

# Nothing to Hide

Hope for Marriages Hurt by  
Pornography and Infidelity



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## Discovering Infidelity

If your spouse has violated the wedding vows through habitual pornography use (Internet, videos, magazines), strip clubs, sexual chat rooms, phone sex, affairs or prostitutes, this booklet will provide specific suggestions, guidelines and hope. For the sake of simplification, I will refer mostly to addictive Internet pornography use, but please realize the principles apply to other sexual activities outside the marriage as well.

Let's begin by stating the obvious: Anything with this title is extremely difficult to pick up and read if you have been hurt by a spouse's sexual betrayal. Your emotions can leave you feeling shipwrecked or lost at sea, with wave after wave of tears drowning your soul. Or, you may be without tears, one minute strangely numb and the next filled with indescribable rage.

Either way, it may seem as if you are going crazy. You're not. You may feel completely abandoned. You're not. You may feel as if God Himself has left and no one could possibly understand or help. Again, this is not the case.

Your profound sense of betrayal and excruciating pain is normal and natural, considering a grenade has been thrown into the most precious relationship in your life. You *will* be able to regain your balance and start moving forward; eventually you will be able to hold your head high and look forward to another new day.

You may wonder how anyone could offer hope at a time like this. You may also wonder why you should consider my suggestions. Let me reveal something about myself. I am not a woman who has floated above the clouds, living a victorious Christian life.

I am your fellow sister who has also been wounded. I have been wounded by my own sins and by the sins of others. Truly, all sin is damaging, regardless of the source.

In fact, all of us might be considered "walking-wounded" in one aspect or another. Some of us have scars that are visible and obvious, while others have wounds that have been kept hidden, wounds that have not yet begun to heal. However, we can do more than be healed; we can become "wounded healers" for others. Many years ago, I offered a personal prayer: "God, don't waste my pain." In this, and in so many other ways, He has proven faithful.

Although I do not know the specific details of your story, I have counseled many men and women over the years that have walked in your shoes. Regardless of where you might be at this moment, if you are willing, you can begin moving forward, step by step. We can take this walk together. I suggest we ask God to join us, because no one is more qualified or more capable to bring healing than the One who created you, your spouse and your marriage.

## **Preparing for the Journey**

Surviving sexual infidelity can seem like trying to maneuver a convoluted path up a steep mountain in the middle of the night. If that isn't treacherous enough, numerous land mines lie hidden just beneath the topsoil. It is a frightening experience; it's difficult to know where to put down your next foot. However, using a trusted road map *and* a trusted guide reduces your chance of greater harm to yourself and your family.

Knowing how to manage your immediate crisis will be easier if you analyze your life and recollect your past relationship responses. For example, when past relationships hit a difficult snag did you tend to retreat into self-blame or were you more likely to lash out and criticize others? Were you able to assertively address conflict or did you choose to fight unfairly? Has it been easier for you to lie wounded and end a friendship than resolve the differences? Were you able to objectively assess what was occurring in your past relationships (or current marriage) or did you miss the red flags?

Understanding your past behavior will provide keys to how you are

responding to your marital crisis today. Recalling your actions might be relatively easy for you or it may require considerable concentration, but the task is worth the effort. Here are four examples of how some spouses respond to infidelity:

### **(1) Curious Bystander**

If you are a Curious Bystander, you have had many anxious days and nights. You can't understand why the knot in your stomach doesn't go away even after hearing your spouse's words (which were meant to reassure you, but didn't). For example, your husband may have chided you for mentioning the numerous porn sites (virtual prostitutes) you keep finding on the computer. Perhaps when confronted, your wife (the mother of your two children) minimized evidence from a sexual chat room.

Confronted with the incriminating data, your spouse might have given multiple explanations. These excuses may have seemed reasonable, but did not convince your heart that all was well. Your gnawing questions never seemed to be fully answered by you or your spouse. Eventually, you wore down emotionally and entered a downward spiral of self doubt. Sadly, through this process, you began ignoring your God-given discernment.

Curious Bystanders have great difficulty assertively confronting others. They generally waver, convinced that nice people don't stir up trouble (they want peace at any price), and they fully believe "it will all go away if it's ignored."

### **(2) Previous Victim**

Victimization occurs in the form of abuse as well as neglect. Some people have been treated as objects to be used. This might have occurred in childhood with sexual molestation or in adulthood through sexual harassment or rape. Sexual abuse creates horrendous lifelong damage to victims, especially if the survivors have not received adequate counseling to heal the wounds. From my experience with treating adult survivors, I find that young boys can be even more seriously injured psychologically than their female counterparts. And, unfortunately, men are less likely than women to get the help they need.

Others have been treated as objects to be ignored. Perhaps, because you were female, your brothers received more attention or privilege, or your male co-workers automatically received promotions and bonuses you didn't. Consequently, you don't trust men in general. Or you might be a male with a father who was never available to play catch, shoot hoops or watch your little league game, and your mom was smothering and over-involved in your life. You may not fully trust members of the opposite sex.

Victims of abuse or neglect receive a "double whammy" when their spouses cheat on them. If the original damage in their lives is not addressed, they will be ill-equipped for developing healthy relationships; after discovering their spouse's infidelity, they are ill-equipped for dealing with the fallout.

### **(3) Love-Blind Survivor**

Do affirmation, love and respect seem to escape you? Do you have a past history of rocky relationships with unhappy endings, only to find yourself now in a rocky marriage tainted by infidelity? If this is the case, you may be able to identify with the people who were treated as objects to be used or ignored.

You may, however, be saying just the opposite, "I had a perfect childhood with a loving caring family." You might admit, however, that your life seems performance-driven, with a high priority placed on a polished image. Your marriage may have been described as "perfect" and so you were completely shocked at what you discovered. Yet sexual infidelity revealed an intimacy disorder not much different from those with the visibly troubled marriage. How can that be true?

