

SURVIVING INFIDELITY

Ps. Waweru Njenga – 19 Feb 2017
Cheaters Series
Sermon Notes



Hey Mavuno, we have been going through a series called **CHEATERS**: a sermon series on conversations about infidelity. We started with a panel of love doctors on week one and began to see how cheating in relationships in our city is such an epidemic. We said that **infidelity is a heart issue, with physical consequences**. As such **we must all guard our hearts** since no one is **immune**. On our second instalment last week, we spoke about the 12 steps to an affair. We said **affairs don't happen by accident**, but are as a result of a **progression of choices** we make. We said we have to **stop and back up** if we are walking down this path to save ourselves and others the pain affairs cause. Today we will talk about recovery. How do you survive if an affair has happened in your relationship? This sermon is critical so let's lean in together.

People have no idea just how painful and difficult surviving infidelity really is, unless they have been there themselves. During the initial stages one seems to be literally teetering between life and death. This is not just a bad day or something you will 'just get over.' It is worse than death. It is living through your worst nightmare. This is because romantic relationships are built, in part, on positive illusions. Discovering infidelity shatters those illusions, it creates a lot of uncertainty, and it raises fundamental questions such as:

- Who are you?
- How could you do this to me?
- What is our relationship about?

The initial shock of discovering an affair and the uncertainty it creates, often leads to the following reactions: **depression, anger, shame, obsessive thoughts, dwelling on the details of the affair, inability to concentrate, and monitoring a spouse's every move.**

The best way to deal with these initial reactions is to discuss one's feelings in a supportive, non-judgmental environment. An environment where someone will simply listen without offering knee-jerk reactions or advice.

People who are surviving infidelity begin **scapegoating**, that is taking out their anger, frustration and pain on others who have nothing to do with it. In the initial stages after discovering a spouse's betrayal, it is very difficult to cope. We go into shock, sometimes anger, we can't think straight. Some of us behave like obsessive neurotics, doing all we can to win back our spouse (as if it were our fault in the first place). At this moment, **you are surviving one moment at a time**. There is inability to eat or sleep and significant weight loss. Inability to cope with regular jobs. People talk of being on the edge of an emotional break down. Others go to work, only to find they're racing out of an important meeting to vomit, and then returning, attempting to appear somewhat composed. Embarrassed, ashamed and not free to share the truth, saying, 'it's food poisoning.'" You must win this Fight. You have to! Here is God's promise to you and me:

Psalms 34:17-22 (The Message):

¹⁷ Is anyone crying for help? God is listening, ready to rescue you. ¹⁸ If your heart is broken, you'll find God right there; if you're kicked in the gut, he'll help you catch your breath. ¹⁹ Disciples so often get into trouble; still, God is there every time. ²⁰ He's your bodyguard, shielding every bone; not even a finger gets broken. ²¹ The wicked commit slow suicide; they waste their lives hating the good. ²² God pays for each slave's freedom; no one who runs to him loses out.

God will help you survive the toughest fight of your life. You are not alone. You have help. Here are some practical keys to help you!

Guide to Surviving Infidelity

1. Take Care of Your Physical & Spiritual Health

- You may not feel like eating, but your body needs to have basic nutritional requirements met, now more than ever, because you are going to be making important decisions that are going to have a huge impact on your future.
- Adopt spiritual discipline, reading the word, worship and prayer. It's okay to experience emotional outbursts during your devotional time. Allow God to touch your emotions.
- *Go to church, listen to sermons online, connect with a small group at church etc.*

2. Don't Make Final Decisions While in a State of Emotional Trauma

Do not make a life altering decision while you are in the initial stages of surviving infidelity, still in a state of emotional trauma and shock. Don't doom yourself to a future filled with 'what ifs.'

3. Tell People Who Can Offer You Support

Go and visit a friend. Do not attempt surviving infidelity all alone. Don't just tell anyone, talk to people that matter and can help you with support and perspective.

4. Plan Your Time

- Plan your first day. How are you going to live through this? Schedule appropriate down time, but don't allow yourself to stay in bed crying all day, all week. The reality is that if you are in the process of surviving infidelity, you are in the middle of a war, whether you like it or not. You can have times of crying, but not whole days in bed.
- When surviving infidelity, give yourself permission to mourn. Something has been stolen from you. You can never get it back. *Then force yourself to get up, dress nicely and do something constructive every day.*

5. Counseling & Therapy

This is a quality of life issue. Many people have found counseling to be an invaluable help in surviving infidelity. Sometimes you need professional counselors and that's okay. Don't be afraid to seek one out. We have contacts to good counselors here at Mavuno.

6. Serve Others

Healing rarely comes when we are solely focused on ourselves and our own wounds. It comes when we stop long enough to help another hurting person. In the process, we are healed of our own pain.

Important: Stay strong and be brave. Life is a continuous battle, but when an enemy strikes the hardest, it is no time for weakness. It's a time to stand up and fight with everything that is within you. You can make it through this, but it will take time. **Give yourself time in surviving infidelity.**

6 Steps for the Unfaithful Spouse

Your marriage can survive an affair. Healing from infidelity is hard, painful work; both of you must be committed to repairing the damage, rebuilding trust, and reconnecting. On the agenda: The unfaithful spouse must be willing to stop the affair, provide all details honestly and completely, and take the steps necessary to prove his or her trustworthiness. The betrayed spouse must take the job of healing seriously — by not

minimizing or trying to speed up the process and, at times, by setting aside overwhelming anger and despair in order to learn more about what's happened. Stopping secrecy and building a more honest union are extremely important keys. **If you make a commitment to follow these strategies with your whole heart, your marriage has a good chance of surviving the affair — and emerging stronger on the other side.**

