



Managing Temptation

by Scott Stanley

When Bob planted a garden, he put up little hedges all around the perimeter of his yard to help keep out pests that would eat the prized vegetables he worked so hard to nurture. His efforts proved successful.

Within marriage, barriers must also be erected to protect the "garden of marital bliss" that you are trying hard to build. These barriers, which help keep out unwanted intruders, especially during times of temptation to be unfaithful, will, like Bob's hedges, protect the marriage that God gave you.

When you or your spouse feels tempted to cheat, either through participating in some online forum that promotes infidelity or flirting with a coworker, these barriers can protect the marriage that God gave you. And like Bob, you'll reap the benefits of a well-tended garden of marital love.

We have some great ideas for you on what kind of hedges or boundaries you can erect to keep your marriage thriving, healthy and safe from the dangers of temptation and extra-marital affairs.

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Is the Grass Really Greener?

In marriage, it's important to guard yourself against greener grass fantasies and temptations.

by Scott Stanley

When you pick one path, it's natural to wonder about the others, especially if the path you've chosen gets rocky. In marriage, maybes and what-ifs are most dangerous when your commitment to your marriage is lagging and the person you're thinking of is available (that is, single or in the process of divorce).

Cindy and Martin — and Frank

Cindy and Martin had been married for 12 years. They had three children between the ages of five and nine. Like most couples, they'd had their ups and downs, but basically their marriage was good.

Then Martin, a salesman, was made a district manager and had to start traveling more. The new work left him tired and less available to the family. This caused Cindy to be stressed and unhappy. And because both she and Martin were busier than ever, they stopped going out together and became increasingly irritable with each other.

During this period Cindy, a pharmacist, began to talk more and more with her coworker Frank. She and Frank, who was attractive and divorced, had been working together for five years and had grown to appreciate each other as friends. As Cindy became more unhappy at home, she became increasingly happy to share her thoughts and feelings at work with Frank. Frank really listened to her and understood the stress she was under.

Cindy soon realized that her attraction to Frank was growing beyond mere friendship. She liked feeling what she felt, but it also scared her. *After all, I'm married to Martin, not to Frank*, she reflected. But Frank seemed very interested in her. She wondered if they would date if she left Frank, and started to play various scenarios over and over in her mind.

Like Cindy, you have the choice either to dwell on the what-ifs or to put that energy into nurturing your marriage and making it as rich as possible. The remaining parts of this article cover specific strategies for protecting your marriage from attractive alternatives.

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The New Workplace Romance

The workplace is the No. 1 spot for married individuals to meet affair partners.

by Scott Stanley

How budding workplace relationships are causing a "crisis of infidelity"

Today's workplace has become the No. 1 spot for married individuals to meet affair partners. More men and women are breaking their marriage vows by engaging in office friendships that slowly become romantic relationships — relationships that would have been socially impossible just 20 years ago. As the boundaries that once separated the sexes crumble, so do the boundaries that protect marriage.

In her book *Not 'Just Friends'*, Dr. Shirley Glass says, "The new infidelity is between people who unwittingly form deep, passionate connections before realizing that they've crossed the line from platonic friendship into romantic love. Eighty-two percent of the 210 unfaithful partners I've treated have had an affair with someone who was, at first, 'just a friend.'" From 1991 to 2000, Glass discovered in her practice that 50 percent of the unfaithful women and about 62 percent of unfaithful men she treated were involved with someone from work. "Today's workplace has become the new danger zone of romantic attraction and opportunity," Glass writes.

Today's careers offer more opportunity for extramarital affairs. Group interaction in coed workplaces, frequent travel and long hours create more opportunity and temptation than ever. Glass writes, "all of these changes and others allow individuals to mix freely where once they were segregated and restricted." Studies published in the *American Sociological Review* and the *Journal of Marriage and Family* show that before 1985, divorce rates were about equal among working and homemaking women; however, "between 1985 and 1992, the annual probability of divorce among employed wives exceeded that for nonemployed wives by 40 percent."

