On The Fence

1. Mercy Triumphs Justice

"'If a man divorces his wife and she leaves and marries another man, should he return to her again? Would not the land be completely defiled? But you have lived as a prostitute with many lovers [yet] you now return to me? declares the Lord." Jeremiah 3:1

God accuses the nation of Israel of brazen adultery and in His anger, He gives unfaithful Israel a certificate of divorce. God tells Israel, 'you call me your friend and yet continue to hurt me' – doesn't that sound like a spouse who's had enough? However, in the same chapter, He offers mercy if Israel will acknowledge guilt and return to Him. God vows to let go of anger and reunite with her in marriage. God decided to "divorce" His chosen people but then changed His mind!

The redeeming and forgiving nature of God is often overlooked; yes, we have permission to divorce after adultery but we also have permission to forgive one who chooses to apologize and change. Forgiveness opens the doorway for healing, restoration, and reconciliation. It is so interesting that adultery, the one offense highlighted in the Bible as permissible grounds for divorce, is also the grievance for which God redeems Israel after a divorce.

Forgiveness does not deny that a wrong was committed, but it is an antidote to bitterness and resentment. Note that God offers to forgive Israel on the condition that she admits she is wrong and repents; repentance is when one chooses to change a belief or behavior. I am not suggesting that a person should spiritually endure in a marriage with a partner that is cheating yet NOT actively exhibiting changed behavior. However, when a person acknowledges wrong and has repented-if both individuals want the marriage to heal-then the innocent person has to be willing to forgive. There is no shortcut to reconciliation.

In addition to adultery, there are many who divorce on grounds of abuse, discontentment, incompatibility, or lack of love. I will address abuse in my next post, "Stop Drop and Roll." The power of God is greater than any impossible situation; that power can transform dead bones back to life (see Ezekiel 37). Therefore, there is hope for any marriage. The mistake that many of us make is in thinking WE can change or control our spouse through some form of manipulation. That type of change is neither powerful nor sustainable. In a dead marriage, the change which comes from God can produce lifetime results.

God, along with a host of angelic beings are willing and able to ignite change, give you hope and provide comfort at the time you need it most. God is drawn to impossible situations because they provide a vehicle for Him to bring restoration, redemption, and renewal. Father does not cause our problems, but when in trouble, He will respond to our cry for help and is able to bring beauty out of ashes. He allows mercy to win over justice, so why not do the same?

2. Stop, Drop & Roll

If some part of your body catches on fire, would you "stop, drop, and roll" or would you kneel and pray? I would stop, drop, and roll while praying; prayer alone does not replace common sense. In cases of danger, yes pray, but also initiate an appropriate emergency response.

Adultery is commonly tolerated yet it puts the innocent spouse at risk, to the point of death. There are health & safety precautions that an individual should consider when their spouse is being unfaithful. This does not mean the marriage is dead but it does need some intensive care.

Are you currently a victim of verbal, sexual, or physical abuse? Is your life in danger due to drug addiction, sexual slavery, or other illegal activity involving your spouse? If yes, please seek professional help immediately. Whenever there is imminent danger, separation is recommended to secure the safety of all involved, especially children. It is advisable to create a safe exit plan with help from professionals. You can obtain advocacy resources through the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence at HTTP://www.nrcdv.org. Even if your situation does not involve violence, you can still find helpful information at the resource noted.

Is there still hope? Yes, it is possible to experience a supernatural outcome while physically separated. There is a famous man in the Bible named Paul (aka "Saul") who was transformed from a murderer (whose target was Christians) to a passionate follower of Christ. Paul was transformed due to a supernatural encounter; if he could change, anyone can change. [see Acts 9]

While separated, it is tempting to become spiritually passive and lose all hope for marriage reconciliation. Remember, you can choose to actively pray for miracles while also focusing on personal emotional healing (forgiveness, building self-esteem, increasing faith, etc.) from a safe distance. Nevertheless, if you reject hope for restoration, God's love for you does not waiver at all! Some churches/christians turn against people who choose separation/divorce—God/Jesus does not reject us but vows to never abandon us.