In both cases, the skills for developing an authentic, intimate relationship with your spouse were lacking. The desperate desire to fill the God-shaped void within you cannot be satisfied with people or performance. (This topic is addressed more fully in the next section titled "intimacy and Basic trust")

### **(4) Spiritual Barometer**

You may be a person with a history full of faith, or of no faith at all. Either way, I would guess that you are experiencing some form of

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spiritual distress right now. For example, if you have never considered yourself a Christian, you may be recognizing for the first time how much you actually need God in your life. Or, as a Christian already, the devastation of sexual infidelity may have caused you to reassess what you truly believe about God. Since the betrayal came from the person you loved and trusted the most, your pain can lead you to wonder if God also betrayed you. You may have asked (audibly or within the secret recesses of the heart): "What kind of God would allow such a terrible thing to happen?"

If you are wondering about your relationship with God or about God's relationship with you, don't feel alone; many others in your situation have felt this way. I highly recommend reading Dr. James Dobson's book, *When God Doesn't Make Sense*. This comprehensive book addresses the tough questions asked for centuries, including some asked by King David, who wondered why the wicked could mock God and get away with it (Psalm 10). Let Dr. Dobson's book point you back to an accurate view of God and provide encouragement and comfort to your soul.

If you have gained some insight and understanding about your past response patterns, then we are ready to go to the next stage of recovery.

## **The Journey Toward Healing**

The healing journey requires a personal commitment to work through the shock and pain of your spouse's unfaithfulness. The basic tools for this process are best remembered by using the acronym FAITH.

- F = Fear not**
- A = Assess your support system**
- I = Insist your spouse decide**
- T = Talk to a trained Christian counselor**
- H = Heed biblical principles**

## **F = Fear Not**

Fear is one of the first emotions experienced by those who have been shocked by the evidence of their mate's infidelity or pornography use. Other emotions, such as anger, pain and confusion, may appear on the surface, but fear is often lurking beneath it all. Fear often causes either an under- or over-reaction. These two extremes may seem like opposites, but, like a coin with two sides, under- and overreacting are two sides of the same dysfunction.

Let's look at two women I'll call Angela and Stephanie:

### **Angela**

Angela's marriage started out like a Cinderella story. For generations, her side of the family had lived happily-ever-after lives. Scott and his family were well respected for their business savvy and civic leadership. Angela was a stay-at-home mom, caring for three small sons, while Scott's efforts nearly doubled the sales for his family's company.

Sadly, the couple's perfect image was simply a thin veneer covering the terrible truth behind closed doors. Scott, unfortunately, was not only a workaholic, but also a sex addict. Weekly business trips became the norm and X-rated hotel movies became nightly fare. Eventually, Scott needed more and more to maintain his "high." Strip bars and phone sex came next, and, although he carried overwhelming torment, shame and guilt, he never could kick his addiction.

Angela found evidence bit by bit throughout their marriage until eventually she could no longer avoid the truth. She began to figure out the times Scott was unfaithful because when he returned home he was more sullen and irritable than usual. Angela's inner pain and loneliness ripped her heart to shreds. Scott's unwillingness to connect emotionally drove her to severe bouts of crying, but fear gripped her every time she thought of leaving. She had walked away from a career years before and wondered how she could keep her sons financially secure. She also worried about what her family and friends would think. Scott tried to keep his ugly secret from her, and she kept their ugly secret from the outside world.

### **Stephanie**

Stephanie was intently searching the Internet for stats to use in a presentation when she stumbled upon sites used by her husband,

*The enemy of our souls uses the terrible, but effective, tactic called FEAR, which is simply False Evidence Appearing Real*

Michael. She became nauseated by the sexual scenes she saw and later discovered even more violent and repulsive material when she checked the history file. Her mind filled with visions of her sister's suicide attempt following her own husband's adultery. Stephanie immediately called Michael's office and demanded he come home at once. She refused to answer his anxious questions and slammed down the phone. When he rushed into the house, worried and shaken, she screamed hateful, angry words about his pornography use and called him horrible names. Stephanie demanded he move out of the house or she would ruin his career. All attempts by Michael to confess his addiction and consider a solution were met by Stephanie's escalating anger.

My suggestion to people in these types of situations is: "Resist the temptation toward fear."

Underreacting, like Angela's response, results from a frozen-in-fear state. This paralysis: 1) prevents the clear thinking required to make healthy, godly choices and 2) inhibits taking a proactive approach which might effectively start the healing process.

Overreacting, like Stephanie's response: 1) adds insult to the already injured relationship, resulting in more damage than what was initially dealt by the adulterer himself, 2) is frequently an unintentional attempt to appear in control of an out-of-control situation, and 3) shows up when you assume the worst before hearing all the facts.

The enemy of our souls uses the terrible, but effective, tactic called FEAR, which is simply **False Evidence Appearing Real**. Don't play into his hand. Instead, remember Jesus' promise: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).

Now would be the time to plant your feet firmly in the bedrock of God's love and His provision for you and your family, even when it appears your world has been blown apart.

*Let us never be so callous as to first, wink our eye at sin, or second, cover up another's sin in an attempt to hide it from our family, other believers or God.*

The next letter of our FAITH acronym is:

### **A = Assess Your Support System**

Sadly, many people, like Angela, jump from an *underrating* "Fear Base" position to that of a "Cover-up Agent," hiding from others. However, if ever you needed the support of trusted friends, now is the time. As someone wisely said, "A Christian without a support system is like an accident waiting to happen."

Women, by nature, tend to maintain a more active support system than men. But, even women seem to reject that same support when they need it the most. Why is this? First, if they are like Angela, they carry guilt and shame that

rightly should be carried by the unfaithful spouse. This wrong reaction then leads them into a second unhealthy response: They buy into their unfaithful spouses' system of hiding the sin. Third, fear convinces them that others would abandon them if they knew the truth about their marriage. Therefore, they conclude they don't need an authentic support system, but rather fair-weather friends to maintain the good image.

Remember, God wants us to hate sin as much as He does. How much does our heavenly Father hate sin? So much that He would have His only Son (without a trace of sin) carry our sin to the cross to suffer and die for it. Let us never be so callous as to first, wink our eye at sin, or second, cover up another's sin in an attempt to hide it from our family, other believers or God.

The Bible offers clear instruction on this point: "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

Others are more like Stephanie, who jump from an *overreacting* "Fear Base" position to that of a "Broadcasting Agent." Let me be very clear on this point: When I recommend not hiding the sin but

rather talking about it, I am not suggesting becoming another Stephanie, announcing your spouse's porn addiction at the next family reunion or from the pulpit on Sunday.

