

Infidelity and Maintaining Counselor Boundaries

Let me mention three resources as we get started: Dave Carder's *Torn Asunder*, Frank Pittman's *Private Lies*, and Donald Harvey's *Surviving Betrayal: Counseling an Adulterous Marriage, a Clear Action Plan for Restoration*. This last one is a great book. I am sorry it is out of print. Carder's is a great book, too.

In the song "Fountain of Sorrow," Jackson Browne says,

But when you see through love's illusions there lies the danger
And your perfect lover just looks like a perfect fool
So you go running off in search of a perfect stranger
While the loneliness seems to spring from your life
Like a fountain from a pool

Read through that again. He captures so much there of a very common dynamic. Intimacy is hard. We are often surprised by the struggle, and we assume that the struggle means we are matched with the wrong person. We think, wrongly, about whether or not we married the right person. We think that there is one right person, and we wonder if we married the right one or not. We think that rather than thinking that when we got married that question was settled. The one you marry is the right person, and you work together to become better for each other all the time. But when we use that faulty thinking we start wondering if we married the wrong person.

There is a section in Bill Doherty's book *Take Back Your Marriage* that I want to talk about. It is in the chapter called "Preventing the Unnecessary Divorce," which is another one of Doherty's fairly unique chapters. Here you have a therapist who is saying, "You know what, divorce should not be happening as much as it is." Bill Doherty wrote a book in 1995 called *Soul Searching*, where he makes an appeal to the psychotherapy world to bring morals back into therapy. He did that, as he tells the story, primarily because of a particular client. This was a man whom he had been working with who was coming in for their last session. But the man had divorced his wife—they had a couple of kids—and was leaving town. The ruling value of the day—and the ruling value still today in most therapists' minds—was that our responsibility is to help the client be happy. Therefore therapists typically will not challenge people too much. But Doherty started to question that whole notion and was feeling like he would be doing something wrong if he did not help this guy consider a little better what it was he was doing.

Part of the story was that this was this man's second marriage. There was another wife and another couple of kids in another city whom he had left and did not have much to do with. Well, this made Doherty recognize that there is a set of values that are not about what is going to make the client happy. They are really about how they need to be responsible. In his book, Doherty develops an ethic that is something like "the golden rule." Doherty does not have a biblical foundation, but he ends up asking questions about an objective standard. He encourages therapists to know what their values are and to work from them. As you work with people, he encourages you to help them consider the impact of their behavior on others. Help them consider the stakeholders. That is the exact opposite of the divorce culture assumptions that Barbara Dafoe Whitehead has identified, where people just look at how something impacts them. Doherty is trying to help people think about who the stakeholders are and how their actions impact them. If they think divorce is necessary and they are going to go through with it, how can they do it in a way that will reduce the impact on the stakeholders? Consider the other people.

In a video I often use, Bill Doherty meets with a woman who is in an affair. She is debating whether to divorce her husband and live with the other man or to stop the affair and stay in the marriage. Doherty tries to give a third view: Stay in the marriage and try to make it a better marriage. In that process he gets her to think about the stakeholders. He helps her see her kids, although she says that they would be all right. He also helps her think about the community. Her husband teaches at a denominational college. I think they are Evangelicals. Their marriage has been fairly flat. She has issues in her life, and she has stumbled into this other relationship. Doherty compares it to going to a tropical island with someone. This woman has a relationship with her husband where there are mundane things to do like doing the laundry and preparing meals. Then she gets involved with this other guy, and it is like she is going off to a tropical island where things are always great. But sooner or later she is going to have to come back to the mainland. He helps her to think about what is actually happening.

In the magazine *Psychotherapy Networker*, Doherty has an article called “Deciding about Divorce: Therapy and the Marriage Preservation Movement.” In that article he talks about the lady in the video and he tells the end of the story, how she chose to stay in her marriage and invest herself in building a better marriage. Part of Doherty’s mission these days is trying to preserve marriages. He even has a website devoted to this. On his website he created a place where therapists who agree with his principles can sign up—principles of trying to preserve marriage, of recognizing one of the things he says in the article, that you can always end your marriage, but you cannot always work on saving it. He is trying to get therapists to be not so easily prone to saying that divorce is an answer. It is not. It is just trading one set of problems for another. That has been a big part of what Doherty is about. There has been a transformation in his thinking about marriage and stakeholders. He does not merely think about what makes people happy. He thinks about what is really best for all who are involved.

In Jackson Browne’s song, the person is thinking about what they are getting out of this. They moved into a love relationship, and they discovered some illusions. They thought it was going to be certain things, and it is not. This perfect lover is now looking like a fool. So they decide to go after someone else. Jackson Browne rightly paints the picture that it does not work that way. But that process happens so often when people start to believe that they married the wrong person.