Perhaps you're wondering, how long after the separation do I continue praying & waiting for this change? I don't think anyone can answer that question except you. I do believe God is alive and can guide you and illuminate your path if you seek Him. The healing process should not be carried out in isolation but with professional support, particularly in dangerous cases. Perceive yourself as being on fire and seek personal rescue & wellness accordingly.

3. Friends That Inspire

A person undergoing chemotherapy is susceptible to infectious diseases due to a weakened immune system. Therefore, hospital staff/relatives are often careful to verify the physical health of visitors and limit their access. The more critical a person's condition, the higher the level of caution. When in a heart-breaking season, who you choose to be vulnerable with can make or break the outcome.

So, think of yourself as one in an intensive care unit ("ICU") with a compromised immune system. Words have the power to create or destroy cancerous thoughts; the Bible actually says our words have the power to produce life or death, so choose wisely (Proverbs 18:21). When in extreme pain, the brain's automatic reaction leans toward offense, fear, anger, resentment, or even revenge. Yes, it takes very intentional emotional energy to choose love (the action verb, not based on feelings) when everything in us wants to panic in fear. Choosing who you allow in your emotional space requires intentionality.

I've often heard of friends who tell a person who is on the fence "they don't deserve you," "you deserve to find new love," "I would leave if I were you," etc. Whether you are a man or woman who is unsure whether or not your marriage is worth fighting for, it is imperative that you search out a friend who is FOR your marriage—one who will fan the flame of hope when apathy sets in.

A friend who is for your marriage will call out the gold in you AND your spouse especially when your eyes can only see the junk in your spouse. When we are in a pit, it is very tempting to hang out with the friends who will jump into the pit with us and begin decorating the pit. The more courageous act is to reach out to the friend who will challenge us to climb out of the pit to higher ground; let's choose to be vulnerable with those who will respond to our pain with words that produce hope and even challenge our toxic thinking/unforgiveness.

A friend fit for ICU is able to recognize our blind spots AND willing to courageously but lovingly exercise their voice.

- Are you aware of the emotional health of your friends & how their energy impacts you?
- Are you intentionally selecting with whom you share your pain?
- Are your friends inspiring you to fight to win = healed marriage?

If not, it doesn't mean you get rid of your current friends, you may just want to modify what to share with them and what you allow them to say about your wife/husband. Next, seek inspirational voices through a new friend, mentor, support group, counselor, and/or online (teachings, worship music, books, etc).

A friend loves at all times and a brother is born for a time of adversity (Proverbs 17:17). Don't be surprised if a mere acquaintance becomes like a sister/brother during your darkest hour.

4. What If?

Have you ever played the "what if" game? What if he/she leaves, what if he/she's cheating, what if he/she doesn't love me, what if it doesn't work out? These are often worse-case scenarios that require us to fantasize about catastrophic outcomes. Why is it so easy to imagine the worse outcomes and often challenging to have faith or hope for best outcomes?

Faith is the essence of things we HOPE for and being certain of what we don't see. Faith is not a delusion. Faith does not deny the facts but it does believe that with God's intervention, impossible outcomes can happen. Doubt and fear are the opposite of faith so as long as we are asking the question "what if," we don't leave room for faith. The premise of praying and hoping for a transformed or supernatural outcome is based on faith. This is where surrender to God becomes critical because if we do not believe that he exists and that he can be trusted then the idea of dead bones coming back to life becomes a delusion (see Ezekiel 37).

I have seen many situations where what seemed impossible - based on the facts of visible circumstances - actually happened! The miracles do not come about by coincidence, they are usually the result of someone asking. Yes, it is quite normal and natural for our minds to dwell on a negative outcome but we can intentionally train our thoughts to think the opposite. When we begin to think in terms of positive outcomes, especially when the positive matches a promise that God has made to us, we can be sure that Father is on our side and we can win.

Think in terms of building a spiritual muscle. If we don't exercise, how can we expect strong muscles? The only way to gain power through prayer is by praying and expecting results through faith. Start asking, "what if this whole situation shifts from negative to positive? What if I start believing God's word?"