What I am saying is you need trusted prayer partners of the same sex to help you through this difficult time. Pray and ask for God's help in deciding whom you should trust with the information about your marital crisis. Ideally, you already have a trustworthy and biblically-balanced spiritual mentor. Call on two or three Christian friends to carry you, as you pour out your grief and suffering. The Bible indicates that there is wisdom in a multitude of counselors (Proverbs 11:14). Allow them to pray with you and provide the backbone needed for the times when you may waver or take a shortcut.

### **A word of caution**

Please, be extra cautious and do not lean on a friend or co-worker of the opposite sex. You are more vulnerable than usual right now. Many a heartbreaking story has ended with men or women going to another for comfort only to end up in their arms—and then in their bed—committing sins similar to their spouses'. Also be wary of people who insult your intelligence by oversimplifying your marital dilemma. As was said earlier, infidelity is a complicated and convoluted issue.

You also may be hearing a variety of voices from well-meaning people who are sincere, but sincerely wrong! Wounded spouses have given me a long list of bizarre suggestions provided by friends, parents or pastors.

A few of these include:

- "The sooner you forgive, forget and move forward, the quicker he will lose interest in his mistress."
- "Pray more; your wife's sex addiction is directly in proportion to your lack of faith in what God can do."
- "Lose weight (or gain), change your hair color (or style) or wear sexier lingerie."
- "He'll stop picking up prostitutes if you make him jealous by flirting with his best friend."
- "Expose her sex habits to your young children; that will shame her into stopping."

I have also heard a hundred different reasons why the infidel's secret sin should now also be the hurting spouse's secret.

Here are some of the more creative excuses:

- "Don't tell anyone what she's doing because you'll ruin her career, or reputation in the family or church."
- "We can't talk about it now. Our daughter is engaged; we are too busy planning for the wedding."
- "Grandma is getting up in years; we don't want her to think badly of us."
- "Burn his pornographic magazines and videos. That will be his wake up call and no one will ever need to know."

There will likely be a lot of confusing information in your head at this time. Pray for God's help in removing excuses, denial, rationalization, minimization and various codependency traits. Remember that supportive friends and family can keep you accountable at weak times when strong emotions or bad advice detour you from personal and relationship goals. Balanced people without a hidden agenda can help you stay balanced.

### **I = Insist Your Spouse Decide**

You must be clear with your unfaithful spouse. He or she must decide to have you alone as a marital partner. He cannot have you *plus* his other mistresses, be they prostitutes, pornography, girlfriends, strip clubs or whatever else takes him away. She cannot expect you to continue as if nothing is wrong, while she has another man online or waiting in the wings. Do you remember your vows taken before God to "forsake all others?" That applies today, tomorrow and always. Insist on it!

Many marriages end in divorce or exist simply as a piece of paper at city hall because the spouse of the sex addict was unsure of himself or herself. This is not the time for you to get weak-kneed or cater to any of your codependent weakness. If you have any hesitation about whether or not this is a healthy biblical position, please read the best book I know for explaining these principles, *Love Must Be Tough* by Dr. James Dobson.

If you allow your spouse to continue with the affair or pornography

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use, the disrespect will continue. This leads to contempt, which offers the least likelihood of saving the marriage.

### **T = Talk to a Trained Christian Counselor**

I have already mentioned the importance of a strong system of friends and family. Remember, however, that right now you are making some of the most important decisions of your entire life. These folks may be helpful and supportive in some manner, but when it comes to decisions with lifelong consequences, their suggestions may actually be harmful.

Don't make these common mistakes:

#### ***Choosing a buddy instead of a trained counselor***

We wouldn't consider calling on our best friend to provide treatment for terminal cancer, no matter how nice he might be. In the same manner, when our marriage has symptoms of being terminal, we need to call on a professional Christian counselor with years of experience and expertise.

#### ***Choosing a counselor simply because he or she treats a little of everything***

Some professional counselors may have worked with a multitude of common disorders, but have little or no expertise working in this area. Generic marriage counselors do well with generic problems; however, sex addiction, pornography addiction and adultery require specialized work.

#### ***Choosing a counselor who simply focuses on fixing your spouse's problematic behavior***

God's design for intimacy in marriage involves husband and wife deeply connecting in mind, spirit and body. The infidelity or sexually addictive behavior reveals intimacy disorder in the spouse and in

marriage. The inappropriate behavior must stop, of course, but the damage was also done to the wounded spouse. Therefore, the couple needs restoration and healing. For more information, see "Intimacy and Basic Trust."

### ***Choosing a counselor who automatically assumes many years of treatment will be needed***

Beware of therapists who move you toward dependence on them or on something other than dependence on God. Also, some sex addiction counselors believe, "Once an addict, always an addict." Concerning intimacy disorders, such as sex addiction, I personally do not believe this matches with what God says in the Bible. I believe (1) therapy must comprehensively address the intimacy disorder of the body, mind and spirit, or relapse is more likely to occur; and (2) recovery is certainly a process and not a magical event. But, God reminds us that we can be a new creation in Him (2 Corinthians 5:17) and He can restore the years the locust took away (Joel 2:25).

### ***Choosing a counselor based on lowest fees***

Do not consider bargain shopping for the cheapest brain surgeon, parachute packer or licensed counselor! You and your marriage (and children) deserve the best care possible.

### ***Choosing a secular counselor***

Frequently, secular counselors are on insurance panels or have a convenient office location. Does it matter if they are not Christian? If you have a broken leg, a skilled secular physician can read the x-ray and place a leg cast, but if you are broken in your marriage, in your spirit or in your heart, would you ever want to trust the treatment to someone who had no understanding of God's design for you and the spiritual basis for marriage? No!

If you need assistance in finding a licensed professional Christian counselor in your region, Focus on the Family can help. They have a listing of therapists throughout the U.S. and Canada who have been thoroughly screened. Call (719) 531-3400 ext. 2700 weekdays 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (MST). When you call that number, you may also ask for a one-time complimentary consultation with a Focus on the Family licensed Christian therapist. If one is not immediately available, you can leave your contact information and a counselor will call you back as soon as possible.

