

AFFAIRS BEGIN in many ways and for many reasons, so we must be always on guard for the slightest hint of temptation. Because hints turn into flirtations, flirtations turn into attractions, attractions turn into affairs, and affairs turn into disasters. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says that God will always provide a way of escape, but we have to make a decision to run toward the door.

When you're guarding your marriage, you're not guarding just your spouse, but guarding yourself too. I rationalised my way into a boatload of trouble because I thought: *The rules don't apply to me. I am a Christian, I'm smart, I have self-control, and I can stop before it gets too far.* All lies!



How to Affair-Proof your Marriage

It can happen to you. Subtle flirtations can take you down the slippery slope of infidelity. **Nancy C. Anderson** tells how she had an affair – and how you can avoid one.



My affair began at work, so I'm an expert on workplace

temptation. Once, the most common type of office infidelity was between male bosses and females who were lower-ranking employees, but that's changed in the last ten years. With more and more women working, the most common office affair is between coworkers. The man I had my affair with (Jake) was not my boss; we were both sales reps – equals.

My relationship with Jake started innocently. I noticed that we laughed at the same things, and he noticed that we liked similar music, so we started to sit together at lunch. We were just friends... until we weren't.

I remember the first time we went out of the friendship zone and into the danger zone. We were sitting next to each other at a sales meeting when his leg brushed up against mine. I felt a spark at the contact point and was a bit disappointed when he pulled away. A few minutes later, he shifted slightly in his chair and his leg, from knee to thigh, pressed gently against mine. I liked it, and I didn't pull away.

I should have. But because I didn't, I sent him a signal that I was unguarded. We both began to look for excuses to be together. If I'd not responded to his flirtations, I would have avoided the biggest regret of my life.

Guard Yourself

Coworkers sometimes work on projects or solve problems together, and the resulting closeness can build teamwork – but it can also build a feeling of intimacy.

If you feel an attraction to someone in your office, consider a transfer to a different department, a different position, or maybe

you should quit. **No job is more valuable than your marriage.** I knew that I could not continue to work with Jake without being tempted, so I quit my job the same day I confessed my affair to my husband.

Be honest with yourself. If you're dressing to please someone at work or lingering in the parking lot hoping that person will ask you to lunch, stop now, before you've gone too far. If you're in doubt as to what conduct is inappropriate, ask yourself, *Would I do this in front of my spouse?* And if you're still not sure, ask yourself, *Would I do it in front of the Lord?* (You are, you know.) Here is a simple rule to keep you on the straight and narrow: If you'd have to hide it or lie about it – don't do it!

Proverbs 4:23 says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do."

When Secret Service agents guard the President, they regard the President's life as more important than their own individual lives. Guard your marriage in the same way. You may be required to sacrifice part of your individual life – hobbies, profession, TV time, computer time, sports activities – to strengthen your marriage.

The key to growing effective hedges is to be honest about your weaknesses, both as individuals and as a couple. Set up distinct boundaries and enforce them.

If your spouse reminds you of the rules, don't be defensive or point out your mate's faults; accept his or her correction because it's for the greater good of the marriage. Some of the most difficult phrases to say – *you're right* and *I'm sorry* – can save your marriage – and your love.

Marriages can be raised from the dead

If your marriage is less than blissful, and you feel like giving up, I can tell you from personal experience:

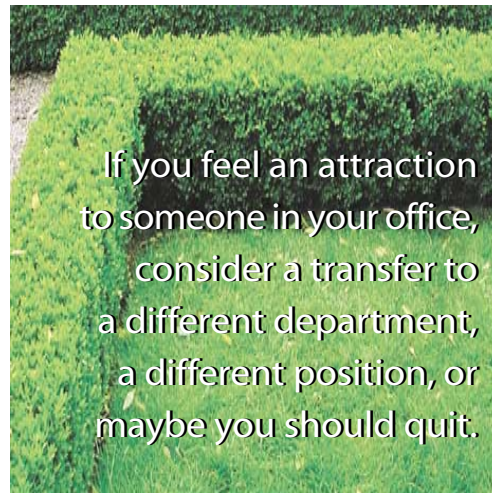
marriages can be raised from the dead. My husband, Ron, and I had one of the worst marriages I've ever seen, but now, we really love each other – even like each other. You can too. Are you willing to begin anew?

You're probably thinking, *Why should I be the first to change? or How come I have to do all the work?* The answer is simple: **God will work with whoever is available and give that person**

the strength to change. Are you available?

You already know that you can't change your mate, but you can change your own behaviour. The word *change* indicates a transformation, which is a metamorphosis. The word *metamorphosis* begins with the two letters: me. Change begins with me.

If you want a vibrant and loving marriage, make this verse your prayer: "Create in me a clean heart, O God,



If you feel an attraction to someone in your office, consider a transfer to a different department, a different position, or maybe you should quit.

and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10).

When I told my husband the whole truth and begged for his forgiveness, he miraculously chose to forgive me.

We both called Jake. I cried as I apologised to him and explained why I had to quit my job and why I could never see him again. Ron and I asked him not to call or have any further contact and he agreed to honour our request. I told him that I hoped he would reconcile with his wife and restore his family. When we said goodbye, all three of us were crying, for three different reasons.