Begin by deciding which side of the fence you want to be on, then do your willful best to stay on it. The tossing back and forth causes much damage to our hearts, hope, faith, and even the outcome (James 1:6). Ask God, "are my present circumstances causing me to question who you are and whether or not I can trust you?" If yes, then "Holy Spirit forgive my unbelief, this day I choose to put my hope in you and not in my circumstances."

5. Expiration Dates

In the midst of wishing your marriage could be repaired, have you ever said this to yourself even if only subconsciously?... 'I DON'T trust God to be ABLE to fix my marriage at the pace that I need it to be fixed. As the days go by I don't SEE any potential change. I am tired of the emotional pain and this has been going on for a long time now and there is no change. And I'm tired. I just want a break from ANYTHING that is giving me trouble and if that means not being married... That is what I want RIGHT ABOUT NOW.'

Sometimes it's hard for us to admit that our "faith" has an expiration date. The problem is that faith with an expiration date is not faith at all. There's no place in the Bible where God advises us that if what we hope for doesn't occur by our prayer expiration date, then we should give up because it will never happen. Yet we often act on that type of premise. I believe God has all the power He says he has- if there is no power, why even bother believing? It is so imperative that we test the truth ourselves. Have you ever seen God perform a miracle – in your life or someone else's? If Abba proved his power once, why do we question it at the sight of each new impossible situation?

Yes, God's promises do NOT expire but when our faith expires, it can abort the promise. We always have the freedom to choose to partner with what He is doing or to decline it. The living God is a gentleman who accepts no without force.

No one can measure a person's endurance except the individual and I'm not here to say everyone must endure- it is up to each of us whether or not to wait until what is hoped for manifests. **Again, remember that when there is any form of abuse or danger, personal safety should be the priority (see the post titled "Stop, Drop, Roll"). When someone seeks safety due to physical, mental, or emotional danger, I applaud their wisdom and courage. I'm talking about waiting in safety.

Once safety is in place, if you want to know what God is advising YOU to do in your situation, it is imperative that you seek Him and trust Him with your WHOLE HEART. If you have pace requirements or expiration dates, that is like hanging up during a conversation where you can no longer hear what is being said on the other end...not that He is not speaking, but you have unplugged the access to the hearing.

Do you believe the Bible? Have you proven its validity or are you riding on someone else's faith? I urge you to test it for yourself so that when doubt knocks at the door, you have a firm foundation of faith from which to respond.

6. The Infallible GPS

Imagine getting stuck in a crawling traffic jam in an unfamiliar city and there are no alternative routes suggested by the GPS ("global positioning system"). Nevertheless, you notice several cars veering away from the main path and you follow them, deciding to trust what appears to be a good detour to arrive at the destination faster. Several hours later, after acknowledging you are lost, you realize that moving at a snail's pace with a GPS guide would have been less frustrating and more efficient than following intuition or other drivers (that may be heading to a different destination). Often, life-impacting choices can play out similarly.

Like children following the directions of a parent, following instructions doesn't mean there will be no pain/discomfort. However, a parent's guidance can result in LESS pain and increased safety. God does give us the freedom to follow His way or our way or to take on more than we have the capacity to bear (we are not robots)...that is true freedom.

Isn't it amazing how AFTER we have taken on more than we can bear, we console ourselves by claiming "God won't give me more than I can bear so He must have wanted this pain for me?" It is very important to first determine whether or not God directed us in the first place to make a certain life choice. When it comes to marriage, most people choose their mate based on emotional feelings, sexual attraction, or social/economic factors. Did you notice that none of these factors provide sustainable contentment?

But what if I never consulted God for directions (like a GPS) on who to marry or HOW to conduct myself in marriage and now things are falling apart, shouldn't I divorce and start over? What's the point of hoping or waiting for an outcome without a guarantee? The good news is God can redeem (to repair, reform) any person or situation. Even if we said "I do" without His advice, He is FOR marriage and a host of angels are ready to fight on your behalf. [**address personal safety first in #2]

Jesus said if you have faith the size of a mustard seed you can move mountains; today and going forward, will you be directed by faith in God (an unfailing GPS system) or go by what your eyes see/feelings/intuition? Consult God and determine if you believe He is for your marriage (not because someone else says so but because He said so). Here is one of my favorite verses regarding how to know God's plan:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what God's will is, His good, pleasing & perfect will (Romans 12:2).

