, the sooner you can absorb God's Word and receive his help. God doesn't promise the alleviation of suffering in this life. Sin brings consequences. It severely complicates life, whether it's the effects of sin from Adam and Eve or the current sin of your marriage partner.

God's capital-H Hope for you

So, if you can't find hope in fixing your emotional hurts, your spouse, your marriage, or in reversing the effects of their sinful choices, where do you find it? In the Bible. It offers you a better hope—God's capital-H Hope: the presence of Almighty God and all his promises now and in the days to come. The triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—promises to be with you, watch over you, and walk with you through the entire aftermath of your spouse's infidelity.

We will unpack these in the coming chapters. But for now, I encourage you to turn to God. Only he can fully understand you and guide you through this trial. I want you to be able to trust God your Father, the One who is sovereign, wise, and good in all things. He loves you more than you can fathom, proving it by sending his Son to die and be raised for you, while you were "powerless . . . ungodly . . . [a sinner and] God's enemies" (Romans 5:6–11). And this was just the start of the Father's love for you. Romans 8:32 goes further, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously

give us all things?” And those things include “everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3). The Father is with you. The Father watches over you. And the Father will be with you through the aftermath of your spouse’s infidelity.

I want you to be able to trust your Lord Jesus Christ as the One who has been made like you in every way and has been tempted like you in every way (Hebrews 2:17; 4:15). He understands you. His three closest friends fell asleep on him in the garden of Gethsemane. Judas betrayed him to his murderers. Peter denied him three times. And all his disciples abandoned him, as Matthew 26:56 records, “Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.” Jesus was alone when facing his worst suffering. And as our suffering, compassionate Savior, he can help you follow his model as you walk with him down the difficult path you face.

And I want you to trust the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Christ who resides within you—to use this ordeal to make you more like Jesus each day. He enables you to believe and obey the Lord, and to cry out as an adopted son or daughter to God as your Father.⁴ Furthermore, even when you face severe conflicts (Galatians 5:13–15), the Spirit empowers you to live a life marked by “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23).

If this capital-H Hope seems too good to be true, or if the implications of following Christ seem overwhelming, be encouraged; you’re in good company. Absorbing these biblical truths takes time. Remember

that Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead precisely to make all these things real for you. You can take courage because he did what you can't. And so I simply extend to you the same assurance God extended to Cassie and Deanna:

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20–21)

Jesus is with you. He bled and died and rose for you. He will equip you. He is your great Shepherd. He is working in you. Whatever our Lord calls you to do, he will enable you to do it.

HOW TO BENEFIT FROM THIS BOOK

As you continue, I'd like to suggest three commitments that will help you.

First, read this book along with an open Bible to look up and reflect on passages and to commune prayerfully with your Lord. Ask him to reveal himself to you through his Word. Consider what the psalmist says in Psalm 119:116, "Sustain me, my God, according to your promise, and I will live." In the face of an experience that brings you through a dark valley, God's Word can bring us life. We need his life-giving Word. Amid the chaos of adultery, we need the promise of verse 165 to

stabilize our soul, “Great peace have those who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.”

Assured by verses like these, you can pray, “Father, I need your help. I don’t know how to handle this crisis, but I believe your Word will sustain me and stabilize me. Help me glean from your Word what I need to know and do to please you and live in light of these promises.”

I also recommend you read this entire book first to understand the big picture, but then implement the steps in the order presented. As I noted earlier, you might be experiencing and handling the infidelity in differing ways than others, so certain chapters might be more timely for you than others. No book can discern that for you. To give you an overview, chapters 3, 4, and 5 take you along the path of connecting with God, discerning how he wants you to view the betrayal, and then engaging your spouse. Interacting with your spouse in chapter 5 without the truths in chapters 3 and 4 will be ineffective and counterproductive.

Second, to best benefit from this book, seek the help of your pastor(s) and two or three fellow church members, assuming you belong to a healthy, Christ-centered church that teaches the gospel and cares for its members in biblical ways. If this doesn’t describe your church, find one immediately and begin attending it with a view to joining it. Consider the power and beauty of the body of Christ when we face a hardship like infidelity.

In his church, the Lord provides pastors and Christian brothers and sisters who can weep and suffer alongside us and insightfully counsel us (Proverbs 20:5; Romans 12:15; 15:14; 1 Corinthians 12:25–26). We

don't need to bear these burdens alone or navigate the confusing path of handling adultery without the wise, compassionate care of others. Just as you need God's Word, you also need his people.

Inform your pastor, who can shepherd you through this, counsel you biblically, connect you to a biblical counselor in the church or community, and in many cases, reach out to your spouse. Along with counseling, share your struggle with one or two same-gender, godly, caring church members. Invite them to befriend you, walk with you, pray with you, and provide support and accountability as you follow this difficult path. If you are not sure whom to approach, ask your pastor or counselor for suggestions. I recommend that the people you choose read this book with you and use it as a guide to help you. They could even come with you to the counseling sessions to help reinforce the biblical counsel you are receiving.

For the purpose of this book, I will typically use the term "your counselors" to refer to whomever is helping you. That might include several individuals—pastors, friends, church-based counselors, and/or state-licensed counselors.

Third, be patient. Persevere in pursuing the Lord despite the pain, even if change comes slowly. Gut-wrenching trials rarely resolve quickly. Serious relational breaches resist immediate reconciliation. Consider this encouragement to press on:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,
whenever you face trials of many kinds, because
you know that the testing of your faith produces

perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. (James 1:2–5; cf. 1:12; Romans 5:1–5)

Having counseled many couples in cases of infidelity, I assure you that by making these commitments, the Lord will use the biblical truths in this book to help you handle this crisis in ways that please him and strengthen your faith.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What uncertainties or fears do you face as you begin to read this book and apply its Christ-centered counsel?
2. Where do you find yourself struggling to gain and maintain capital-H Hope?
3. Who is your counseling team?