

**Explanatory Notes:****FAITHFULNESS AND FORGIVENESS**

**Series title:** Faithfulness and Forgiveness

**Topics:** Adultery, Forgiveness

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**Message #1: ADULTERY: A THREAT TO YOUR MARRIAGE**

**Matthew 5:27-30, CEV**

God gave us his holy will in the form of ten special commands (the Ten Commandments). One of those commands is, “Do not commit adultery.” To commit adultery is to be sexually unfaithful to your spouse by having sexual intercourse with someone else. In this message we will consider three questions about adultery: Why do people commit adultery? Why does God forbid adultery? How can we avoid adultery?

**1. Why do people commit adultery?**

Why is adultery such a powerful force? Why are so many people attracted to other people’s spouses? Here are some of the reasons:

- **We are bombarded by sexual messages** on TV, music, movies and videos, the Internet, magazines and advertising. Many voices are telling us, “It’s okay to have sex with whomever you wish.”
- **Men and women are coming into more frequent contact in workplaces.** More contact means more possibilities for temptation.
- **Many communities are not as strong as they used to be.** A family used to have the help of the community (including church, neighbors) to protect marriages. But now many people are left to fight temptation on their own.
- **Some people are disappointed or dissatisfied with their marriage.** Their hopes and expectations for their marriage are not being met. Some want more romance, more communication or more sex than their partner gives them. So, they become close

with other members of the opposite sex to satisfy their longings.

- **Some people crave attention and affection.** This makes them feel loved and important.
- **As people grow old, some of them use the thrill of adultery to make them feel young again.**

**Conclusion:** Sex is a powerful desire. God made it that way. And its power is increased when people are lonely, careless or dissatisfied with life.

## 2. Why does God forbid adultery?

Is adultery really so terrible? Why does God forbid adultery if it gives people pleasure and excitement?

God always gives his commands for our benefit. He knows that adultery hurts people. It is good to note the ways God shows his care for us by forbidding adultery. Here are some of the harmful effects of adultery:

- **Adultery robs our spouses.** Adultery robs them of love that we promised to give them. It takes time, energy and affection away from our spouses and gives attention to someone else.
- **Adultery interferes with a sacred, intimate relationship that two people share.** No one should be allowed to drive a wedge\* between two people that God has brought together in marriage. The Bible says the “two become one.” This close intimate union can only be shared between two people.
- **Adultery makes our spouses feel unloved, unwanted and rejected.**
- **Adultery destroys our integrity.** We begin to live two lives—our normal life and another secret life. This tears us into two people and destroys us. We are no longer whole. People can no longer trust us.
- **Adultery can lead to unwanted pregnancies.** Children are born to a man and woman who are not married. They are deprived of a normal home with a mother and a father. Their view of marriage will be full of doubt and uncertainty.
- **Adultery can lead to sexually-transmitted diseases (STD’s).\*** These diseases destroy peoples’ health and the health of the children born to them.
- **Adultery, like any sin against God, brings us guilt** and other

**\*Wedge:** A piece of wood or metal that tapers to a fine edge. Wedges are thrust between two objects or two parts of an object in order to separate them.

**\*Here is a startling piece of information about STD’s** (which include Syphilis, gonorrhea, AIDS and herpes): their treatment

emotional wounds. It penetrates deeply into our thinking and decisions.

So adultery, the act of having sexual relations with someone who is not our partner in marriage, is wrong. We need to do everything we can to keep from its destructive power.

Perhaps some of you are saying, “I have never done this. I would never commit adultery.” Congratulations! You are to be commended for your faithfulness. But according to Jesus, faithfulness means more than simply avoiding sexual intercourse outside of marriage. We can be unfaithful to our husbands and wives with our thoughts, even if we are faithful with our bodies. Listen to the words of Jesus:

*You know the commandment which says, “Be faithful in marriage.” But I tell you that if you look at another woman and want her, you are already unfaithful in your thoughts. If your right eye causes you to sin, poke it out and throw it away. It is better to lose one part of your body, than for your whole body to end up in hell. If your right hand causes you to sin, chop it off and throw it away! It is better to lose one part of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*

Matthew 5:27-30, CEV

God intends for us to enjoy sex with our spouses only. When we look at other people and have lustful thoughts about having sex with them, we commit adultery in our inner selves. We are to be faithful to them, even in our thoughts.