Without a transformed mind, we direct our own path and often repeat the same mistake of driving without directions and ending up at an undesired destination. As long as we want to do things our way, we will not be able to discern or follow God's GPS.

7. Dry Bones

Have you ever heard of prophecy? One of the best teachings I've heard regarding prophecy is from Kris Vallotton's book, "Basic Training for the Prophetic Ministry" (Vallotton, 24). He explains that prophecy can do one of two things:

- 1. foretelling to know the future through God's revelation
- 2. Forth-telling to speak or declare God's words in order to cause them to happen

In regard to healing a broken marriage, I will only focus on #2, forth-telling. In the Bible, there is a passage in Ezekiel chapter 37 which is an awesome example of forth-telling (New Living Translation). Ezekiel speaks:

The Lord took hold of me, and I was carried away by the Spirit of the Lord to a valley filled with bones. 2 He led me all around among the bones that covered the valley floor. They were scattered everywhere across the ground and were completely dried out. 3 Then he asked me, "Son of man, can these bones become living people again?" "O Sovereign Lord," I replied, "you alone know the answer to that." 4 Then he said to me, "Speak a prophetic message to these bones and say, 'Dry bones, listen to the word of the Lord! 5 This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again! 6 I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord." 7 So I spoke this message, just as he told me. Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as complete skeletons. 8 Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them. 9 Then he said to me, "Speak a prophetic message to the winds, son of man. Speak a prophetic message and say, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so they may live again." 10 So I spoke the message as he commanded me, and the breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army. 11 Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones represent the people of Israel. They are saying, 'We have become old, dry bones—all hope is gone. Our nation is finished.' 12 Therefore, prophesy to them and say, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I will open your graves of exile and cause you to rise again. Then I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 When this happens, O my people, you will know that I am the Lord. 14 I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live again and return home to your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done what I said. Yes, the Lord has spoken!"

Do you perceive any relevant comparisons between these dry bones and your heart or spouse's heart? Pray and ask the Lord if you are to prophesy for life to return to a dead marriage or dead places in your heart/mind/soul. I included the end of being brought back

from graves of exile because I visualize a spouse who has physically or emotionally "left the building." Remember, don't just take my word for it, ask God! And these words can be effectively spoken alone in prayer- not necessarily recommended for you to speak them TO your distant spouse.

8. Unfailing Love

Psalm 33:20-22 - We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you.

When I speak of hope, I'm referring to hope in the Lord and his unlimited ability to heal, rescue, and redeem in any circumstance. The situations in which we need to hope in the Lord are often those that appear hopeless if we are looking with logic or physical eyes. To hope in the Lord usually means we are not staring at the circumstances and trying to figure out where there's a glimpse of hope. It means that we have turned our eyes toward God or heaven in order to focus on his unfailing love and his power to squash all limitations.

So if your marriage looks hopeless, it's time to stop looking at the circumstances or analyzing how it is going to improve. Get into a daily habit of declaring the truth (not facts). Declaring is similar to speaking out loud what the Lord has promised you. What he has promised is the truth, what your eyes see may be factual or even distorted. For example, you might tell yourself: "__your name__, wait for the Lord because he is your help and your shield. Let your heart rejoice because you trust in his holy name; wait for the Lord to heal you and your spouse because he is your help and your shield. Let your heart rejoice because you trust in his holy name. His unfailing love is with you as you put your hope in him." I used the opening scripture (Psalm 33:20-22) and made it a personal declaration.

That promise and declaration is exciting to me! Think of the weight of the word unfailing – a love that never fails us! You may be deeply hurt by failed love from your spouse, a love that you once trusted and thought was unconditional or unfailing. Today, God is inviting you to put your hope in HIS unfailing love. His love is powerful enough to fill every void and mend every piece of your broken heart.