In the Doherty chapter on unnecessary divorce, he cites research exploring how it is that people can be married, get divorced, marry again, and say the same things in the second marriage ceremony that they said in the first one. They say that this second marriage is for life. They are committed for life, almost as if the first one never happened. What the research has demonstrated is that part of what happens is that a process goes on in which people reinterpret history and look at that first marriage as not a real marriage. Perhaps they do that by saying that they married the wrong person. Since it was the wrong person it did not really count.

Doherty gets more specific in his chapter and explains the thought process that happens. He says it is about a two-year process, and I believe he is right. It typically starts with someone asking a question that is something like, “Did I marry the right person?” They entertain that question seriously. When you start to entertain that question seriously, it is not hard to see evidence that you did marry the wrong person. No one is perfect, and it is easy to find flaws in your spouse if that is what you are looking for. In that process, what happens is that over time, as that becomes your framework for what you are looking for, you draw the conclusion that you have married the wrong person. Most of that happens internally, individually, and privately. At some point there might be discussion with someone else other than the spouse. Usually that other person is someone who has gotten divorced themselves. There is always someone at work who is happy to say, “Divorce the bum. I did it, and it was the best thing I ever did.”

That may not even be true, and they may know it is not true, but there is always someone who is happy to say, "Join the club" so that they will feel better.

A very similar process happens in situations where infidelity occurs. We think about how hard marriage is getting. We start to think that we married the wrong person. Then someone comes along, like Carder describes, who makes it look easier. They look like the right person. Intimacy does not look so hard with them. Often it is someone at work. Perhaps they are in a different context, but a conversation happens that seems easy. It seems like you connect. I am still of the belief that it is much easier to connect with people whom you do not live with. It is a false connection, because you do not have to deal with the reality of who they are. They can present their best side, and it can be very powerful.

That kind of process is what introduces the romantic type of infidelity, which is the most common type, as far as I can tell. Frank Pittman, in *Private Lies*, says there are four types of infidelity. They are parallel to Dave Carder's types in *Torn Asunder*. Carder numbers them one to four. But names are easier for me to remember than numbers, so I use the types. The types may be mixed, but they are usually predominantly one or the other. Figuring out the type of infidelity helps you to figure out what you really need to address.

In the romantic type of infidelity, the assumption is that the other person is perfect. You might even call it romanticism. It is not just romantic in the sense of flowers and candy. It is not that type of romance. It is rather a romanticism of thinking that this person is perfect. This person makes reality go away. It can be very extreme. There can be lots of blindness involved in terms of seeing what is really involved with this person. You only see the goodness, or even an inflated goodness. They might be the one to inflate themselves, but they are likely inflated by us as we are not looking at reality.

Frank Pittman told a story at a conference that I went to one time. Even though it was about 10 years ago, it sticks in my mind. It is such an illustration of the blindness that can be involved in this romanticism. Pittman had counseled a man who was an orthopedic surgeon. Those are people who operate on knees, ankles, and other things that move. They pay attention to mobile parts, it seems to me. Well, the man had an affair and got divorced and then married the woman whom he had the affair with. He had this romantic idea that this woman was perfect. As I remember the story, it was actually at the altar in the second wedding that the man, this orthopedic surgeon, recognized for the first time that the woman was missing a finger on one hand. That is a mobile part, which is why I mentioned that earlier. That is pretty amazing, is it not? There is a very real blindness to this romanticism. More often than not it is not going to be that drastic. More often the blindness will be about the negative characteristics and the reality of who this person is as a human being.

I am thinking of a situation that happened to me once when I was working with a couple. The husband had two affairs, and I actually got to meet with one of the other women. That has only happened to me once. This couple was in their mid 40s. They both were attractive people. The wife was tall, lean, and in good shape. She was a little worn from the tough stuff she had been through, but she was an attractive lady. She looked like she was from California, was used to lying on the beach, and had an easy life. Well, in the end, the man divorced his wife, moved in with the other woman, and probably ended up getting married. But when I met the other woman I was surprised. I had been hearing about how attentive and mature this woman was, how she listened so well, how she honored and respected him, and how she did not see negative in him. She overlooked all his faults. That was hard for him to turn away from.

Let me describe the situation for you as I met this woman. The man, remember, was about 45. This was a few years ago, and at the time my daughter was about 24. Well, this young woman came in, and there was a receptionist at the desk who gave her a form to fill out. I came down and greeted her. She handed me the form and as we were walking back to the office I was reading it and noticed that her birth date was the same month and year as my daughter's. So this man, who is just a little bit younger than I am, was very seriously involved with a woman who was the same age as my daughter and just slightly older than his oldest daughter, who was in college. She was probably about a hundred pounds and 4'10 or 4'11. She was smart enough to try to pull her hair back and dress sophisticatedly enough to look a little older. But she looked like an eighth grader who was trying hard. I am not being critical. I am just trying to paint the picture as accurately as I can. She looked very young, like a person whom you would look at and wonder, how much can she bring into a long-term relationship with this 45-year-old man?

