



FIDELITY IN MARRIAGE:

IT'S MORE THAN YOU THINK

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When a spouse has developed a relationship that compromises his or her spiritual fidelity, he or she should be humble and take the necessary steps to restore the marital relationship.

But I'm not doing anything wrong," insisted Jane when family members voiced concern over the time she was spending with a male co-worker. "We're just friends."

In Jane's mind, she had not crossed any lines because there had been nothing physical or romantic between her and her co-worker. She saw no harm in going to lunch and spending breaks with someone with whom she had so much in common. She saw no problem with sending him personal e-mails and text messages.

Jane's husband, Aaron, was quiet and shy. He was not one to make conversation, and Jane often felt alone—even when they were together. Aaron was a good man and a faithful father to their young children. Still, when it came to being sensitive to her needs and "being there for her," she felt Aaron had a lot to learn.

Jane's co-worker, on the other hand, was a good listener and could easily read her moods. He was quick to laugh and fun to be around. As the two of

them spent more time together, family members to whom Jane had casually mentioned the relationship began to express concern. Jane dismissed their comments.

What Jane didn't realize was how hurt and upset Aaron felt at what she was doing. He felt betrayed and rejected and was even

beginning to worry that Jane didn't love him anymore. Jane talked as though their marriage was strong but, by her actions, she seemed to care more about her co-worker than her husband. Aaron began to wonder if she was thinking of leaving him. Any time Aaron brought up the subject of her relationship with the co-worker, she would refuse to discuss it and would change the subject. To Aaron, their communication seemed superficial. He felt as though his feelings were not

important to her.

This couple's story—representative of several true stories—illustrates a growing problem creeping into some marriages today. A marriage can be placed in a precarious situation when one spouse forms a relationship with someone outside the marriage and begins to choose the company of that person or frequently shares personal

In the beginning, Jane didn't even realize that she was holding back in her relationship with her husband. But over time she realized that she was not giving her whole heart to him.



MARITAL FIDELITY

“The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. . . . We warn that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God.”

The Family: A Proclamation to the World, Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.



Signs of Emotional Infidelity

Relationships with others of the opposite sex are not in and of themselves a problem or a fracture of fidelity. In fact, many of our meaningful relationships with neighbors, Church friends, co-workers, and others have a balanced and important place in our lives. However, there is a danger zone that people may cross into if they are not watchful. As in the case with Jane and Aaron, compromising on spiritual fidelity can create emotional heartbreak, distrust, and marital conflict. If not corrected, this can lead to physical infidelity.

Jane's sister finally helped Jane admit there was a problem. One day the sister asked a series of introspective questions that required Jane to think about how she was treating Aaron and to be honest about her relationship with

her co-worker (see sidebar, “Questions to Consider,” 16).

As Jane answered each question, she realized she had indeed been seeking her co-worker's emotional support rather than her husband's. Her friendship with her co-worker had escalated into an inappropriate relationship. “What can I do now?” Jane asked her sister.

Spiritual Fidelity

In Jane's case, meeting with her bishop was not only helpful, but critical to improving the health of her marriage. Her bishop assured Jane that her willingness to admit there was a problem was a wonderful step in the right direction. The very fact that she had sought help indicated that she understood her marriage relationship had been damaged. The bishop urged her to consider how dangerous the relationship with her co-worker had

information with that person rather than with a spouse.

Furthermore, the problem can occur with either husband or wife. “Jane” could just as easily be “John.”

Fidelity includes refraining from physical contact—but that is not all. Fidelity also means complete commitment, trust, and respect between husband and wife.

Inappropriate interactions with another person can erode fidelity.

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) said, “What does it mean to love someone with all your heart? It means to love with all your emotional feelings and with all your devotion.”¹

Emotional Infidelity

Physical infidelity is only one of the many temptations Satan uses to break up families and marriages. Emotional infidelity, which occurs when emotions and thoughts are focused on someone other than a spouse, is an insidious threat that can weaken the trust between a couple and shatter peace of mind.

Emotional infidelity doesn't usually happen suddenly; rather, it occurs gradually—often imperceptibly at first. This is one reason why those involved often feel innocent of any wrongdoing.

Jane didn't wake up one morning with an intentional desire to hurt Aaron or pull away from him. She simply found herself emotionally attracted to a man who demonstrated qualities she perceived lacking in Aaron. As her relationship with that co-worker progressed, she began to feel justified in her behavior. She admitted, “I felt more important and valued around my co-worker than I did around my husband.”

become. In fact, if considered honestly, her attitudes, thoughts, and actions could jeopardize her ability to hold a temple recommend.

To help her understand this, the bishop suggested she stop thinking in terms of emotional infidelity and instead use the phrase, “spiritual fidelity.” This phrase underscores the seriousness of the choices we make because it recognizes the eternal potential of our marital relationships as well as the importance of acting in accordance with the promptings of the Holy Ghost. Spiritual fidelity also causes us to consider

the sacred covenants we have made in the temple and how the very nature of our thoughts and deeds can undermine those covenants. In other words, if a person is unfaithful spiritually he is not honoring his temple covenants even though he has not committed physical acts of intimacy.

As we consider the sacred nature of being spiritually faithful to our spouses, we should remember the Savior’s counsel: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5:27–28).