New Kind of Affair

A different work environment has spawned a different kind of affair. Glass says the old idea of workplace romance between a powerful company executive and his single young secretary no longer reflects today's office relationship. The new infidelity occurs between peers who first become emotionally attached, having no thought of physical involvement. Men and women who work closely together under stressful conditions can quickly become attracted to each other. They often share interests and think nothing of spending time over coffee or lunch getting to know one another. Nevertheless, lunch between married friends, no matter what their intentions, can have unanticipated and dangerous consequences.

One researcher calls this new kind of affair the "cup of coffee" syndrome. Men and women begin with safe marriages at home and friendships at work. As they regularly meet for coffee breaks and lunch, these relationships develop into deep friendships. Coworkers come to depend on these coffee rendezvous, and soon they have emotional work friendships and crumbling marriages.

Oddly, men and women in these workplace romances believe it is wrong to have an affair. According to Glass, affair partners are usually happy in their marriages and have no plans to leave their spouses. Because of the gradual slide toward infidelity, partners do not pay attention to their behavior until they have already damaged their marriages, and sex is often the last sign that the marriage partner has been betrayed.

Protecting the Marriage

Though today's workplace offers more opportunity for extramarital relationships, it is not opportunity that is causing the workplace to become such a hotspot of infidelity. Healthy marriages must have proper boundaries. "In a committed relationship, a couple constructs a wall that shields them from any outside forces that have the power to split them," Glass writes. Referring to a particular couple, she adds, "The problem wasn't that they were attracted, but that they began to act on their feelings as if they had no other primary commitments."

Good intentions are not enough to protect a marriage from the temptations in today's workplace, to which both men and women fall prey. It is natural to feel an attraction toward someone of the opposite sex, even in happy marriages. But when a man neglects his primary responsibility and allows himself to act on an instinctive attraction — even in his thoughts — he has already violated his marriage vows.

Though many factors can play a role in causing infidelity, it always requires attraction, opportunity, and failure to follow precautions. Glass provides some basic rules to help avoid the new infidelity:

- Don't allow yourself to think about being with another person, because thoughts lead to actions.
- Don't flirt, because it tells others you are available.
- Stay away from dangerous situations, because everyone is fallen and can be tempted.

Positive Friendships, Proper Boundaries

Boundaries should always exist outside the marriage relationship and never inside. One way to make sure that your boundaries are in the right place is to always be accountable to your partner. Use a shared e-mail address and contact each other throughout the day. Be open with your spouse about work friendships, and even invite work friends to your home for dinner. By maintaining openness inside the marriage and boundaries outside, you will help keep your marriage happy and healthy.

Friends can provide great encouragement and accountability in your marriage. All of your friends should be friends of your marriage, too. In an interview, Mary White, wife of The Navigators president, Jerry White, said, "We shouldn't be exclusive in our friendships with our partners. A marriage is strengthened when you have other strong, supportive friendships in your lives." White says she is concerned that too many Christian couples turn exclusively to their marriage for friendship.

No matter what kind of friendships you have, they should always help strengthen your marriage. When couples observe proper boundaries, their marriages are secure, open and comforting. Then, friendships pose no danger. Marriage, like a relationship with God, works best when it enters every corner of life. Secrecy and infidelity are impossible when we are completely transparent within our marriage. This transparency not only protects our marriage from harm on the outside, it keeps our marriage happiest on the inside.

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Looking for Weeds and Noticing Your Green Grass

When you are attracted to another, use these two strategies to protect yourself and your marriage.

by Scott Stanley

When you are attracted to another, you can do two things to protect yourself if you understand that your perception is biased.

First, think seriously about what's not right with the alternative. One obvious point is that you are not married to the person. Also, you, your mate, your children, and others would feel pain — and probably great loss — if you did not make the right choice.

You can also look for more specific negatives about the person. Perhaps he or she doesn't share your views on important issues such as faith, child rearing and lifestyle. Perhaps the other person doesn't handle money well or hasn't been responsible in his or her marriage. You don't have to demean the person, but finding the negatives will help you gain an accurate perspective and move toward appreciating what you have.