## **H = Heed Biblical Principles**

This last letter of the acronym, FAITH, represents the most important aspect of your journey. Regardless of what you have taken from this booklet up to this point, all advice must stand up to the test of heeding biblical principles or else you "jump from the frying pan into the fire."

God is in the business of healing, and therefore, *His* plan and guidelines will be the most accurate and effective. Following biblical principles is not a matter of "keeping the letter of the law," for that approach was attempted (and failed) long before Jesus arrived. You can only maintain a functioning, balanced life when you have asked Jesus Christ to be your Savior, forgiver of your sins, and Lord of your life (letting Him guide and direct your decisions). If you have already taken that life-changing step, stay close to Him who will never leave you or forsake you. If you have not yet made that decision, there could never be a better time than right now. Please call a local pastor or Focus on the Family's counseling department to provide you with additional guidance, support and resources.

## **Continuing Your Journey in FAITH**

Faith in God will carry you through these most difficult times of recovering from infidelity. Don't try to figure it all out today. Even though you may have just recently discovered the painful reality that your marriage is in trouble, the truth is, it has taken many months and years to get to this point. As a result, it will take time to bring about restoration for yourself and your marriage. Regardless of what your spouse chooses to do next, you can choose to live fully and receive peace and joy along the way.

God is faithful and will never stop loving you or let you down. Your pain has a time limit built into it. How do I know? Because God has proven His promise to me and many others just like you. God promises: "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Psalm 30:5, RSV).

As you continue to press forward using the principles of FAITH, it is important to look below the surface of marital infidelity and consider the key factors of intimacy and trust.

## Intimacy and Basic Trust

You entrusted your heart and soul to your husband and yet he violated your trust and your marriage vows. As a result of this infidelity you may have vowed to "never trust again." Or, perhaps, you want to begin anew and you're wondering, "How do I start trusting again?"

These important issues will be addressed by previewing: (1) a healthy model of intimacy and basic trust, (2) examining intimacy disorder and distrust and (3) learning how to restore intimacy and trust.

From cradle to grave, trust is the foundation of all healthy relationships, such as those between baby and mother, husband and wife, business managers and employees or terminally ill patients and their caregivers.

This vital element of trust occurs in two forms: *primary* and *secondary*. *Webster's Dictionary* defines trust as: "confidence in the integrity, ability, character and truth of a person or thing." The Bible, on the other hand, defines trust as the core confidence that a person is secure. Isaiah 12:2 states: "Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord is my strength and my song, he has become my salvation."

These two descriptions of trust are not at odds with each other. *Webster's* gives an accurate depiction of secondary trust, while Isaiah describes an abiding primary trust.

God's original design for us is to have intimacy with Him (primary trust) and intimacy with others (secondary trust). When both forms of trust are solidly rooted in our lives, we can maintain stability and sanity even in times of personal crisis and chaos.

Let's look more closely at each type of trust, starting with the one with which we are most familiar.

### Secondary trust

In day-to-day relationships, secondary trust is established by the *other* person, based on what he or she does or doesn't do. You

might liken secondary trust to the stock market. When the other person performs well, trust goes up; when she performs poorly, trust goes down.

For example, I might agree to loan my friend my laptop computer because previous experiences revealed he was responsible and dependable. In addition, when he has borrowed less expensive tools of mine, he has returned them on time and in their original condition. As long as he maintains his good track record, I trust him.

Our trust gets tested, however, in proportion to the value we place on the item someone is borrowing. When a relationship is new, we might risk loaning something that is easily repaired or replaced. But, what if the item is a family heirloom? Now we begin to weigh the value of the item against the value of the relationship. As the risk increases, more trust is required.

What happens if the stakes are even higher, such as extending our love or sharing our heart with someone else? Such a request might seem too risky or almost unthinkable if we previously suffered a broken heart or only learned distrust while growing up.

Such was the life of Bethany, who grew up in a family that appeared to be "the Christian ideal." Her biological family was intact and her parents volunteered weekly at their church. She and her two older brothers received good grades and never caused trouble. No one struggled with any serious problems, so all appeared well—at least on the outside.

Bethany learned at an early age, however, to not talk about conflicts that might be churning inside herself or inside her home. Emotional needs were considered unimportant and generally ignored. Her dad seemed to have plenty of time to give to church members and her brothers. Seldom, however, did he show interest in Bethany or extend love and affirmation to her. Once, she confided her feelings of rejection to her mother and then got shamed for not being appreciative.

Bethany drove home crying one day when her boyfriend asked her friend to the homecoming dance. She didn't expect any support from her family, but she was unprepared for the jokes directed at her during

dinner. Bethany's heart was broken first by her boyfriend and then by her family. That evening, Bethany made a silent vow to never get hurt again.

Bethany's needs were not met, and her feelings of rejection, shame and frustration were ignored. These types of encounters during the formative years actually set in place a type of "trust template" which will inadvertently continue to operate throughout life. People like Bethany are ill-equipped for establishing healthy, trusting relationships. Unless their wounds are acknowledged and healed, they will tend to be more vulnerable to addictions or becoming the partner of someone with an addiction.

## Primary trust

While most people are familiar with secondary trust, primary trust is actually more critical to the healthy development of the inner person (intrapersonal) and later to the healthy development of intimate relationships with others (interpersonal).

## Trust *in utero*

Most specialists agree that the first 18 months of a child's life set the stage for establishing a person's sense of primary trust—the feeling of being safe and secure in the world. But, few also realize that the months *before* a child is born are also critical to the development of primary trust.

For generations, women have encouraged pregnant mothers to "think good thoughts and listen to music in order to have healthy, happy babies." People across the globe have intuitively passed this message along to their children and grandchildren. Unfortunately, since superstitions were also added to the message, "civilized" people tended to downplay this advice until eventually the concept was generally considered folklore.

Yet, look at these examples in Scripture of developing primary trust:

- Psalm 22:9 declares, "You (God) brought me out of the womb, you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast."
- Also, God told Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you."

- In Luke, Elizabeth replies to Mary (pregnant with Jesus), "As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy."
- David proclaims in Psalm 139 that God knew him while he was still being formed in the womb and David further proclaims he has put his trust in God.