Well, I had a conversation with her. She was nice enough and all of that. But I was pretty sure she was scheming. She was scheming. She told me some things that I did not know, and I knew why she was telling me. She was expecting me to use them in such a way to break the marriage up. Think about that picture. Think about the kind of person and character that he was not seeing. He did not see any scheming. He was completely blind to that. He made decisions about moving out of his marriage and away from his four kids toward this woman without seeing it. He may never see it.

Sometimes people stay in that romantic state. But a lot of times they do not. Something happens a year or two into the new relationship. The eyes are opened, and it can be an incredible shock. Most people do not admit that because they have done it. But it is a part of that blindness that sees the other person as perfect. The blindness is very real, and it covers things that people should see. So our goal as counselors becomes to expose the false expectations. This person is not really what they seem. Expose the feelings they are trying to escape. They are trying to escape by going off to this other relationship that is not even real. But sooner or later it will most likely become real. So try to help them grow up and deal with life as it really is. Do not believe the craziness. They may say that the other person is perfect. People who fall in love think that a lot of times. But they usually do not stay there. Stay rooted in reality with the desired result of trying to help those people return to reality. It is a tricky thing. Use the two tracks of the relationship. Build enough connection with this person that in our confrontation, challenge, and coaching toward change, they can hear us saying the things that they are blind to. Have enough conversation about that that they will at least think about it. If you can get that far you are doing something. It is very hard to accomplish.

Another type of infidelity occurs by the philanderer. Usually it is men who are the philanderers, although these days I think women are more than they used to be. The assumption here is that real men do it more. Philanderers are men who prove their manhood to themselves and to other men by being sexual athletes, trying to be the best or the most frequent. Usually what is happening is that they are avoiding intimacy. So our goal as counselors becomes to help them stop avoiding intimacy. The process by which we do that is by exploring their relationship with their father and asking questions about their fear of women. It is not natural to assume that a man who is sleeping with a lot of women is afraid of women. But that is typically what drives them. They are trying to demonstrate to themselves what they are not through their sexual conquests. It usually grows out of a lack of relationship with their father. We might ask where they learned about being a man, or what they did not learn. It usually goes back to their relationship with their father.

Would the reverse be true for a female philanderer? I am less clear about that and about the processes that go on in female homosexuality than I am about men. My hunch is that the issues for women are likely to be a little more complicated, and it is more likely that the relationship with both parents has had

an impact. Keep an eye on both relationships. Certainly the male philanderer can have a problem with his mom as well, but the relationship with his father is usually the key. For women it may be one or the other or both.

One of the reasons I think that is because of the technology that has developed in the last 15 to 20 years where we are able to do brain scans on people while they are doing activity. We have gotten better at mapping the structure of the brain. One of the things we have discovered is that the place in the brain right above the brain stem has a collection of connectors between the two spheres. And we have discovered that women generally have more connections than men. So when women think that men just think out of one side of their head, that is true. They have less actual physical capacity. And when husbands think that their wives are scatter-brains, there is some truth to that, too. That does not have to be a negative thing. It can be positive. So there is a physically built-in difference. Whether it is created in us, I do not know. How does that happen? I do not know. Part of physical differences like that can be the result of use or not use. If you do not use certain things they do not develop; they atrophy. If athletes do not use certain muscles, they do not develop. They do not develop the muscle memory, not just the size and strength, but the coordination. So I do not know if this is the result of use or misuse, if it is the result of the curse, or if it is created in us. I do not know. But it is a real thing. There are differences. Perhaps that has something to do with the fact that in these situations men seem to be more about one aspect or one kind of relationship. Women may have a little more capacity for multiple aspects. That is a bit of a guess, so take it for what it is worth or not worth. Having said that, our desired result for the philanderer is the pursuit of true intimacy with his wife.

Another type of infidelity is called “accidental.” The reaction to this type of infidelity is, “Oops,” or “How did this happen?” The word accidental is in quotation marks on purpose. This is referring to a one-night stand, which often occurs in the following way: A spouse goes away on a business trip, has too much to drink at the bar, lets their boundaries down, connects with somebody who comes up to their room, and the next morning they wake up and look over and think, “Who is this and what happened?” They are appalled, scared, and panicked. They did not want this to happen. It can take different forms than that but the point is that it is different than the romantic type of infidelity where conversation starts, the relationship builds, and the idea forms that you are developing a really good friendship. That friendship eventually becomes something else when it gets ratified sexually. There is a much longer process there than with the accidental type of infidelity. Accidental infidelity refers to a situation that “just happens.” They are not sure how it happened.