It is with a heavy heart I'm about to broach the subject of hope for healing after adultery. My heart is heavy because there are people with fresh wounds or unattended wounds that have turned into infections over a period of years. Your heart may be so full of bitterness, rage, or resentment that the mere word "forgive" evokes increased anger. If you have been betrayed and not yet forgiven, the intensity of your pain is probably beyond words. Regardless of whether or not you want your marriage healed, I hope you choose to forgive. As it is often said, holding on to unforgiveness is like drinking poison in an effort to kill the betrayer. More on forgiveness later.

I've seen cases where the betrayed stays in a toxic marriage for financial stability, for fear of change, or for "the kids," without the active pursuit of healing or restoration. The two people simply tolerate each other – while one (or both) engage in ongoing affairs. That is NOT what I'm talking about when I speak of hope for healing.

Why stay faithful to one who has been unfaithful? In a 4 part interview, Chris and Cindy Beall discuss how they overcame the devastation of adultery. The interview was recorded 7.5 years after the betrayal was revealed. I do not know this couple but their story indicates that they both tapped into the supernatural power of God for motivation to choose hope and pursue healing. For those who do not believe in God, their story will sound absolutely insane. Similarly, without faith, it is impossible to grasp how a guiltless God would die in order to save the guilty who did not earn/deserve it.

In some cases, the cheating spouse may deny wrongdoing even after a confrontation or they may confess to adultery when confronted. There are some cases when the betrayer will confess even before they are confronted or "caught" in the act. Then you have those who only confess because there is a threat that someone or something will expose them if they don't confess. Either way, exposure is often messy and characterized by exponential pain. It is easy for the betrayed spouse to get caught up in the mental torment of "would they have confessed if it weren't for..." and use that as proof that the betrayer is not truly sorry. I don't think anyone can judge sincerity from the outside, based on words alone, however, sustained actions over time can provide more clarity.

You can forgive yet choose to leave the marriage, however, if you want a restored marriage, forgiveness is a necessity. There is no way to begin to heal until there is complete honesty & vulnerability- nothing hidden. Due to the messiness of the process, having a wise and hopeful counselor does help.

Here is a link to part 1 of the 4 part interview with Chris & Cindy Beall: Exposing Adultery How To Expose an Adulterous Affair

What are some next steps after exposure to adultery?

To the betrayer, I ask...

How much trouble are you willing to go through to put a hedge around your access to harmful individuals (or pornography)? Are you willing to go through as much trouble to avoid adultery as you did to pursue it? Given the trust that was violated, how patient are you regarding the time to re-establish trust?

To the betrayed, I ask...

Do you want to forgive? Forgiveness is an action you can do independent of your spouse's stance. Are there signs that the unfaithful person WANTS to change? If not, what are you prepared to do in response? Do you want to stay married to an unrepentant person? Are you blaming yourself for the betrayal? Do not blame yourself for another person's choice. It's ok if you do not have answers to these questions, there is no deadline for deciding all the answers.

Shame vs. Guilt

Shame says "I am bad and unworthy of forgiveness/love, I can not forgive myself...something is inherently wrong with me..." shame is like self-induced torture which blocks freedom and healing. Shame is rooted in lies and not from God. Shame can keep a person in a cycle of self-destructive choices in spite of their desire for repentance/change.

Guilt or brokenness says "I did a bad thing, yet, I am worthy of forgiveness/love...I must change, I want to change...I will go to great lengths to set boundaries that will sustain change..." Brokenness leads to positive change including forgiving oneself.

Repentance is not simply an expression of remorse or regret. Repentance is fueled by a strong conviction and resolve to CHANGE. Repentance is to intentionally change course or direction, veer off a destructive path, and run toward a constructive path. Repentance = Change

Forgiveness Test: have you ever wondered how to determine if you have forgiven? Here are some signs:

- → When you perceive your own mistakes for which you have been forgiven (without weighing judgment on a scale).
- → When you can acknowledge the pain caused without feeling hatred toward the person who has hurt you.
- → When you desire healing/goodness/blessings for the betrayer, not revenge.

