



Dealing with the Aftermath of Sexual Sin

Excerpt: *From Ashes to Beauty* by Jeff Colón

It was May 4, 1991. The sky was painted a heavenly blue and accented with lazy white clouds. The early spring foliage was a rich green, and even the air seemed fresh and clean in New York City that morning. It was the beautiful, pristine kind of day couples dream about for their marriage ceremony. Rose, my wife to be, stood hand in hand with me at the altar. As we expressed our wedding vows to one another, I looked into her eyes and I could see the same bright hopefulness and expectation that every bride has on her wedding day.

Her hopes were anchored in the belief that I would love and cherish her and meet her needs. She had expectations that I would provide and care for her, and give her a life of happiness with abundant blessings. Isn't that what we all expect from our marriage? Isn't our mate supposed to complete and fulfill us, and to make all of our dreams come true? Isn't that how all of the storybook romances end, and shouldn't we, too, expect to live happily ever after?

Nevertheless, it only took a few weeks before our fairy tale crumbled as my twelve-year history of sexual sin and drug abuse resurfaced...

Internet pornography and sexual sin has flourished in the Church in recent years, destroying innumerable marriages in the process. In an online poll of 10,000 Christians conducted by Focus on the Family several years ago, 47% stated that pornography had been a problem in their home. No doubt this onslaught of sexual sin has played a part in the fact that the divorce rate within Christian homes is hovering around 50% —about the same as the rest of our nation. Commenting on this phenomenon, Barna Project director Meg Flammang said: "We would love to be able to report that Christians are living very distinct lives and impacting the community, but in the area of divorce rates they continue to be the same."^[i] Christians divorcing at the same rate as unbelievers? Is it possible that we can do no better than the unbelieving world in dealing with our problems?

My own marriage could have easily become one of those statistics. Rose had every reason to divorce me, and she most certainly would have if God had not intervened and performed a miracle. That was over 15 years ago. Since then, I have been privileged to witness countless marriages lifted from the ash heap and transformed into beautiful representations of God's love and forgiveness. That's what can happen when both husband and wife live in repentance and appropriate God's tremendous promises for their lives.

Building Blocks of Restoration

In his book, *At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry*, Steve Gallagher wrote, "The beatitudes contain all that is involved in the process of transformation. Those seven verses, Matthew 5:3-9, describe how a person is prepared for repentance, how it unfolds, and the life that accompanies it."^[ii] In the same way that

those seven blessings provide a road to spiritual recovery for a life ruined by sin, so too they provide a blueprint for the restoration of a marriage devastated by sin. Let's take a cursory look at how this process unfolds.

Before this rebuilding process can begin, there must first be a solid foundation. Thus this building project must begin with *poverty of spirit*. God must bring both spouses to an end of their own resources, abilities and strengths in order to accomplish His work in their lives. It is as they stand empty-handed at the foot of the Cross, that He is able to begin the work of rebuilding their lives and marriage.

The first place the Lord begins this marvelous restorative work is teaching each spouse how to focus on his or her own failures, rather than on those of their mate. This awareness of one's sinfulness brings about a sense of godly sorrow: *blessed are those who mourn*. As each spouse acknowledges and repents over their own sin, they become compassionate toward their mate's struggles. This new camaraderie further strengthens the foundation within the marital relationship.

Sinful behavior, and the marital problems that result from it, are ultimately rooted in a lack of submission to God's authority. But the repentance that comes about through godly sorrow humbles the person into a state of *meekness*: a subjection of one's will to the will of Another. As both spouses begin to obey and to actually live God's Word, a new atmosphere fills their home. Mutual support and camaraderie replace the selfishness, defensiveness and finger-pointing.

Inevitably, meekness begets *a hunger for righteousness*. As the couple grows in their desire to please God, Christ is able to reign in the center of the marriage. This new mindset will cause the couple to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Couples will need to examine their priorities in life, including how they invest their time and resources. God can only bless a marriage that is in line with His desires. Ultimately, a marriage can only glorify God when both spouses hunger and thirst to be like Jesus.

It is the *merciful* who are promised mercy from God. Most marital problems arise from a selfish preoccupation with one's own rights and desires. However, the process of repentance found in the Beatitudes brings people into the love of God, and this is especially true in the marriage setting. Consequently, rather than each spouse settling into a selfish preoccupation with their own rights and desires, they both learn to consider the needs of the other. "It is more blessed to give than to receive," said Jesus. (Acts 20:34) One of those blessings is that the more each mate shows mercy to the other, the more they are sure to receive in return.

By this point in the process, another fruit of repentance, purity of heart, will emerge. Not only will the *pure in heart* see God, as the beatitude promises, but they will also enjoy freedom from controlling sin. The effects of habitual sin on the marriage are deep and pervasive. As both spouses proceed through the process of repentance, however, sinful attitudes are exposed in the Light. Issues that are buried deep within the heart come to the surface and are dealt with. Little by little their hearts will become purified and they will gain a greater sight of God. What is happening in their individual hearts will also be expressed in the marriage.

Finally, as a couple allows the first six spiritual truths to be worked into them, this last beatitude simply arises as the culmination of all the others in God's transforming process. The closer a person comes to Christ, the more he or she will become what Jesus called a *peacemaker*. Where once strife and disunity permeated the marriage, the couple is now able to reconcile differences and enjoy godly

communication with each other. Harmony in the marital relationship is the crowning fruit of a life of repentance.

Following the Map

Sometimes when we come to God for help, His answers are not what we want to hear. There were times the Pharisees were so frustrated with Jesus' answers that they were ready to kill Him. It takes humility to hear and receive a "hard word." Most couples who have come to Rose and me for counseling through the years have come expressly looking for solutions to their marital problems. Many times, however, what we tell them doesn't sit well with them. Some couples are interested only in a temporal fix for their marriage while God is interested in building His kingdom.

In order to overcome the issues and obstacles that lie ahead, you have to commit yourself to doing things God's way. Rose and I have been counseling for nearly 15 years and are still amazed at the level of resistance we face from Christians who claim to believe the Word of God. In spite of the fact that our counseling is all based in Scripture, it is amazing how often people respond with statements like, "God wouldn't expect me to do that," or "That's not what Dr. So-and-So wrote in his book." Still others protest, "You don't understand what I have been through." It grieves me to hear these kinds of responses, because I know these people are only evading and prolonging what God needs to do for them.

Sometimes professing Christians look at the words of Jesus and conclude that they are either too hard to follow, or too simple to work. Nevertheless, they are the words of the One who spoke the universe into existence. He is the One who sustains all things by His Word; the One who is the wisdom of God; the One who is the way, the truth and the life; and the One who will bring all things into judgment. What could be more important than conforming our lives and marriages to His Word? Whose opinion can we regard above His?

To put it bluntly, marriages fail because people are unwilling to conform their lives to God's Word. I can tell you that if Rose was determined to take the easy route, we would have ended up in divorce court. There was even a time when I thought divorce was the preferable route. Restoring a marriage is difficult, and the work of restoration nearly always goes against the grain of our natural tendencies. Winning this battle requires people to consistently do things that are uncomfortable.

Yet, if Rose and I had not followed the principles outlined in this book, we would not be where we are today. When we were simply trying to obey the Lord, we had no idea how He would one day use us to help others. We only knew that we needed to be conformed into the likeness of Jesus.

The marriages that we have seen make it through this process are the ones where the couples have embraced the Cross. Please, beloved reader, keep an open mind and a willing heart from the outset; God is calling you to something better than what you can imagine.

^[i] Meg Flammang, Barna Project http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_dira.htm

^[ii] Steve Gallagher *At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry* p. 199.

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