These passages describe a trust in God that began before and right after we were born. New babies don't yet have the cognitive functions to rationally place their trust in another, but they do instinctively know whether the world is proving to be a safe or dangerous place.

Modern medical research has verified this. One study revealed that a preborn baby tightens into a fetal curl when its mother smokes a cigarette. The baby feels pain from the cigarette's toxins coming through the umbilical cord. Another startling fact is that a baby tightens its abdominal muscles when its mother even *thinks* about smoking a cigarette!

There is a real and mysterious bond between mother and child that we are still trying to understand from a scientific point of view, but it is clear that a person's sense of trust can begin to develop—and be harmed—very early in life. Obviously, this process continues outside the womb and in the first few years of a child's life.

## Trust in early childhood

Primary trust is either strengthened or weakened depending on early childhood experiences. A small child's perspective about himself and life (his worldview) is based on what happens at home. When love, stability, safety and forgiveness are balanced with fair and proper discipline, the child learns that he is valued and appreciated regardless of his performance.

A child's perspective on God is also formed in these early years, and is based largely on how mom and dad model the Trinity. Parents serve as "in-the-flesh" representations of God until the child can learn to trust and depend on Him personally. If parents reflect God's unconditional love, the child's core confidence and security in himself and in God is developed. This kind of trust involves a fundamental confidence in God to keep us secure regardless of our circumstances. This illuminates Jesus' prayer that his followers would experience the same oneness with His Father that He enjoyed (John 17:21).

*Too often we think of intimacy only in a sexual context, but this is not what God intended. Intimacy means being authentically known and knowing another, sharing one's soul, and being loved and valued by another.*

A high level of primary trust is crucial for personal growth and healthy connectedness or bonding to others. Another name for this attachment is intimacy. Too often we think of intimacy only in a sexual context, but this is not what God intended. Intimacy means being authentically known and knowing another, sharing one's soul, and being loved and valued by another. The relationship that exists within the Trinity (Father, Son and Spirit) reflects the intimate nature of God, fully balanced and fully functioning.

### **Trust in marriage**

God's design for intimacy in marriage means connecting with our spouse in body, mind and spirit. God declares in Genesis 2:24 that the husband and wife become one body and in Malachi 2:15, "Has not the Lord made them (husband and wife) one in flesh and spirit" (NLV).

- **Intimacy of body** includes nonsexual physical contact (hugs, snuggling, back rubs, holding hands) as well as sexual play and sexual intercourse.
- **Intimacy of mind** includes friendship, love, respect, honesty, vulnerability, confidentiality, healthy conflict resolution and sharing of feelings, thoughts, values, joys and sorrows.
- **Intimacy of spirit** includes worshipping together, sharing a Bible study or devotional and praying both together and for one another on a daily basis.

Marital intimacy "Divine Style" is the closest of human experiences and is a foretaste of the union of Christ with His Church. Probably no other human experience is more fulfilling. Conversely, probably nothing is more painful than the breaking of intimacy and the betrayal of trust from infidelity.

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## **Intimacy Disorder and Distrust**

We saw the damage done to Bethany when her family destroyed her sense of secondary trust. We also learned how crucial it is for babies and young children to be nurtured in safe, loving and protective environments in order to bond well later in life.

Now that we understand the importance primary and secondary trust plays in the formation of healthy relationships, what happens when that trust is violated or broken, especially in the marital relationship?

If you are the victim of your spouse's infidelity, I do not need to explain the severity of the damage or the severity of your pain, but, perhaps, I can help you more fully understand intimacy disorder and the breakdown of trust in order to survive it.

I have found in my counseling practice that a victim of infidelity often exhibits similar symptoms to adults who have survived child abuse or were victims of rape.

This comparison may seem shocking since the violating act was committed by the unfaithful spouse with another person or with pornography. How could this betrayal of trust, this act of infidelity which occurred across town or outside the victim's presence, cause such horrific damage?

The answer, I believe, is directly connected to God's design for marriage as a one-flesh and one-spirit union. If your spouse violates the exclusivity of the marriage bond by using his body and his spirit with another, then, because of the close intimate bond between husband and wife, he also violates *your* body and *your* spirit. In essence, this is the same violation that occurs in rape or sexual abuse.

Perhaps this is one of the many reasons why sexual immorality carries such severe consequences (see 1 Corinthians 5:11-13 and 6:18-20). In Hebrews 13:4-5 we read that "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."

It is no surprise, then, that infidelity results in deep distrust and can lead to some of the following symptoms experienced by the injured partner:

**Craziness:** Confusion, disorientation and loss of identity often occur when trust is shattered. When trust is damaged, one's sense of self is deeply harmed as well. As stated earlier, trust is the foremost building block in a child's life— everything related to a sense of self is built upon it. With infidelity, a spouse moves immediately from a position of security and trust to one in which everything is in doubt. A person in this situation might wonder if she is going crazy. The truth is that this reaction is a *normal* response to a "crazy-making" event in one's life.

**Powerlessness:** Being unable to control a wayward spouse's attention or his twisted commitment to someone—or something—other than one's self leaves a person with a sense that life is out of control. This leads to personally feeling out of control, and obsessions and compulsions often follow. Flashbacks and reexperiencing the initial shock and ruminating over the details is common. Frantically looking for clues of the torrid affair or hysterically searching for additional evidence on the computer is typical.

**Ambivalence:** Your inner sense of craziness is compounded by opposing thoughts, emotions and behaviors. Examples of these opposites include: love and revulsion, deep hurt and numbness, forgiveness and vengefulness, fear and relief, crying non-stop or inability to cry, not eating or eating nonstop, self-hate or spouse-hate.

**Rejection:** During courtship you felt loved, cherished, valued and special. Nothing leaves you feeling more rejected and discarded than your mate not wanting you sexually and taking care of himself with Internet pornography. Nothing leaves you feeling more rejected and discarded than your mate not wanting you sexually and taking care of himself with Internet pornography.

Often, friends or family members are shocked with the news. Even if they want to help, they often respond inappropriately, giving hurtful advice and possibly further rejection.

**Hopelessness:** Feeling rejected by a life mate can lead to feeling rejected by life in general and then questioning God's faithfulness, sovereignty, love and protection which leads to deep feelings of hopelessness. Despair and depression soon follow.