We should be careful not to allow relationships even to begin to develop inappropriately. As Paul warned, “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

Not only our actions relative to other people, but also our thoughts must be guarded. As Alma explained, our thoughts and words must be pure because we shall be judged for our thoughts as well as our actions, good or ill (see Alma 12:12–15; see also 2 Nephi 9:39; Mosiah 4:30; D&C 88:109).

As we begin to think in terms of spiritual fidelity, we also open the door for healing and hope. When a spouse has developed



BE FAITHFUL

There are those married people who permit their eyes to wander and their hearts to become vagrant, who think it is not improper to flirt a little, to share their hearts and have desire for someone other than the wife or the husband. The Lord says in no uncertain terms: “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else” (D&C 42:22).

And, when the Lord says all thy heart, it allows for no sharing nor dividing nor depriving. And, to the woman it is paraphrased: “Thou shalt love thy husband with all thy heart and shalt cleave unto him and none else.”

The words none else eliminate everyone and everything. The spouse then becomes preeminent in the life of the husband or wife, and neither social life nor occupational life nor political life nor any other interest nor person nor thing shall ever take precedence over the companion spouse.

Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (1972), 142–43.

a relationship that compromises his or her spiritual fidelity, he or she should be humble and take the necessary steps to restore the marital relationship. Fasting, prayer, temple attendance, scripture study, and pondering the Lord’s teachings are essential in helping one remain pure and true to one’s spouse and in healing the relationship.

The weekend after Jane met with her bishop, she asked her sister to watch her children so she could speak to Aaron alone. Although she had not committed a physical act of infidelity, the serious nature of her actions and her desire to fully come clean, repent, and rebuild her marriage inspired

her to confess to Aaron. It was difficult, but she finally managed to explain the situation. Aaron told her he had noticed her pulling away but didn’t know what to do about it. Jane apologized and committed to change the dynamics with her co-worker immediately and to work at rekindling her marriage relationship.

In situations such as these, spouses should remember that change is not easy and that neither spouse can change the other person. Instead, spouses can commit to making changes in their individual behavior. They can also commit to seeking the Lord’s help through the power of the Atonement in order to become their best selves, for their own sakes and for the sake of their spouses.

Although Jane recognized that she would have an easier time making the necessary changes if Aaron committed to being more sensitive and attentive, she decided to focus on Aaron’s strengths rather than on his deficiencies. Her first concern had to be the changes she needed to make in her own actions and attitudes.

In the week that followed, Jane stopped meeting with her co-worker and discontinued contact with him over the

Internet. When they needed to be together at work, she made certain there was always another person present. At home she expressed her love to Aaron and made more of an effort to share with him her goals, desires, and frustrations—the same information she had been sharing with her co-worker. Aaron still felt awkward holding deep conversations, but that didn't stop Jane from sharing. She consciously tried to channel an increase of time and energy into her marriage. When she became discouraged, she stopped looking to her co-worker for comfort. Instead, she turned to Aaron, prayer, the scriptures, and the temple for strength and support.

Some of the challenges Jane and Aaron had to overcome were difficult—just as they would be for any of us. Trust and loyalty had to be rebuilt. They accomplished this mainly by making it safe to verbalize feelings, frustrations, and perceptions to each other without the fear of being judged. When they had a disagreement, they learned how to focus on the problem rather than attack each other. They learned to emphasize the positives in the relationship rather than focus on the negatives. They began to acknowledge the efforts made by each other and not just the outcome. For example, after a 15-minute conversation, Jane said to Aaron, “Thank you for taking the time to listen to me; it means a lot.”

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Successful marriages benefit from honest personal assessment of our relationships—both with our spouses and with others. In evaluating whether you have need for improved spiritual fidelity, ask yourself the following questions.

- “Are you turning to your friend for comfort rather than turning to your spouse?”
- “Do you find yourself thinking about your friend even when you're at home?”
- “Do you seek opportunities to be with your friend even when work doesn't require you to be together?”
- “Do you e-mail and text your friend when you're not together?”
- “Have you told your spouse about these messages?”
- “Does the relationship with your friend take more of your time and energy than your relationship with your spouse?”
- “Do you compare your spouse to your friend?”
- “Would you be uncomfortable introducing your spouse to your friend?”

Depending on how you answer these questions, you may need to make some changes in your life. Consider an open and honest conversation with your spouse—being sure to focus on yourself and not the other person. If you find you have some real challenges to overcome, you may want to talk with your bishop.



Both had to focus on forgiveness. Jane recalls, “Before, I used to feel frustrated with Aaron for not being more responsive, but now I think of the pain he was experiencing instead of the pain I thought he was causing me.” This empathy helped them make progress. It also helped them think about how their interactions strengthened each other.

Aaron said, “I had to let go of the anger and resentment I had initially felt. Anger just distorts reality and slows the healing process.”

As time passed and Jane kept her pledge, positive feelings in her marriage returned. One day she reflected on the questions her sister had asked and found that her answers now were different. That's when she knew God had helped her feel a change of heart.

The Savior's Atonement not only has the power to cleanse us but also to change and purify our hearts (see Mosiah 4:2; 5:2). As we seek heaven's help, we can regain and maintain spiritual fidelity. God can give people the power to confess, connect, and change.

When Jane began looking at the spiritual consequences of her choices, she found the desire and power to change. Remembering that God was a vital part of her marriage helped

her “cleave unto” her husband and truly love him with all her heart (D&C 42:22; see also Genesis 2:24). ■

NOTE

1. Ezra Taft Benson, “To the Fathers in Israel,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 50.