- 1. Promise to stop and actually stop the affair** — and to stop seeing your lover — immediately. Agree to sever all contact. This lifts secrecy and creates a sense of safety for the betrayed spouse. Stopping an affair goes beyond no dinner dates or sex. All phone calls, in-person conversations, and quick coffee breaks together must stop. If you work with the person with whom you had an affair, keep your encounters strictly businesslike — and tell your spouse everything that happens. Avoid private lunch dates and closed-door meetings. It's also important to report any chance meetings with your former lover to your spouse before he or she asks about it. Talk about your conversation. If your former lover contacts you, announce that too.
- 2. Answer any and all questions.** More and more marriage experts agree that couples heal better after an affair if the adulterous spouse supplies *all* of the information requested by his or her betrayed partner. In one study of 1,083 betrayed husbands and wives, those whose spouses were the most honest felt better emotionally and reconciled more completely, reports affairs expert Peggy Vaughan, author of *The Monogamy Myth: A Personal Handbook for Recovering from Affairs*, who developed the international Beyond Affairs Network. "I've talked with plenty of people who say with pride that they never talked about the affair," she says. "That's not healing. You need to reach the point where you can talk about it without pain. If you never, ever discuss it, you cannot recover. One husband had 12 affairs over seven years. The main reason the wife recovered was because of his willingness to answer all of her questions." It's counterintuitive — many spouses (and therapists) think that going over the details will only further upset the aggrieved partner. Truth is, **willingness to talk rebuilds trust.** The key? Not holding back — no more secrets. If you leave out details that emerge later, your spouse may feel newly betrayed.
- 3. Show your spouse empathy, no matter what.** The single best indicator of whether a relationship can survive infidelity is how much empathy the unfaithful partner shows when the betrayed spouse gets emotional about the pain caused by the affair, according to infidelity expert Shirley Glass, Ph.D.
- 4. Keep talking and listening, no matter how long it takes.** You can't speed up your spouse's healing process, and you shouldn't ever negate its significance. Be ready to answer questions at any time, even months or years after the affair has ended. And listen to his or her reactions without anger or blame.
- 5. Take responsibility.** Blaming your partner for the affair won't heal your marriage. Showing sincere regret and remorse will. Apologize often and vow to never commit adultery again. It may seem obvious to you that you'll never stray again, but your spouse may have worries, so renew your commitment to your spouse as your one-and-only.
- 6. Don't expect quick or easy forgiveness.** Your partner may be in deep pain or shock. Expect tears, rage, and anger.

9 Steps for the Betrayed Spouse

You want to scream and rail at your partner. You want all the details about the affair. Above all, you want the secrecy to stop. These strategies can help you find what you need to heal, to repair your marriage, and to move forward with your life.

1. Ask lots of questions. At first, you may want all the factual details: How often did you meet? When did you cross the line from friends to lovers? What sexual acts did you share? How many times? Where? How much money did you spend on him or her? Who else knows about your affair? Later, your questions may shift as you think about your partner's emotions, about the reasons he or she was pushed and pulled into the affair, about whether the affair has turned a spotlight on a hidden weakness in your own marriage.

2. Balance your rage with your need for information. You want to scream, cry, and lash out — but big emotions may prevent your spouse from making the full disclosure that leads to recovery. To get the truth (and form a tighter connection with your spouse), be compassionate about your partner's emotions. "When you get all the facts, you're not obsessed anymore," Vaughan says. "The only way your spouse will be willing to answer is if you can manage not to lash out and attack every time. Spouses who've had affairs are afraid to reveal everything because they're worried it will become a marathon, with a downward spiral of out-of-control emotions." If one of you becomes upset, it's time to stop the discussion for now.

3. Set a time limit on affair talk. Restrict yourselves to 15 to 30 minutes. Don't let the affair take over your lives. Do ask questions as they arise instead of building up resentment and long lists of questions. "Don't let your worries go underground. Keep talking," Vaughan says.

4. Expect curveballs. The spouse who had the affair may become angry or even accuse you of betraying him or her. Keep the focus on the affair itself.

5. Talk about how the affair has affected you. Discuss your doubts, disappointments, feelings of betrayal and abandonment, anger, and sadness. As your partner builds a wall between him- or herself and the former lover, help open a window of intimacy between the two of you. Don't hold back.

6. Don't just move on. You must grapple with your pain and anger first and rebuild trust.

7. Find support. Reconnecting with family and friends, and even finding a support group to join, can help you feel less isolated.

8. Spend time together without talking about the affair. Connect as friends and romantic partners by doing the things you've always enjoyed.

9. Walk out Forgiveness progressively. You'll never forget an affair, but the painful memories will fade with time. Forgiveness allows you to move past the pain and rage and to reconcile with your partner. Take this important step to let go of your negative feelings, when your partner has been completely honest and has taken steps to rebuild your trust.

Next week, we will answer questions on infidelity and recovery. Today, we want to pray for people hurting from affairs. We understand your pain. We want to anoint you and pray over you. The pastors and prayer team are here. If you are hurting, please come. There is healing in your Father's house.

Helpful Resources:

1. Peggy Vaughan, author of [The Monogamy Myth: A Personal Handbook for Recovering from Affairs](#)
2. After the Affair: Healing the Pain and Rebuilding Trust When a Partner Has Been Unfaithful by Janis A Spring.
3. How to Help Your Spouse Heal From Your Affair by Linda J. MacDonald
4. Mavuno Church Ndoa ministry (ndoa) <http://mavuno.wordpress.com/tag/ndoa/>