These five traits include some, but not all of the symptoms experienced by an injured spouse. Don't worry if you don't fit into these categories. Remember that this is a "crazy-making" time and your experiences are unique to you.

What your reactions do indicate, though—and very clearly—is that your relationship has suffered a serious blow to its foundational element: trust. Intimacy between spouses is in shambles and one or both partners are questioning whether or not there can ever again be a real bond between them.

At this point many couples seriously consider getting divorced. Yet, divorce will not solve the deeper issues of intimacy disorder. Likely, too, the ability to trust again will be so damaged as to affect any future relationships. Rather than speak of ending the marriage that has been damaged, couples in this situation would do better to openly and honestly try to dig deep into their relationship and themselves to discover the source of their intimacy disorder and work to rebuild their lives—individually and together. This is best accomplished with the help of a trained Christian counselor who specializes in intimacy disorder, family trauma or sex addiction.

*Note: If your spouse is not sorrowful for the pain he has caused you, or if he is not humble and broken, I suggest you read Dr. James Dobson's book Love Must Be Tough. This book provides step-by-step biblical principles to use along with the help and guidance of a trusted Christian counselor.*

It may seem after the infidelity that the life you have known is over. In a sense, this is true. Yet, the life just ended was obviously rife with secrets and decay before it came crashing down. Ask yourself if you desire to go back to what you had. While reconciliation will not happen for all couples, there is indeed hope. For those willing to invest themselves in the process of rebuilding intimacy and trust,

and for those willing to follow God's plan of forgiveness, the chances are much higher. It is possible to move toward a healthier and happier relationship than you ever experienced previously.

## Restoring Intimacy With Primary and Secondary Trust

One of the most common reactions to infidelity is loss of hope. The wounded spouse believes first, there is no possible way to repair the relationship, and, second, even if the couple tried to stay together, there is no way to trust again. In fact, this inability to even imagine trusting again is one of the greatest threats to reconciliation and true healing. What seems impossible is often never even attempted.

The good news is that we have a God who loves us lavishly and who is deeply committed to restoring us and our relationships.

If your unfaithful spouse is sorrowful, humble, repentant and broken, then marital healing is possible. Those reading this who have been hurt may seriously doubt my words. I have heard spouses injured by infidelity say things like, "As the trust goes, so the relationship goes." That may be true, but at the same time, "As the trust grows, so the *relationship* grows."

## Just how does one restore trust in a severely fractured marriage?

First, you must understand that a multitude of downward steps were taken before the final step of infidelity took place. Most people focus just on the behavior in question. Yet, there were any number of problems occurring personally (and possibly in the marital relationship) that contributed to the infidelity. This is not to excuse or justify any behavior, but to show that true healing will not simply ensure that the behavior doesn't happen again, but will focus on healing and restoring the whole person. Just as a spouse's downfall was a process, many steps are necessary to rebuild the marital relationship.

### Rebuilding primary trust

Before we can restore trust in the relationship (secondary trust), we

must look again to primary trust. If you recall, this is the inner knowledge or core confidence that a person is secure, which ultimately is tied to a fundamental confidence in God.

- [The righteous person] is not afraid of evil tidings; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. His heart is steady, he will not be afraid (Psalm 112: 7-8, RSV).
- Jesus reminds us to not be afraid because we are worth more than many sparrows (Matthew 10:31).
- Psalm 121 declares that our help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. He will not let our foot be moved, because He neither slumbers nor sleeps.

An individual's reliance on God (primary trust) will be the single most important factor in how he or she personally recovers. When secondary trust is destroyed, a person needs to be as dependent and trusting on the Heavenly Father as a dependent child trusts a loving earthly parent. In addition, anything blocking an open relationship with God must be dealt with. This includes: (1) facing sins and personal shortcomings, (2) confessing these sins to God, and (3) asking for forgiveness. Jesus reminds us to remove the log from our own eye before noticing the speck in another's eye (Matthew 7: 3-5). Securing this primary trust with God will be the foundation upon which a person begins to develop secondary trust in the spouse.

If you ask God, He will help you see your spouse and your relationship with spiritual eyes. Pray daily and ask for spiritual discernment and wisdom and it will be provided. Hope and trust in God's promise in James 1:5: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him" (RSV).

### Rebuilding secondary trust

Restoring secondary trust requires both the understanding and application of forgiveness. Biblical forgiveness is often misunderstood; it is NOT:

- condoning or minimizing the offense
- pretending the transgression did not occur
- naively allowing offenses to continue

At the same time, forgiveness cannot be disregarded if true recovery is desired. Restoring secondary trust also requires slowly and carefully weighing the decision to reconcile based on both personal prayer and the prayer support of others. Taking adequate time, paying attention to detail, and receiving the objective help of a Christian counselor is essential for the future of your relationship, if there is to be one.

Infidelity gains its strength from secrecy. Reconciliation gains strength by bringing the secret sin to light in a shared community with key people including your mate, the designated counselor, the pastor and selected people of faith.

While rebuilding, a truly repentant spouse will show evidence of taking the initiative to restore trust primarily in the marriage, but also within the family and church community. The following would be realistic expectations of the wayward spouse if he (or she) is sincerely devoted to repairing the damaged marriage:

- Prayerfully commit or recommit to the lordship of God.
- Break all ties with the affair partner, or, in the case of pornography or other sexual addiction, put all necessary boundaries in place.
- Agree to the assistance of spiritual mentors and accountability partners.
- Commit to Christian counseling, in clouding sorting through the issues leading up to the infidelity and making necessary changes.
- Take personal responsibility for the damage done to the spouse (and children) without blame-shifting to the injured spouse or elsewhere.
- Cooperate with a therapeutic separation if recommended by the counselor or if needed by your injured spouse to heal.
- Agree to medical testing for sexually transmitted diseases and encourage your spouse to get tested as well.
- Commit to not placing sexual pressure upon your spouse.
- Allow the wounded spouse the time necessary to heal without applying guilt or added stress.

These steps will be necessary simply to prepare the field for trust to grow again. The offending spouse's dedication, transparency and honesty will serve as vital nutrients to enrich this soil. Constant

prayer will water the field, and, in time, trust may again sprout in the field of your heart.