The counselor goal with this type of infidelity is generally to expose the facts and repair the relationship. For those who are pastors, imagine that a man or woman whom this has happened to comes to see you. They come to see you alone, and they tell you about this awful thing that has happened. Often they are hoping that they will feel better by confessing to you. They want you to be their priest. If they can confess to you, they think they will not have to tell anyone else. They think they can go on and live like it never happened and things will be all right. That usually does not work. You need wisdom here. There might be some extreme and unusual circumstances where you recognize that they should not tell the spouse, but it is hard for me to imagine what those circumstances are.

That the other spouse will get upset is not a reason for not telling. Yes, there will be a crisis. There will be a crisis. But think of the alternative. What will go on in that person’s mind, not only the first time or the second time, but every time they have intercourse with their spouse? We’ve talked about the enemy using premarital sexual experiences against us. What about extramarital sexual experiences that are secrets and that we have not shared with our spouse? Is that not going to be something that is going to diminish your intimacy? By not telling, what you are saying is that you are going to live the rest of your

lives with less intimacy, maybe greatly reduced intimacy, because you have done this thing and you do not have the courage or the decency to let your spouse in on what happened. You will not be that honest. I simply do not think that good things can come out of that. You have avoided the crisis, but you have created a long-term problem that will not go away. Not that its going away is the point. You are not moving through it. You are trying to get around it, and those things almost always haunt you. So expose the facts and repair.

Further, with this type of infidelity you need to support the people and check boundaries. Most often these folks are not that good with boundaries. Even in the example I gave this came out. The husband was in a bar, drinking. It was not the drinking that was the problem as much as the fact that the boundaries were not up. Perhaps the drinking contributed to the boundaries being down. But it may simply be the kind of person who does not keep good, clear boundaries. You may know some of those people.

I am thinking about a couple I worked with a while ago. The wife brought him in for counseling. They were a good Christian couple. He was a great guy. I loved this guy. But he did not have good boundaries. He did not see things coming, and he did not recognize the impact he had on people. His wife would watch him interact with other women and she would say, "Do you not see how she is responding to you?" But he would say, "No, it is just a work relationship. We are just having fun." This was a school setting, and some of the stuff seemed like it was just part of having fun in a school setting with the teenage kids. But they ended up coming in for counseling because of a school trip that he went on. As the group was coming back from dinner the women he had been talking to saw an opportunity and tried to take advantage of it. He was lagging behind, and she came alongside him and offered to come to his room. He was aghast. He was shocked. He never saw it coming, even though his wife had been saying, "I am not so sure about this relationship." He did not see it coming. He was a good man. He did not want that. He said no. I think he called his wife immediately. He did all the right things. So nothing happened that should not have happened. But they had an issue.

I am using this couple as an example because he did not put up good boundaries. Part of his style was being very affectionate and using lots of touch. But that is easy for people to look at and perceive as an invitation. He could be perceived as somebody who is needy, or it could be perceived in some other way as an open door. This other woman tried to push that door open further. He pushed it back closed, which was right. But he had to do some work, because he was close to an accident. He had to do some work to figure out boundaries, not just with that woman, but with all kinds of people. Help people with those boundaries.

Recognize that there are cultural and sub-cultural differences in what boundaries look like. There are personal differences as well, and what we learn in families affects this, too. So how are we true to ourselves and yet careful with this? In a certain way that question underlines the difficulty that goes back to the idea that it is not our intent but the impact that our behavior has that is the key. One person might perceive another person's actions as polite and another person might perceive them as an invitation. In other words, there could be different impacts. That is part of the difficulty. The man who was off in another city, by living the way he lived and saying to his wife that he was not doing anything, was refusing to pay attention to the impact he had on other people. So I think the answer is that we need to learn to grow better antennae so that we can pick up on how people respond to us and the impact that we are having. I also think it means that all of us need to do some thinking about our boundaries and what they look like. If you are a man, what do those boundaries look like to women versus what they look like to men? Women need to do some thinking about what their boundaries look like in the way they impact other women and in the way they impact men.

We have to think about boundaries regarding the different roles that we are in. We obviously may do different things with family. There may be cultural expectations at different churches. That becomes an interesting one for counselors. One of the things that the secular counseling world says, recognizing that counselors have more power than they often realize, is that they should not touch their clients. Did you know that is part of the ethics code of the American Psychological Association? The American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy says that as well. Do not touch your clients. That is interesting, is it not? In some church environments hugging is the way you greet. I am not saying that there is anything wrong with that. But in a counseling session something is different. So what do you do? I want to say that men may want to do something differently with women than what they do with men. And women may do something differently with men than they do with women. It may be that we do something differently in that moment but not at other moments. Pay attention to the different roles that you are in at different times. There are times when I hug female students. On the last day of class I sometimes hug my counseling interns. We spend a fairly intense year together, and I have not touched those women for nine months. But it is appropriate at the end of the year, because everyone understands that we are saying goodbye. That is the end. But I try to pay attention to different contexts and different roles that I am in, and I try to be careful.