The second strategy is to think about your mate's positives and the positives in your marriage. Consider more carefully the good parts of your lawn. Very likely you and your mate have many good things together, but you may have lost track of them if your marriage has been neglected. You may want to pull out old photos and other memorabilia to help you remember what was, and likely still is, good. If you are at a low point in your marriage, be extra careful not to give in to the tendency to rewrite history and convince yourself that the positives were never there in the first place.

By using the two strategies, Cindy started to fight back against the thoughts about greener grass. Her dedication gave rise to her will to fight.

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Understanding Biased Perceptions

If you are seriously attracted to someone other than your spouse, chances are you're seeing that person in an unrealistic light.

by Scott Stanley

Let's go back now to Cindy, Martin and Frank. Cindy had become very attracted to Frank. He offered a refuge from the pain and distance Cindy was feeling in her marriage. She became focused on what Frank did well that Martin either did not do so well or had not done recently. That's what happens when you think seriously about alternatives: you become focused on the things that the alternative appears to offer, usually failing to think clearly about the things you already have in your mate or that the alternative does not have. Hence, your perception becomes skewed.

While Cindy was thinking that Frank might have more to offer her than Martin, the truth was that Cindy and Frank were on their best behavior with each other. They didn't have to work out budgets, discipline kids, clean up the kitchen together, or do anything hard. They could just listen and talk as friends. But it wasn't real life, and it wasn't a fair comparison. Cindy was actually more compatible with Martin, but she had lost touch with him.

You won't get far battling the temptation of alternatives if you don't recognize and accept your built-in bias. You have to push yourself to doubt your certainty that someone else could be as good or better for you. Even if you can't find anything wrong with that person, you need to recognize the importance of the promise you made before your mate, your friends, probably before your family, and before God. The promise you made is serious stuff.

If you are currently attracted to someone else but you are committed to your marriage, take a hard look at how your perceptions of the other person may be biased. If the attraction is a serious threat, ask a close friend you trust to challenge you to build and maintain your commitment to your spouse.

One note here before we move on: although it is often biased perception that makes an alternative seem more

satisfying, it is possible to become attracted to someone who actually would be more satisfying to you than your mate. There may be something missing in your marriage that you desperately want, and although it might develop later, it also might not. It's painful to have this realization. It can also make you resentful and angry. If that's your situation, it's better to acknowledge it and grieve for the loss rather than letting it erode your dedication to your mate. Otherwise, you could lose all you have built together.

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Taking Care of Your Own Lawn

A fulfilling marriage does not drop from heaven into your lap. It becomes fulfilling when it's tended like a beautiful garden.

by *Scott Stanley*

If you take really good care of the lawn where you live, the odds go down that you'll have to deal with being attracted to alternatives. Most people are less aware of alternatives when they're happy at home. It's not enough to have a fence around your lawn that protects it from the outside. You have to work within the fence to make the lawn green and lush.

To fully protect your commitment to your marriage, you need to consistently nurture your lawn. Water it, fertilize it, rake it, trim it carefully; pull some weeds. Most lawns — though not all, I admit — respond well to tender love and care. There's often a lot of life left in even the deadest-looking lawns. But you have to bring it out. And that takes making choices and following priorities. By sanctifying time for fun, friendship, spiritual connection, physical intimacy, and all the other things that bond you and your spouse, you'll be taking care of your lawn as well as you can.

A fulfilling marriage does not drop from heaven into your lap. It becomes fulfilling when it's tended like a beautiful garden. It won't be perfect, no matter what you do. We live in a difficult and fallen world, and we all have challenges. Because of that, the things that matter most require attention. Keeping your marriage strong and growing takes time and attention — it takes making your marriage a priority.

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Additional resources addressing sex and intimacy in marriage

Scott Stanley

Popular questions on this topic:

- [Do you think women should seek to meet some of their emotional needs outside of marriage?](#)
- [How can I keep from feeling that it's my fault my wife left me?](#)

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- [Hedges](#)
- [Escaping the Lure of Infidelity I-II](#)
- [Five Essentials for Lifelong Intimacy](#)

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 - [Building a Pure Marriage](#)
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