

THE INSIDE RUNNING

Sometimes it feels like we are being swamped by a sexually saturated culture. All sorts of immoral behaviour is normalised in entertainment. In real life, there has also been a huge shift in attitudes.

A healthy marriage takes work. Your spouse needs attention, consideration and kindness. When the going gets tough the temptation is to look for understanding or thrills elsewhere.

I believe in the power of Men's Groups to help guys through the rough patches. Too often in the past, image was everything in the church. Marriage itself can become an idol, where being married is more important than treating your spouse with kindness and dignity. People can also be reluctant to get help until it is far too late. Counsellors don't like being the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff.

Technology and our society has made cheating on your spouse easier than ever with porn, chat or physical affairs. As the article says, if you have a pulse, it's possible you could have an affair. The only thing stopping that is the way you think and the decisions you make.

The right way is seldom the easy way.

With gratitude



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Affair-Proofing Your Marriage

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by John Cowan

There are a lot of homes with holes ripped in them. The building might be intact, but some of the residents are bleeding – the children certainly are. The bomb that blew them apart was an affair. In some of these homes the marriage staggers on... maybe it will heal, maybe it will ultimately fail, but in the meantime, and for a long time to come, there will be tears, anger and suspicion. In other homes the explosion has already blown one of the partners out the door. The children don't understand. Maybe they don't condemn anyone – yet – but they do hurt. Even when spared the details, children are emotional chameleons, and they pick up the tension and sadness. And they wonder why Mum or Dad isn't there anymore.



♥ Be wary: It could happen to you

Take your pulse. Is it beating? Then you could have an affair. It might not be likely, but there is no shortage of examples of atypical philanderers. Telling yourself "It could never happen to me" is an excellent phrase to kid yourself that your flirting and risk-taking is harmless.

♥ The door to affairs unlocks from the inside

Desires and temptations can be very strong, and it is perfectly true that you can find yourself in situations where you just can't say "no". But to get yourself in that situation, you have to have already said "yes" several times. You said "yes" to thinking about them, "yes" to flirting, "yes" to being alone with them, "yes" to listening to the seductive patter and "yes" to the preliminary touches. It may well then be impossible to say "no". When does a relationship become dangerous? The moment you push past a twinge of conscience that this might not be right, the moment you entertain a "what if?" fantasy for a second.

"Hold on... let's be realistic," I imagine some of you protesting, "It is impossible for men

and women to look at each other and not be attracted". Granted. Men especially, but not exclusively, have an almost irresistible compulsion to look at the opposite sex. You might not be quick enough to block a reflex-like action of the eyeballs, but we can all catch and control thoughts. The trouble starts when you forward that image on to your fantasy department: "What would it be like with that person?" Affairs don't start in motel rooms, they start between the ears.

♥ Don't believe an affair won't harm your spouse

Few people embarking on an affair ever consider that their actions will cause pain to their spouse, but invariably it does. On a simply biological level, affairs expose your spouse to risks of STDs, and yes, it does happen. If the cheating is discovered, the blow to the betrayed partner is savage: many claim it is the worst blow of their life. Self-esteem, plans, security, happiness, trust – all can be dashed for a lifetime. Are you that cruel?

♥ Don't erode your "won't power"

High ideals don't get knocked flat by full frontal attacks – they get eroded ➤



and undermined by little compromises. Pornography and trash literature drag people into vicarious affairs. The mind gains experience at yielding. Tiredness causes all sorts of mistakes, including the marriage-wrecking kind, but perhaps the thing that makes one most prone is alcohol. Take care.

♥ Don't flirt

There is no such thing as "harmless" flirting, only flirting that didn't work. What if it does work? Don't be naïve: the way you talk, touch and make eye contact can all carry sexual messages. Be aware that you may provoke more than you intend.

♥ Don't keep secrets from each other

Happily married individuals can have a wide range of friendships with people of both gender. But if the friendships and interactions ever need to be concealed or fibbed about, or if they cause the spouse any concern, or especially if there seems to be a little too much "chemistry" in the interaction, then there should be an automatic and immediate backing down or even breaking off of that friendship. Too much is at stake.

♥ Filter out the lies

The idea of "a bit on the side" promises to relieve loneliness and to add romance, love and adventure. It seems as though that exciting, attractive, responsive person you could have an affair with would satisfy that need you have, boost your self esteem, compensate for those deficits in your marriage and get you over that low spot you're in. It might even help you "cope" with your poor marriage. All lies. The PR department in your brain will be very creative in promoting the idea... but real life experience proves over and over: it doesn't work. Unlike the movies or TV, real sex in the real world has real consequences. Any benefits are short term, and are far outweighed by the negative effects.

♥ Don't think it isn't worth it

Being faithful can be difficult. Staying married is hard work. There will be problems and, to be honest, some

of them might never be adequately fixed, but most problems can be. The benefits of being married and staying married are irrefutably proved by a skip-full of research. Statistically, married people live longer, are healthier, wealthier, and report being happier and having better sex lives than any other group. Similarly, their children are happier, safer, healthier, and are less likely to be involved in crime, drugs or early sex; they will grow up to have happier, more stable relationships themselves. And they get on better with their parents. You could have all of that, or you could have a wild fifteen minutes in the photocopier room, but you can't have them both.

♥ Keep the dream alive

Fleeing from the problems of your marriage into the arms of another partner may seem easier, but the weight of evidence suggests it is seldom the simple solution that people thought it would be. The best affair prevention strategy is to work on your marriage, to be intentional about constantly working on communication, fun, intimacy and romance. It means being mature in your attitude to your solemn commitments, gracious in your accepting of faults, patient in waiting for improvement. But the benefits of remaining faithful and restoring your marriage are incredible, to you and your whole family. Dream a new dream, and re-dream the old dream. Use that same imagination that could lead you away from your partner to imagine how good it could be.

- Invest in your marriage: attend courses and seminars, read books, listen to podcasts and CDs
- Make time – for dates, romantic nights alone, weekends away
- Accept change: did you really expect her to stay twenty-three forever?
- Accept lack of change: did you really believe you could convert him to being a neat-nik?
- Forgive: grudges grind the love out of you
- Practise little courtesies: showing love in the little things of life
- Don't let sex get stale: at least occasionally it should be "the main event," and not just a need or a concession.
- Very importantly – seek help early. A little counselling and accountability can work wonderfully, but most couples in trouble leave it years too late.

A good marriage is a mixture of gratitude and grace: gratitude for the wonderful things in your spouse and grace to overlook the less-than-perfect features. Let's encourage each other to stay married and be the best men we can be!



PROMISE #4

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