Recently I was in a situation with a couple. She had been my student, and I get very close with my students. They feel like my children after I have spent a year with them doing this internship. She had been my student two or three years ago, and so when I saw her I hugged her. Then I looked at him and said, after the fact, "Is it all right if I hug your wife?" I had not seen her for three years. We had a pretty intense relationship. In the meantime I had a relationship with him more than her. The three of us just happened to be in the same place, and so I hugged her. There was nothing wrong with that. It helped that he was right there. But there is nothing wrong with that. Just be aware of it and think about it. I know there was much less opportunity for misunderstanding because her husband was standing there. Actually, I have a feeling, knowing this person the way I do, that if he was not standing there we probably would not have done that. It would not have happened. So think about it. Be careful. Go on the safe side. Try to be wise.

Having said that, our desired result in the case of accidental infidelity is prevention and increased carefulness.

The fourth type of infidelity is the marital arrangement. The assumption here is that marriage cannot be enough. Because marriage cannot be enough, a marital helper gets recruited. Often that happens with everyone's knowledge. They do not necessarily approve of it, but they are aware of it. It is really a case of avoiding intimacy. It is escaping the struggle for intimacy in marriage. It avoids it by adding a third person, becoming a triangular relationship. Let me give an example. This happens in lots of royal situations. Those are the ones that become famous. For a long time there was Prince Charles, Diana, and Camilla. The wife is not necessarily happy about it, but for whatever reason she is powerless to do anything about it. They may have conversation about it, but she typically cannot do anything actively about it.

There was a time when I did not talk about marital arrangements. I only talked about the other three types because I thought you would never see this. It is kind of weird. It happens in the royal family, but that is it, I thought. But a change came in my thinking as I was reading student genograms. There have been students who passed through this seminary who were a part of families with marital arrangements. One that sticks in my head the most is one where the marital arrangement was fairly open. People knew about it. This student, now an adult obviously, remembers being in the back seat of the car, waving

goodbye to mom as they were going on vacation. Dad was driving, and the other woman was in the front seat. These are very strange and peculiar relationships. There are peculiar dynamics going on, so peculiar that I assume it does not happen very often, but it does. That is not the only situation that I have read through the years. That is just the one that sticks out. That is the way these things work. They are strange.

There was a movie where this happened. A teenager came home one day and found that his mom was having a health emergency. Dad was not home, but the teenager knew where to find him. So he goes to her apartment. It was known that something of this arrangement was going on. These arrangements almost feel permanent. It is just the way people think it is supposed to go. If we had a class discussion we could probably all think of movies, stories, or people we know where there seems to be this belief that marriage does not work on its own. Two people cannot do it. There has to be someone else to pull in and balance it. People actually believe—through not using the word triangle—that a triangle is what is necessary for marriage to work. It is not true. And it is not about the fact that marriage cannot work with two people. It is about the fact that they are afraid of doing the hard work of intimacy, and maybe they are just afraid of intimacy itself.

Our goal as counselors in these cases becomes to increase their awareness of their real need for intimacy. The process of doing that is to help them become less comfortable with the arrangement. Disturb the comfort with the arrangement. When you have enough connection with them, let them know that this is really peculiar. That can be a helpful thing. Let them know that this is not normal. This is off. They should not need this. It is damaging to the kids. Then help the spouses build real intimacy with each other. That is going to be challenging. They have coped this way. We are asking people to stop coping in a way that has been working for them. Even though it leads to all kinds of problems, discomfort, and pain, it has been working at some level. They have been able to escape an even more painful thing of working toward intimacy. Perhaps they do not know how to do that. Perhaps they did not see that modeled in their own lives. We are asking people to stop coping. It is not easy. But hang in there with them. That is a crucial thing to try to do.

Let us talk about maintaining necessary boundaries as counselors. These are boundaries the counselor needs to maintain with people. It starts with the very first phone call. You are not going to get both spouses on the phone at the same time, one on each extension, or something like that. Typically when one person calls they are usually going to try to get you to do something. Perhaps that might not always happen, but they often want to tell their story. It is really hard to have them not tell the story. But it is better if they can save the story for when you are all together. They are going to need to tell the story again anyway. You do not want to hear their perspective on the story without the other spouse hearing it. You might have to say during the session with the couple, “When I talked with you earlier you said,” and then relay what was said. Make sure there are not any secrets.