## Why Sex Is Addictive

People ask if it is possible to be addicted to pornography in the same manner as drug addiction. The answer is, "Yes!" The Attorney General's Commission on Pornography determined pornography was more addictive than cocaine or heroin!<sup>1</sup>

We know that pleasure centers in the brain are activated by eating, exercise and sex, releasing neurochemicals similar to opioids (natural or manufactured opium substances). Runners describe this as a "high" they experience. Fortunately, running does not have the negative consequences of inappropriate sexual activity. We can, however, become actually dependent and addicted to the neurochemicals released from our own brains. Adrenaline and testosterone are a powerful combination.

What started as a theory was proven through research with laboratory rats. The more frequent the experience of pleasure (or pain), the more quickly the response travels through the spinal cord to signal the brain. The rats were wired with electrodes to stimulate the brain pleasure centers each time they pressed a bar; they repeated the behavior to the point of exhaustion.

In addition, Dr. Jeffrey Satinover explains that repetitive sexual behavior alters the brain tissue itself.<sup>2</sup> He also states, "This ongoing process embeds the emerging patterns of our choices ever more firmly in actual tissue change."<sup>5</sup>

Several common characteristics of sex addiction or pornography addiction include:

- Sex becomes a means of escaping intimacy instead of

<sup>1</sup> Bringing Up Boys by Dr. James Dobson (p.209)

- increasing intimacy with a life mate.
- Sex becomes the primary vehicle for relationship between the husband and the wife, rather than the result of deep emotional and spiritual intimacy.
  - Sex is used to get "high" and (similar to other drug dependencies) more is needed over time to reach the desired effect.
  - Male addicts objectify women, become obsessed with female/male body parts and may demand increasingly deviant behavior of their mate.
  - Sex is considered merely an act to self-satisfy rather than a mutual giving, serving and sharing with the marital partner.
  - Pornography plus masturbation becomes preferred over the mate.
  - Immediate gratification is more desired than long-term relationship.
  - Sex becomes an attempt to escape emotional pain, shame, guilt and depression, even as the act increases these emotions.
  - Fear of getting caught is increasingly stressful.
  - Sex splits-off the individual's mind, body and spirit into a false self rather than uniting the three into the true self.
  - Sex becomes obsessive and compulsive taking on an uncontrolled life of its own, risking loss of self-respect, the marriage and family or financial stability.
  - Sex eventually becomes increasingly more important so that spouse, children, career, friends and God no longer matter.

**Typically, sex addicts fear abandonment and rejection and thus attempt to gain back power and control through privatizing sex and/or controlling their mates. Inwardly, they are truly "relationship broken" and insecure; their exteriors may reveal this truth or they may overcompensate with polished false exteriors to cover their dark secret life.**

We speak of the sex addict as someone who "acts out" but meanwhile the spouse "acts in." Next, we will consider the traits of the offended spouse.

<sup>2</sup> *Homosexuality and Politics of Truth* by Jeffrey Satinover (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), p. 134

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136

*You are not to blame for your mate's pornography addiction.*

**The Codependent Spouse. Who me?**

Unfortunately, these simple words "codependent spouse" have been misunderstood and overused in describing people who are infinitely complex and made in God's image.

The instinctive resistance to the terminology can be overcome by realizing the purpose here is not to label or stereotype people, but rather to use words which begin to describe an array of similar symptoms experienced by individuals whose marriages have been devastated by habitual Internet pornography or other forms of infidelity.

Understanding traits of the sex addict is usually easier than understanding the traits of the spouse. The person struggling with addiction has inappropriate behaviors that are obviously wrong. The inner conflict experienced by the addicted person "shows up" with outside behavior. On the other hand, the inner conflict of the spouse stays hidden, from others and from self.

Codependency is often found in spouses, injured by sexual infidelity. Before you negatively respond to that idea, saying, "That doesn't describe me," remember, the term is used to help explain common symptoms. Once you have gained a better understanding, you might feel greater compassion for someone else wounded by sexual infidelity and you might gain greater compassion for yourself.

Before we go further, I want to state clearly: **"You are not to blame for your mate's pornography addiction."** In fact, you might have been the most perfect wife (or husband), and your mate still could have chosen to be unfaithful by using Internet pornography or getting involved in affairs. Your spouse chose infidelity for a variety of reasons. You can choose to become informed about pornography addiction and codependency through a methodical process of praying, reading, speaking to your trusted friends and hopefully working with a trained Christian counselor.

Typically codependent people have good intentions; they are kind, caring and eager to help others. Problems arise, however, when their caretaking becomes compulsive and self-defeating.

Codependency is sometimes referred to as a "love addiction" because the injured spouse will often stay involved in a one-sided relationship that is emotionally destructive, or even abusive. An outside observer may ask why an adult would stay in the powerless, childlike position which enables the process to continue. The answer is multifaceted, but one of the main reasons is that the behavior was learned in their unhealthy family of origin.

In dysfunctional families, the emotional, physical, sexual or spiritual abuse or neglect of children is common-place.<sup>4</sup> This does not imply the parents are always intentionally mean-spirited; sometimes they are repeating the poor treatment they received as children.<sup>5</sup> Typically these family members are conditionally loved (at best) and rarely appreciated or validated. The parents seldom model an integrated private life which matches their public life. Their image-keeping agenda can take enormous amounts of energy away from childrearing and place it instead on impressing people outside the home.<sup>6</sup> Each family member is taught directly or indirectly to ignore or deny their true feelings. Soon, depression, anxiety or anger sets in. In addition, we often find that some member of the family is addicted or suffering from a chronic mental or physical illness.

Often unhealthy families have unspoken rules that are indirectly, but strongly, reinforced such as: don't feel, don't confront, don't talk, don't touch, don't trust, don't connect and don't ask. Instead, the unspoken rules state: you must pretend, cover-up, lose sense of self and simply survive. (Thus the term "adult survivor" was developed.) The external persona of these families may appear quite healthy but many dysfunctional qualities are in place behind closed doors.

4 Jesus placed a high priority on parenting and treating children well. He said, "When you receive the childlike on my account, it's the same as receiving me. But if you give them a hard time, bullying or taking advantage of their simple trust, you'll soon wish you hadn't. You'd be better off dropped in the middle of the lake with a millstone around your neck" (Matthew 18: 5-6, M5G).

