

# Breakthroughs in healing

with Dr. Simon Sheh

Healthcare Edition

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## EXTRA-MARITAL AFFAIR:

### *PATHOLOGY & PREVENTION*

In a recent issue of *Physician*, a magazine published by Focus on the Family, a medical doctor shared the following reflection on his affair with a young woman in his office:

*“Medicine is an entity of intense moments and emotions. Men and women who care for the sick and dying often forge special bonds as they share experience of pain, tragedy, anger, frustration and, yes, joy. From my own life and practice, I know that in the middle of the sorrow and trouble in patients’ lives and the difficulty I face attempting to practice, I sometimes look to the nurses with who I work for some normalcy, just as they look to me. We want to see a smiling face, hear a joke and experience something that pulls us temporarily out of the blood and the breathlessness; the drunkenness and the stupidity that often accompany our work. We depend on one another throughout the day until we can go home to the ones we love. A potential stumbling block in this arrangement is that, like many physicians, I work with some lovely women. Bright and professional, some of them have a manner of speech, a favorite perfume, and a tilt of laughter or a curve of body that makes them appealing. This attraction creates a dangerous environment in which powerful feelings and physical exhaustion may lead men and women to seek comfort in the wrong direction – ultimately turning them into adulterers ... All of those factors converged so that I committed adultery with a young woman in my office. She understood the enormous pressures of my medical career, and I thought that she could untangle the mess of emotions I was struggling to unravel. I believed she was an escape that I deserved. I convinced myself*

*that I was rescuing her from a miserable life as well. I bought into the deception that I had found the “right” person at last, and that all was well when we were together.”*

The experience of the medical doctor speaks truly to the pathology of affair and its destructive process. Affair does not happen out of the blue; it evolves in a very predictable pattern. Affair usually begins when a person is unaware of or ignores his/her vulnerability, and at the same time not practicing proper boundaries in relationships. When a person is vulnerable, his/her mind, body, and spirit are looking for pain relief. The affair process further evolves when the pain relief comes from a person of the opposite sex and who is not the spouse, and that person acts like a high performing, addictive drug that provides a sense of comfort, a listening ear, validation, affirmation, emotional attachment, escape and rescue. The affair is consummated when sexual intercourse is involved, and the addiction to one another turns into high gear. The affair continues and sustains itself by mutual rationalization of true love and needing one another. Affair is not about love; it is about an unhealthy, addictive relationship. As one woman put it, when she got caught again by her husband, she felt like she was an alcoholic addicted to booze. Except her liquor was the man she had the affair with.

## The Pathology of Affair: A Four-Step Destructive Process

### 1. Vulnerability

Vulnerability means there is added risk, not added value, in a person’s life. Vulnerability often occurs when a person is:

- under a lot of stress
- grieving major losses
- feeling insecure and looking for affirmation
- feeling rejected and looking for validation
- going through a burnout
- experiencing boredom and looking for fun and excitement
- not aware of his/her personal weaknesses, e.g., boundary issues with persons of the opposite sex, such as, often wants to save or rescue someone
- having unfulfilled expectations and unexpressed needs in the marriage

Therefore let anyone who thinks he stands (who feels sure that he has a steadfast mind and is standing firm), take heed lest he fall.

1 Corinthians 10:12-13  
the Amplified Bible

In his book *Torn Asunder*, Dave Carder wrote: *“When we are vulnerable, we are emotionally run down, our defenses are down, our perspective on things is clouded, we are not able to make judgment based on truth, and everything is seen through an emotional filter. Pain is intensified. Therefore, the pursuit of relief from pain is also intensified. When you are vulnerable, a situation that might otherwise be safe may now be unsafe.”*

*continued on back*

## 2. Emotional, Non-Physical Involvement

In the pathology of affair, the gray area is where much game playing occurs. Don't worry, we're just friends. Because people tend to say that nothing is going on when there is no physical contact, they feel safe because they think they are still walking within boundary – when they are really crossing the line. This innocent “playing around” can lead to the next destructive step in the process: physical contact.

Emotional involvement and violation of boundary occur when a man and a woman who is not married to one another:

- share intimate information about their past
- share intimate information about personal struggles
- share intimate information about marital problems
- want to support, rescue, and protect a wounded soul

The following story of a woman illustrates the danger of emotional involvement:

*“I and Ralph became friends after meeting at work. We began consoling each other over each of our failing marriages. Put it this way, because we are leaning on each other for support, things between me and Ralph ended up getting heavy ... maybe four or five times me and Ralph got into some pretty heavy petting, you know, touchy feely, and then intercourse on just one occasion.”*

## 3. Physical Involvement

Once an affair gets physical, it is hard to get out. It is like a full-blown addiction to the relationship.

## 4. Rationalizations for Continuing the Affair

- “Just one more time”
- “If my wife only met my needs, I wouldn't do this”
- “I understand her so much better than her husband does”
- “She needs me”
- “We work together”
- “It won't happen again”
- “I'm just too weak”
- “If only God would give me the strength to stop”
- “God knows that I need this”
- “King David was doing it; it can't be that bad”
- “No one else knows, so what's the harm”
- “God will forgive us”
- “There are worse sins”
- “God loves us no matter what we do”

### Coming seminars by Dr. Simon Sheh

*How to enhance your marriage in the trenches of midlife*  
April 14, Meadowlark Health Centre, Edmonton

*Godly Men, Ungodly Thoughts*  
*a seminar to safeguard men against pornography*  
April 24, Beulah Alliance Church, Edmonton  
May 8, First Alliance Church, Calgary.

For seminar information, call 429-4761, extension 237.



## How to Affair-Proof Your Marriage

### Set and maintain appropriate boundaries with persons who are not your spouse

- Do not disclose and share intimate information and personal struggles with a person who is not your spouse on a one-to-one basis. If someone of the opposite sex bares his/her soul with you, encourage the person to seek professional help. Do not play the rescuer role.
- When you are meeting a person of the opposite sex in your office, if possible, keep your office door fully or half opened. If possible, construct or choose offices with a glass window in order to create some transparency for the actions within the office.
- When you are travelling with co-workers on business trips, such as attending a conference, do not meet with someone of the opposite sex alone in your hotel room. Meet in the public or in a meeting room with people around.
- If possible, avoid visiting someone of the opposite sex alone in his or her home. This applies to the “Handy Man.” You are handy and have the gift of helping others. A recently separated single parent need some repair in her bathroom, and your spouse send you there to help. Bring your spouse or kids with you. Do not create a situation where you are alone with someone who is potentially vulnerable.

### Seek healthy ways to relieve pain

- Identify your pain (fear, insecurity, rejection, betrayal, failure, feeling not good enough, getting no respect in the marriage, etc.)
- Do not internalize your pain, externalize it. Share your pain with your spouse, and/or with someone of the same gender whom you trust (This is a difficult practice for leaders and healthcare professionals because they are supposed to have answers and solutions. It has taken me a long time to willingly share my own insecurity with my wife). If necessary, seek professional counselling yourself.
- Decrease vulnerability by practicing healthy self care. Regularly exercise. Have good communication with your spouse and children. Remember: Your life is bigger than your work. Self care is not equal to selfishness.

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