When they call initially they might say something like, “Do not tell my husband this, but...” or “Do not tell my wife this, but...” Do not agree to that. Let them know up front that you are going to do this together as the three of you. Let them know that you cannot keep secrets with them. They would not want you keeping secrets with the other person. So do not agree to keep any secrets.

Never discuss your marital problems with a counselee or with anyone else of the opposite sex. Many of these are universal truths. Imagine that a person of the opposite sex comes to you and describes an issue that they are struggling with. You say something like, “You know, I have experienced something like that, too.” You might be thinking that you are using it as an example. You can do that if you have a couple in front of you. But if you just have one spouse and they are the opposite sex, do not do that. The

worst thing that can happen is that they will understand. You may be surprised at how good it feels that this person understands. They just joined with you in an intense way. You crossed the boundary in that one conversation. So do not discuss your own marital problems with a counselee.

This next point is true for me. I think it is true for most men. It is probably also true for some women. I know that this is something I have to recognize. Beware of the vulnerable person. That is especially true for male counselors and especially true in times of difficulty with your spouse. So if my wife, Carolanne, and I are experiencing a time where we are in disagreement about something—and you have seasons of life like this—the last thing that is happening right then is that Carolanne is looking like somebody I can really help. She does not look like someone who is good to be connected to, and I will not be inclined to listen to what she has to say. So if in that moment a woman comes in who is vulnerable, the damsel in distress, who is so ready to listen to what I have to say, she is a dangerous person. She is not dangerous in and of herself. But I am at a place where I am vulnerable, and I need to be careful. What helps me the most is to know that if there is anything about that person that looks attractive, not necessarily physically, though it might be that, too, I do not trust it. When I am not feeling so vulnerable it will not look the same. It will not. That is the way that it is. So figure out the things that you need to pay attention to like that. There are some things that you cannot figure out; that is just the way it is. I do not know if this happens for women or not. I think it happens for most men. For whatever reason, you meet someone new and you think, “Wow, that is an attractive person.” But then the next day you say, “What was I thinking?” You do not know what it was. That is just the way it is. Some days it is just like everything looks good. And other days it is more realistic. In those times when you may feel like your spouse is strongly against you, the vulnerable person can be very attractive.

Be very careful about counseling clients of the opposite sex. You must not have an office that is too private. The faculty offices at this institution all have windows in the doors for this reason. Even though not all of the faculty do counseling, they meet with students, and that should not be too private. That can mean different things. Consider the location of your office in the building. My office is problematic as it is located in the basement of a building. If there is more than one person in the building it can be all right because that means it is not too private. But if I am going to be there alone, we do not schedule things too late. We try to have sessions when there are other people in the other offices. Keep the blinds in the windows open. Have a window to the outside and in your door. Someone else must be visibly present in the building.

It is very important to have someone you can consult with about these situations. Talk to a colleague about what is happening in the sessions and what you are feeling negatively or positively about the client, especially feelings you are surprised about. Most counselors, at least early on, have supervisors. It is important for all of us to have supervisors, or at least people we can consult with. Richard Winter and I will use each other in that way. That is an important practice to maintain. It is easy for pastors to do their counseling in the same sort of lone ranger way that they do their sermon writing. I encourage you to use someone else whom you can talk to and whom you can talk with on a regular basis. It helps us deal with it and keep it realistic. It is an important thing to do.

I think I mentioned already that I realized many years ago that there is a reason why a counseling practice is called “practice.” It is because it is really hard to get good at it, and you are always practicing. I am not sure anyone gets to where you play the game. For most of my early professional life I had been an eclectic jack-of-all-trades kind of person. I recognized that if I wanted to get reasonably good, or even to have a chance to do that, I needed to focus. That is why I decided to do couples counseling. I counsel individual men once in a while, but I mainly counsel couples. In saying that, I recognize that I am not going to counsel individual women. I focus mainly on married couples. From time to time I have

women call up who say that they really need some help figuring out how to live with their husband. I send them somewhere else. Like I said earlier, it is not helpful for me to become more understanding than their husband.

It is different for pastors, however. Women need pastors. In some way pastors do not have the luxury I have. They cannot say, "Sorry, that is not something I can do. I have somebody else I can suggest." By the way, usually I am busy enough that I do not have to say anything along the lines of, "I am sorry, but I will not see you because you are a woman." That would be misunderstood. I would not say that. Most often I have a waiting list, and I can say truthfully that I cannot do it because I do not have the opening, and I can refer them on. But pastors cannot do that. So most of the pastors I know handle this by limiting the number of times they will see people. They might limit it to once. They might limit it to two, three, or a few more than that. One thing I do know is that somewhere around six or eight sessions the intensity of the relationship changes. There has been some research out there, though I have lost the reference, that demonstrated that for pastors who got in trouble sexually through counseling relationships with women, a high percentage of the time it was in longer relationships. It was around six or eight sessions that things changed. The pastor became much more vulnerable. They made mistakes, and the relationship became more intense. So it seems clear to me that limiting sessions to two, three, four, or five is an important thing for pastors to do.