Forgiveness does not equal trust. A person can forgive but not trust however, one can not trust without forgiveness. Forgiveness can not be earned; trust should be earned. Rebuilding trust can be a long process whereas forgiveness can occur in a moment (over & over). If you forgive on Monday and find yourself full of contempt by Friday, that does not mean you never forgave...it means it is time to forgive AGAIN. What if the length of time to rebuild trust mirrors the length of time deception existed, does the couple have patience for that?

Forgiveness does not require one to stay with a spouse whose actions do NOT indicate brokenness and a move toward change. God was only willing to reconcile with adulterous Israel if they repented; see #1 "Mercy Trumps Justice" for details on that. Each individual must decide for themselves.

I pray for those in pain to be comforted by the presence of God, for confusion to be erased by the light of truth, for peace to stabilize a rollercoaster of emotions, for grace to forgive, and for unrelenting hope when facing seemingly impossible barriers.

Watch part 2 interview with the Bealls- How Do You Forgive After Adultery?: https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=O6ULtfwPHDM

After discovery of adultery and establishing that the individual who committed adultery is motivated to change as evidenced by their actions, then a couple can begin to rebuild the trust needed for a healthy marriage.

Perhaps there are some individuals who have achieved this goal without faith in God; if that is your path, it would be helpful to find others who have thrived in their marriage after adultery (without faith). I will highlight faith here since I have witnessed its transformative element in cases that otherwise appeared hopeless. Faith is the tangible proof of something we hope for and the evidence of something that cannot be seen. Faith is not based in logic because logic relies on senses and physical proof. Yes, it is possible to waiver between faith one day and uncertainty the next day (partly why isolation is harmful); hence why faith is an active, ongoing choice to believe even when there is no proof of the outcome.

Another critical element for healing after adultery is for one to possess or develop a tolerance for pain. I'm not going to sugarcoat this, there is no shortcut, no pain pills! WARNING: I'm not recommending staying in a toxic relationship marked by emotional or physical abuse. Please read earlier entries where those circumstances are addressed. I'm referring to a situation where the betrayer has changed their behavior. Even after someone has changed, it does not erase the emotional wounds resulting from betrayal, hence the pain. That is why the road to hope and healing is like climbing a mountain. When choosing hope it's important to know that the journey ahead may be long and tiring. Anger, fear, bitterness and resentment are like huge boulders you will be tempted to carry – if you are carrying them, it is more difficult to endure a long journey. A long, steep climb requires that you pack light- carry love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self control.

When trying to sustain hope against hopelessness, it is also imperative to NOT walk alone- meaning just you and your spouse in isolation. If you find a counselor/therapist that inspires hope, they can provide fuel for your journey. It is also wonderful if you and your spouse can find a couple who has been married longer than you and who wants to encourage you and provide accountability. If you cannot find a specific couple to encourage you, then look for a support group focused on strengthening marriages. Marriage retreats, seminars and even online resources can also help to inspire you when you feel like giving up. Choosing hope is not a one day event.

Here is part 3 from the Bealls: https://m.voutube.com/watch?v=Wi-AgOGituO

When to Walk Away by Thomas

If you are facing infidelity and wondering whether to give up on your marriage or to choose hope, please read the previous 3 blog entries on the topic. If either spouse wants to leave, no one can force them to stay. I don't see anywhere in the Bible that indicates that God will punish/abandon a person who chooses to divorce. Yes, God hates divorce, however, infidelity is indicated as justifiable grounds for divorce.

HOWEVER, if the betrayed spouse wants a restored connection, all of God's power will be released to help them recover all that has been lost: trust, affection, love and vulnerability. In this supernatural process, there may even be positive elements that are added to the marriage that were not there prior to the hope journey. The process of rebuilding love will appear impossible to the natural eye, whereas with faith and hope, the impossible becomes a reality. In the following video link, Chris and Cindy Beall do a great job of articulating the amazing outcome of two hearts that chose HOPE.

Part 4 Adultery: The Speed of Hope

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=fljoeo9lhfl

Some books to explore for more encouragement.

Boundaries in Marriage by Cloud & Townsend

Forgiving What You Can't Forget by TerKeurst

Sacred Marriage by Thomas

The Love Dare by Kendrick

The Power of a Praying (Husband /Wife) by Omartian