Jesus does not want us to tear out our eyes or chop off our hands. But he worded his warning very strongly so that we will do everything possible to avoid the power of lust and adultery. He wants us to direct our strong desires only toward the person we married. He wants us to be faithful in every way, even in our minds. This is what is best for us.

### 3. How Can We Avoid Unfaithfulness?

**First, we can turn to God for strength.** We must not deceive ourselves into thinking we are strong enough to face temptation in our own strength. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “God is faithful, and he

in the United States costs the USA well over \$10 billion every year! Source: US Dept. Of Health and Human Services. See [www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/stdinfo.htm](http://www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/stdinfo.htm) for more information on these diseases.

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#### **When a person commits adultery, does that end the marriage?**

Some people say that adultery destroys the marriage union. They say a person whose spouse commits adultery is free to divorce him or her, because the marriage has already died.

But adultery alone by itself does not destroy a marriage. Spouses should not rush to get a divorce because of one act of adultery. Spouses should be forgiving, as Jesus taught. They should do everything they can to save their marriage. Divorce might be necessary in extreme cases in which a spouse or a child is in physical, emotional or spiritual danger because of the evil actions and words of an offending parent or spouse. But it is never God’s ideal for married people. It should only be undertaken with great sadness and regret, as the last possible

will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.” We must pray to God. We must follow the promptings of God’s Holy Spirit. He will give us everything we need to resist temptation.

alternative.

**Second, we can make our marriage stronger by loving our spouses more fully.** Often we are tempted to be unfaithful because we have conflict or unhappiness in our marriage. We must work together as husband and wife to resolve our conflicts and increase the joy and love in our marriage. Even if our spouse is angry with us and doesn’t want to change, we should dedicate our lives to loving him or her.

**Third, we can turn to fellow believers for help.** Temptation is strong when we are lonely and isolated from other Christians. But when we have the help of people who care for us, we are stronger and bolder.

**Fourth, we can protect ourselves by not putting ourselves in especially tempting situations.** Some people think they are strong enough to resist temptation. Sometimes a man and a woman who are not married to each other spend time working or traveling together alone. They think nothing will happen. Then, surprise! Temptation hits them both with so much force that they cannot resist it. How easily they could have avoided temptation. They could have agreed to do their work or travel together in the company of other people. Don’t put yourself in situations you know are too tempting for you.

**Finally, we can fill our minds with thoughts that please God.** The Bible says, *“Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.”* (Philippians 4:8). If we constantly devote our minds to thinking about good thoughts, evil thoughts will have no place to rest in our minds.

### **Conclusion:**

Are you tempted by desires to be unfaithful to your husband or wife? These desires are very powerful. You will not be able to defeat these desires in your own strength. I encourage you to turn to God for help. His powerful Holy Spirit can make you strong. Then you will be able to resist the powerful forces of lust and adultery.

[Conclude with prayer]

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## **Message #2: FORGIVENESS: HEALING YOUR MARRIAGE**

Bible Verses: Matthew 18:21-35, CEV

*“I found out that my husband was having sex with another woman. I am so angry. I can’t believe he would deceive and betray me in this way. He says he is sorry, but I don’t know if I can trust him again. I am very hurt and sad. My marriage and my whole life feels like it is falling apart. I feel very alone.*

*“I am also confused. Do I still love him? What should I do? Should I forgive him? I’m not sure I can. Should I take him back? What if he has another affair? Am I trapped in this marriage or can I get a divorce? Doesn’t the Bible say divorce is a sin? Are we still married? Or has he already destroyed our marriage by committing adultery?”*

How would you help a person if he or she came to you with these feelings and questions? Or maybe you are struggling with these very thoughts yourself. Maybe you discovered that the one you love has been unfaithful to you. What should you do? This is what we want to look at in this message.

**According to Jesus, when someone sins against us, there is something we should always do. We should forgive them.** No matter how much people hurt us or offend us or do wrong, we should never withhold our love and care for them. We should never say to another person, “I hate you. I will not help you or do anything good for you. I never want to see you again. You are nothing to me.”

### **Most people misunderstand the Christian idea of forgiveness.**

Today we want to listen to Jesus’ words about forgiveness. Then we want to consider some misunderstandings which people have about forgiveness.

Here is **what Jesus Christ spoke about forgiveness** to his follower named Peter.