I do know counselors who believe that at times it can be very therapeutic for a woman to see a male therapist or for a man to see a female therapist. That can be very therapeutic. As an example, a 30-something-year-old man whom I supervise was working with a woman who had been sexually abused. Her dad was absent, and she had been sexually abused by her grandfather for years. She had two failed marriages behind her. Basically she assumed that if she got into a relationship with a man he would want to abuse her. The character of her marriage relationship made it feel like she was being used. Well, my friend got in a very intense therapeutic relationship with her. He really did hit points where he knew she was feeling things for him that were like love. He was talking to me about it because he knew he needed to do that. But the very fact that he would not take advantage of her in any way was incredibly therapeutic.

One of the goals for our relationship with people is that we have a relationship with them that is an exception. My friend was able to create a huge exception for her. Eventually she could generalize and recognize that not all men are about using women. First she saw it in this man, but she recognized that it was possible in other men as well. So there are times when there are important advantages that can play out in lots of ways as a counselor. That is part of why I do not want to make a blanket statement that men should never see women, because there are times when it is important. It could be the other way around, as well.

Never touch a client of the opposite sex. We have talked about that. Even if the local or church culture expects hugging or other forms of expression, do not violate this boundary in counseling. Touching, other than initial handshakes, is too easily misunderstood. You can be wise, and there may be times to vary from that. I have already mentioned that. But this is too easy to be misunderstood. The client is in a special relationship with the counselor, sharing intimate details of his or her life. That can change what would normally be routine physical contact. So be wise.

Let me take up some questions. Is it ever helpful for a pastor's wife or a counselor's spouse to join them in their counseling? Depending on the skills they have to offer, they could do everything from be in the room and not say much to being co-counselors, and there are lots of things in between. I actually think that one of the most therapeutic things can be a male and female counselor team. We do not do very

much of it because we do not know how it would work out financially. Counselors make their living in private practice. If they did joint counseling, would they charge one fee and split it? Well, now they are making half as much money as they normally would. Do they charge their clients double? Well, that is not a great idea either. So it does not happen a lot, but it can be one of the more powerful things. That is partly because families are our school of relationships. By having a male and female therapist, it tends to recreate both kinds of relationships that you have with males and females, mothers and fathers. I am also convinced that the best teams are married couples. I have seen people try to do this who do not know each other very well. It is very difficult. One person jumps in, and they are going in another direction, not realizing that the other person had a plan. It is because they do not know each other. So people who know each other well, like a husband and wife, I think can be the most effective. But it will test your relationship. It is challenging. If a non-married couple is working together it creates an opportunity for them to get to know each other very intimately, and so they would have to be smart. Personally, I am not sure if having non-married co-therapists is a great idea. The relationship becomes fairly intense.

This is similar to a point that Carder makes in *Close Calls* about how people connect. A common way that people connect these days in ways that lead to infidelity is through mission trips, ministry opportunities, worship leading, music groups, and other types of work and ministry-related activity. Having non-married co-therapists would be a very similar kind of thing.

A common way that infidelity occurs in middle-age people today is by high school sweethearts meeting each other on the Internet. They can find them on websites such as www.classmates.com, and they reconnect. Go back to that three-legged stool. One of the legs is adolescent sexuality. If two people were sexually active as teenagers, they will be prone to having some fantasy of being reconnected again. They think that was better than what they are in currently. That is just one of the ways the Internet affects things.

We have not talked about pornography yet. That is a whole other topic. It gets addressed pretty directly in *Pure Desire*. Again, the fullest statement I can make about pornography is that it is a heart issue. It is not a sexual issue in the way that we think. That is the way that men, particularly, think about it. Women do, too, but men especially think about it that way. They think it is just a sexual thing. It is not about their wife, their relationship, or any of that, they think. Actually, it is more about things like finding comfort, having control, feeling safe, avoiding intimacy, or doing something that is easy, which does not cost you anything. It is about the holes in our hearts. It is about finding comfort in an easy way that does not involve any risk, as opposed to having a relationship with a real person, which does involve risk. They might reject you. They might not think you are good, worthwhile, or loveable. So pornography is very attractive and powerful, not just because it is so easy, but often because we are not thinking about the heart stuff that it is actually tapping into.