5 Deuteronomy 5:9-10 God declares, "I hold parents responsible for any sins they pass on to their children to the third, and yes, even to the fourth generation. But I'm lovingly loyal to the thousands who love me and keep my commandments" (M5G).

6 Jesus spoke harshly against those leading a life of duplicity. He said, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like white washed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean" (Matthew 23:27).

### *At the core of codependency is a half-empty heart wanting to be filled with intimacy*

I have found in my private practice (as well as in the research) that frequently both the pornography addict and their spouses have codependency traits. In addition, both partners often have numerous similarities in their backgrounds. For example, the profiles of addicts and their spouses vary by only one to three percentage points. According to a national survey titled, *Sexual Addiction: Questions and Answers*, Golden Valley Health Center reported this profile of sex addicts:

- 97 percent were emotionally abused or neglected as children
- 83 percent were sexually abused
- 73 percent were physically abused

Not surprisingly, codependent people have an inaccurate self-perception. Their self-worth is defined by what others think (or what their pornography-addicted spouse thinks) instead of what our loving God says about them. They instinctively perform, but their performance is for the wrong people. God encourages us to look to an audience of one—Himself.

At the core of codependency is a half-empty heart wanting to be filled with intimacy. The aching was designed by the intimacy-maker, God, for the purpose of drawing us to Himself. Our heart was made to be filled up by God and God alone. The more abundantly we are filled up, the more intimate (or connected) we can be with our mate. However, many of us want to take shortcuts, filling our souls with people and things, seeking the quickest and most immediate gratification.

The addict places pornography at the center of his universe; the more he gives of himself to worship this idol, the more the idol drains from him. In the same manner, the codependent spouse places the addict at the center of her universe. Both partners will have temporary satisfaction, but the counterfeit leaves them both hungry and more dissatisfied.

Both pornography and codependency rob the marriage in all three areas of intimacy: body, mind and spirit. As one area begins to

crumble, the next area is also damaged which in turn, damages the next. Left untreated, each partner exacerbates the problem in the other, until eventually a habitual pattern of behaving, thinking, feeling and spiritually believing tears the relationship down even further.

True intimacy of the body (sexual intimacy) cannot flourish without a solid appreciation of God's glorious design for sexuality. Ideally, parents would teach their children about God's design early (rather than later)<sup>7</sup>. As a result, the children would grow and develop with a positive regard for God's plan for sexual blessing and protection, as well as understand the dangers of premarital and extramarital sex.

Unfortunately, this is seldom the case with codependents. Additionally, their sexual intimacy is further diminished or damaged when one or both of the partners are emotionally reacting instead of appropriately responding. Typical codependents' response patterns might be characterized by:

- Withdrawing emotionally or spiritually without talking about it
- Worrying about performance and fearing mistakes
- Controlling or punishing their mate by withholding sex
- Feeling guilty or shameful when they experience pleasure
- Ignoring sexual problems
- Allowing their spouses to watch pornography or watching it with them
- Lying about reasons to sexually abstain rather than telling the truth
- Reducing sex to a mechanical act
- Bringing their unrealistic expectations to the lovemaking experience
- Forcing themselves to be sexual and then resenting it
- Faking an orgasm while fantasizing about someone else
- Taking their victimization to the bedroom instead of seeking treatment
- Rejecting compliments about their body
- Fearing vulnerability or loss of control
- Avoiding when asked what they need or enjoy

<sup>7</sup> [Parentimacy.org/cs/parents](http://Parentimacy.org/cs/parents) provides valuable information about healthy sexuality and age-appropriate sex education

- Over personalizing what their mate is experiencing
- Engaging in unwanted sexual acts to make their spouse happy
- Never wanting or always wanting sex
- Splitting off their mind or their spirit from their body
- Fearing abandonment and thus tolerating sexual, emotional or spiritual abuse
- Leaving God out of the bedroom

## Healing

As you choose to go forward in the healing process, know that you'll have good days and bad days. You'll experience breakthroughs as well as setbacks. This process is never easy for either partner, and it will be painful. But it will also be the most worthwhile process you have ever undertaken. You will learn and you will grow.

Remember, God is for you and He can see the end when you can not. He is good all the time, even when your marriage and life seem to be falling apart. Trust in Him to make a way for you today. It will be the best decision you ever make.

For a more complete assessment of general codependency, I recommend the books *Codependency, Breaking Free from the Hurt and Manipulation of Dysfunctional Families: A Christian Perspective*, by Pat Springle and *Boundaries*, by Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend.

Available resources from Focus on the Family:

- **Love Must Be Tough**

*New Hope for Marriages in Crisis* by Dr. James C. Dobson, What happens when a husband or wife wants out of a marriage? How should the aching mate react? Find the answer to these questions and more.

- **When God Doesn't Make Sense** by Dr. James C. Dobson, Life comes with no guarantees. Now gain a new appreciation of how a loving God is constantly at work in our lives—even through sorrow—in this comforting book.

- **Pureintimacy.org**

Dealing with issues of sexual brokenness, addictions and intimacy disorders, this Focus on the Family Web site offers articles and resources devoted to the reintegration of the human person—body, mind and spirit.

For the purposes of this booklet, infidelity is defined as any sexual violation of the wedding vows. This could include pornography use, affairs, sexual chat room discussions and other similar betrayals. We recognize that among Christians there is dispute about what is considered infidelity for the purposes of granting a biblical divorce. The author's intention is not to settle that theological dispute, but to address any circumstance in which a spouse feels sexually betrayed. Apart from the theological implications, the pain, confusion and anger are similar for all these situations. This article only intends to help a spouse move forward in a healthy, biblical manner.

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Joann is the founder of The Center for Renewing Intimacy where she maintains a private practice in Colorado Springs, CO. When you or someone you love are caught in the throws of heartache due to sexual brokenness, we hope you will contact us for a free consultation.

While the vast majority of our clients identify themselves as Christians, we warmly offer our services to any individual, couple, and family who know the pain and heartache of relational injuries. As professionals, we aspire to provide safe, reliable clinical care that treats the body, mind, and spirit of each individual we serve.

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