*Peter came up to the Lord and asked, “How many times should I forgive someone who does something wrong to me?”*

*Is seven times enough?”*

*Jesus answered:*

*Not just seven times, but seventy-seven times! This story will show you what the kingdom of heaven is like: One day a king decided to call in his officials and ask them to give an account of what they owed him. As he was doing this, one official was brought in who owed him fifty million silver coins.<sup>25</sup> But he didn't have any money to pay what he owed. The king ordered him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all he owned, in order to pay the debt.*

*The official got down on his knees and began begging, “Have pity on me, and I will pay you every cent I owe!” The king felt sorry for him and let him go free. He even told the official that he did not have to pay back the money.*

*As the official was leaving, he happened to meet another official, who owed him a hundred silver coins. So he grabbed the man by the throat. He started choking him and said, “Pay me what you owe!”*

*The man got down on his knees and began begging, “Have pity on me, and I will pay you back.” But the first official refused to have pity. Instead, he went and had the other official put in jail until he could pay what he owed.*

*When some other officials found out what had happened, they felt sorry for the man who had been put in jail. Then they told the king what had happened. The king called the first official back in and said, “You're an evil man! When you begged for mercy, I said you did not have to pay back a cent. Don't you think you should show pity to someone else, as I did to you?” The king was so angry that he ordered the official to be tortured until he could pay back everything he owed. That is how my Father in heaven will treat you, if you don't forgive each of my followers with all your heart.*

Matthew 18:21-25, CEV

From these words of Jesus we see that Jesus wants us to forgive people no matter how great their sin is against us or how long they continue to sin against us. We also see that the reason we forgive

others is that we are grateful to God, who has forgiven our many sins.

**But what is forgiveness?** When we forgive people, what exactly should we do? Forgiveness is a sacrifice we make to continue loving someone who wronged us. When we forgive people, we give up our desire to seek revenge or punish them. We choose to continue loving them despite the pain they have caused us.

It is difficult to forgive people. It seems impossible. But some people make forgiveness even more difficult, because they misunderstand it. **Let's look briefly at what forgiveness does *not* mean:**

**1. First, forgiveness does not mean that the emotional pain of the offense is unimportant or that it has gone away.** There is a saying in English, "Forgive and forget." But the Bible never tells us we have to forget the harm people cause us in order to forgive them. When people sin against us, the wounds go deep into our hearts. If you forgive someone, you should not feel ashamed that the pain of their wrongdoing still hurts you very much. In fact, the stronger the pain you feel, the more you are to be commended for being willing to forgive that person.

**2. Second, when we forgive people, they are still responsible for their actions.** Some people ask forgiveness in order to avoid the consequences for their actions. They don't want to pay their debts. They don't want to change. They only want to live irresponsibly.

When we forgive people, this does not make them free to do whatever they desire. We must still hold them accountable for their actions. This is the only way they will learn to become responsible.

**3. Third, forgiveness does not always mean that you agree with the person about what happened.** A neighbor may think he didn't sin against you. You may think he did. But you can forgive your neighbor even if he doesn't recognize his wrongdoing or ask for forgiveness.

**4. Finally, there are times when we forgive someone but we do not immediately give them the trust we gave them before.** Forgiveness doesn't require victims to leave themselves unprotected, only to be hurt again. For example, if someone steals from us, we

might forgive him. We do not seek to send him to prison for stealing. But we do not foolishly leave our money where he can steal it again. Or in the case of adultery, the faithful spouse should forgive her unfaithful husband, but she should not act as if nothing happened. It will take time for the unfaithful partner to earn the trust of his wife again. She must hold him responsible. She must not let him continue to misuse and betray her. She must use what we call ‘tough love.’

Are you in pain because the one you love was unfaithful to you? I pray that God’s Word will strengthen you with these truths:

- **Forgiveness is very powerful.** By forgiving your partner, you might rescue him from the powerful forces of lust and adultery.
- **God has forgiven you much, too.** You can find the strength to forgive others by remembering how much God forgave you.
- **God knows how you feel.** He knows what it is like to be abandoned and betrayed. He can comfort you and strengthen you so that you can forgive your mate.
- **Forgiveness is painful. But it does not require you to be a victim.** If your spouse is abusive or unrepentant, you are not trapped. You can and should expect your spouse to love you and be faithful to you. Pray to God. Ask him to give you the strength to lovingly confront your spouse. Do what you can to rescue him or her from the power of sin. Remember that God loves and protects people who are weak and oppressed by others.

If you are struggling to forgive someone, I want to pray for you . . .

*[Producers: end with an appropriate prayer for faithfulness, forgiveness and healthy marriages for your listeners]*