Let me clarify a point that I made earlier when I was talking about counselor vulnerability. I do not want to come across as saying that women are dangerous simply because they are single, needy, or whatever else. That was not the point. The point really is for us to recognize our limits and our vulnerability and that we need to draw some boundaries. There need to be some lines put in. For instance, I will not go more than three or five sessions, because I am aware that the relationship will get more intense with whoever it might be, and I may not handle that intensity well. It is more about my limits, my finite ability, my sinful bent, and my needs that need to be met, which are not met perfectly in marriage in this life. So when someone comes along looking like they can meet those needs, they can be a powerful person. But the reason they are powerful is more because of me than them. That is an important clarification. Please do not hear me saying that single women are predators and most of the married ones

are, too. I am not saying that, but it often gets communicated that way. I certainly do not want to communicate that, and the same thing is true about men.

As a teacher I cannot anticipate all of the situations you will encounter and give you an answer for them, because it really does come down to the fact that you have to pray for wisdom. We could find five different situations and there may be five different ways to respond that would actually be the best. Most of the time, though, you are not going to know what is the best. You are just going to have to make a choice and pay attention to what happens.

How would I connect infidelity with pornography? I hear two questions there. One question is, can pornography lead to infidelity? Yes. It can develop fertile ground. It certainly can lead to infidelity. Why would that be? Sexual things tend to be progressive. The same sexual practice over time tends to lose interest. So we look for something else. It tends to be progressive. So the person who has been involved in pornography may “graduate” to something more intense. I have heard the testimony of church elders and other good Christian men who ended up having an affair, using a prostitute, or whatever, and they recognized that pornography opened the door. So yes, pornography can lead to infidelity.

Is pornography equal to infidelity, and is divorce legitimate because of pornography? That is another question. When Jesus talks about divorce, he says that it is not permissible except when there has been sexual unfaithfulness, which is probably a broader term than just intercourse. It is probably bigger than that. It may mean other kinds of sexual behavior with other people. So there is one exception to the general rule. Then, when Paul talks about two people who are probably unbelievers who get married and one becomes a believer and the other person leaves or deserts, Paul says the remaining spouse is not bound in that marriage. Divorce is permissible. So we have two exceptions. But are they saying that these are the only exceptions? Or are they saying that these are examples of a principle, the principle being that there has been a radical breach of the marriage covenant? Is there a principle behind those two examples that we are meant to see? I agree with those who say yes. The principle is that divorce is permissible when there has been a radical breaking of the marriage covenant. Since sex is reserved for marriage, by having sex with someone else you are breaking the marriage covenant in such a radical way that it may not be able to be redeemed. It is not necessary to get divorced, but it can be permissible.

That should be decided, by the way, not by the couple, but by the church. There could be other things that equally constitute a radical break of the covenant, but that should be decided by the church on a case-by-case basis. So I am very uncomfortable with saying that severe alcoholism, for example, is just like that. I am very uncomfortable with saying that it is always a radical breach of the marriage covenant. Sometimes it might be. But I do not want to say that it is all the time. I think that would be wrong.

Is pornography a radical breach of the covenant? Personally, I do not want to say that. I hear this most often from women who have been very hurt over their husbands' continual failure. It is completely understandable. Part of the hurt for women—husbands who are using pornography need to understand this—is that they cannot help but feel like something comparative is going on and they are losing. They think he would not be looking at that if they were more worth looking at. The men say that is not true, which actually is true for them. But that does not mean that what the women are saying is not true. The men really are not thinking that way. They are going after pornography because of what is going on in their heart rather than doing the comparative thing, typically. When they say they are not comparing, that really is true, but that does not help the wife. And out of the pain of that, women feel betrayed. So they are looking for someone to say that pornography is grounds for divorce, but I am just not comfortable with that. It may be that as the church looks at it, they say that this is a symptom of how

broken this relationship is and that divorce is permissible. But I do not want to say that pornography is equal to infidelity, because the next step then is that it is grounds for divorce.

In closing, let me mention one more thing. One of the greatest things you can do for your marriage is to say to your spouse, "Every year, say on our anniversary, let us take a trip." It does not have to be a big trip, maybe three days. But get away. Let the grandparents take the kids. Pick one or two things you are going to work on. Pay special attention to what the challenges might be. Make decisions together, thinking about how to work on your marriage. Set some goals together. If you do not do that, you will just take life as it comes, and you will end up wherever it happens that you end up. Most of us just let life happen. Doherty's illustration at the beginning of *Take Back Your Marriage* is perfect. Most of us assume we are in good shape. We love each other. It is safe. And we assume good things will happen to us. But Doherty says that marriage is like getting in a canoe on the Mississippi River, and no one paddles. When you do that you start heading south. When you hit Des Moines, Iowa, it is not such a big deal. You are not that far from the headwaters, north of Saint Paul, Minnesota. But by the time you get to Saint Louis, Missouri you are in a very different place. Perhaps one person starts paddling then, but that just leads you around in circles as you continue to go further south. You can hit the Gulf of Mexico before you start working together, and you end up in a place that you do not want to be.