My feelings for Jake had not changed, I was still "in love" with him, but I chose to stay with my husband. It was out of obedience at first, but as I began to act lovingly, the loving feelings eventually followed. Ron and I recently celebrated our 26th wedding anniversary and I am thrilled to tell you that we are deeply and tenderly in love. With each other! We are living proof that no marriage is beyond repair.

I Can't Get No Satisfaction

If either you or your spouse constantly hums the Rolling Stones' tune, "I Can't Get No Satisfaction," you might be in trouble. If you ignore each other's needs, one or both of you will be more tempted to "go" elsewhere. But having unmet needs is no excuse for bad behaviour, and going after satisfaction outside your marriage is always wrong. The Bible says – to both of you – be satisfied with the wife/husband of your youth. That indicates that we should be content

with our mates. **The best way to avoid the "Greener Grass Syndrome" is to water your own lawn.**

If our marriages are well-watered, the grass on our own side of the fence will be lush and soft and lovely. And if you're both content and committed to your marriage, the Flirty Franks and Teasing Tinas at the office, gym, or grocery store won't be as tempting.

Maybe you're saying, "But, Nancy, you don't know how selfish my husband/wife is". You're right, I don't know your situation, but I'm assuming that you chose to marry that person, so they must have some wonderful qualities too.

Unless your spouse is abusing you or your children, you can choose to be satisfied in your marriage. Look for the best in your mate, not at his or her faults. The more you meet your spouse's needs, the more he or she will want to meet yours. **It doesn't matter who plants the first seeds, because you'll enjoy the harvest – together. It might be hard to start, but if you don't, and your mate won't, then who will?** "And let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Galatians 6:9).

1 Thessalonians 4:3 says, "It is God's will that you should be holy; that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like those who do not know God."

Paying Attention?

My husband, Ron, recently had a conversation with his friend Earl. Earl said, "For years, my feet have been

killing me. I bought insole cushions for my shoes and even bought an expensive pair of arch supports, but nothing helped. So I finally went to a podiatrist.”

“What did he say?” Ron asked.

Earl said, “First, he X-rayed my feet and looked at the films. Then the doctor asked me, ‘What size shoe do you wear?’ I answered, ‘Eleven.’ Then he said, ‘No wonder your feet hurt, you should wear a size thirteen!’”

Earl shook his head as he told Ron, “I’ve been buying size eleven shoes since high school. It never occurred to me to measure my feet to see if they’d grown.”

His shoes had been too small for years! His feet had changed, but he wasn’t paying attention.

Have you measured your marriage lately? It’s easy to get complacent and just continue doing what we’ve always done. Since nothing ever stays the same, small changes can sneak up on us and cause some big problems.

Growing Pains

If you’re struggling in your relationship and feel as if you’ve grown apart from your spouse, today can be the day of new beginnings. I know how lonely, discouraged, and exhausted you may feel, because I’ve felt that way.

I was in a marriage full of emptiness. I was the original desperate housewife. Ron and I were both selfish,

angry, and critical; but we aren’t anymore. Well . . . I’m still a little selfish, but mostly our lives are full of light and love – and yours can be too. We admitted our faults, asked for forgiveness, changed our behaviour, and decided to love each other. Our feelings eventually caught up with our actions, and we slowly grew a lovely “green grass” marriage in our own backyard.

We learned that fighting and blaming won’t work. Commanding and demanding can’t work. Surrender works. If you surrender your heart to the Lord and ask Him to work in you and through you, He will accomplish more than you could ever do on your own.

Ron and I still don’t agree on all issues, but since we’ve reached a compromise on most of the major ones; the minor ones – like where to set the thermostat or which one of us is a better driver (me) – won’t break us. We’ve learned to work together as a team, and that is our prayer for you.

“A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer.”
(Ecclesiastes 4:12a)

If you’re both willing to make your marriage a priority, and guard it from internal and external dangers, your home will be a safe haven.

Nancy C. Anderson and her husband of twenty-six years live in Orange County, California, with their teenage son, Nick. She is the author of *Avoiding The Greener Grass Syndrome: How to Grow Affair-Proof Hedges around Your Marriage* (Kregel Publications).

HEDGES: Practical Ways to Guard your Marriage

By Nancy Anderson

Hearing Listening to your spouse is the key to unlocking his or her heart. People who have committed adultery often say, "My wife/husband never listened to me – they never heard me." *"The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord has made both of them."* (Proverbs 20:12)

Encouraging Experience the teamwork-building power of a helping hand and a compliment. Focus on the positive qualities of your mate. *"So then, let us aim for harmony ... and try to build each other up."* (Romans 14:19)

Dating Build a life that celebrates marriage. Have fun, laugh and play together. *"Let your fountains be blessed. Rejoice with the wife [husband] of your youth."* (Proverbs 5:18)

Guarding Establish safeguards for your relationship. Set clear boundaries that neither of you should cross. *"Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do."* (Proverbs 4:23)

Educating Study your mate as if he or she is a textbook. Seek to understand and appreciate your mate's unique qualities. *"Dwell with your wife according to knowledge."* (1 Peter 3:7)

Satisfying Meet each other's needs. Ask your spouse what he or she needs from you, and then do those things. *"You shall be like a well-watered garden."* (Isaiah 58:11)

