

With the recent disclosure of New York's current governor having multiple infidelities and of the immediate past governor having long-term involvement with prostitutes, the media is flooding the print and the airwaves with articles and stories on infidelity and marriage.

In a recent article in the *New York Times* about the sexual dalliances of politicians, Frank Bruni muses, *Scorn was the reaction of many people, while many others reveled in a sense of righteous superiority. But among some I sensed a different, more anxious response to the jarring revelations or accusations It was this: are the rest of us idling in the sexual slow lane? Come to think of it, are we even traveling the same highway?*

Many or the "experts" eventually distill their commentary to the animal instincts in humans and the unreasonableness of expecting faithfulness in marriage. Yet **marital fidelity continues to be an overwhelmingly agreed upon value** in American culture. A Gallup Poll released May 2006 found that only **4% of all adults believe that adultery is morally acceptable**. That means that 96% value fidelity in marriage, another validation that Hollywood does not reflect the same values.

How many Americans are sexually unfaithful during marriage? According to research released in March 2006 by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, **22% of men and 13% of women** have ever had sexual relations with a person other than their spouse while they were married.

Why is faithfulness in marriage such a commonly held value? I have to believe that the value has **a lot to do with honesty and loyalty in marriage, in feeling valued and loved above all others.**

If a person is married and gets involved in a close relationship with someone of the opposite sex, he often becomes confused emotionally and even spiritually. He may think that person offers something he doesn't have at home with his mate. And she does She offers a flight from reality—but **one day the flight crashes**—whether it crashes in front of the whole country or if crashes in the eyes of a child who can't understand why mommy and daddy aren't both here together anymore or in the drudgery of learning how to be a single mom or dad or in the mundaneness of learning to pay bills and clean house with a new spouse. But **eventually the fantasy of an affair does disintegrate.**

Some people think that infidelity is the end of the marriage, but it doesn't have to be. Dave Carder in his book, *Torn Asunder*, says *Infidelity is much like a wildfire that destroys a preserve and all living things in it. But a wildfire also burns away the debris and the underbrush choking the forest's new growth. Though infidelity initially devastates a relationship, a marriage can not only recover from adultery, but flourish after it. The process takes time, a safe environment, appropriate nurture, lots of patience, and God's grace. It is a time of vital personal growth for both spouses.*

A significant dynamic is overlooked in this discussion on marital fidelity – what is the purpose of marriage? Why remain faithful

in marriage? **What is the value of the vow we took when we married?** Marriage is much more than satisfying sexual desires or finding happiness or even having someone to love us.

In the 2004 movie, *Shall We Dance*, an accountant grows increasingly bored with his life and spying a beautiful dance teacher, decides to take some lessons to spice up his life. He didn't tell his wife about the lessons. At one point she realizes that he isn't telling her everything about what is going on in his life. She has a private investigator follow him and finding out about his dance lessons; he is not having an affair. The private investigator has failed at marriage and love and is very skeptical about the whole concept. The wife of the accountant talks to him about what marriage really is to her, ***We need a witness to our lives. There's a billion people on the planet. What does any one life really mean? But in a marriage, you're promising to care about everything. The good things, the bad things, the terrible things, the mundane things... all of it, all of the time, every day. You're saying 'Your life will not go unnoticed because I will notice it. Your life will not go un-witnessed because I will be your witness.'***

Marriage is about a life-long journey, a companion who will witness your life. But even more, it is a refining process. Problem is – most of us don't want to be refined. A successful marriage **refines out the selfishness**. It teaches us **to look out for the best of another person at all times, every day, in every way**. Marriage shows us **what acceptance looks like**, someone who loves you no matter how bad you look in the morning, no matter how grouchy you are after a discouraging day, whether you notice their new hairdo or not, whether you need time alone or are clinging on for affection. Marriage **teaches us how to forgive** – how to let go of the past, how to put away a desire to up the score on repaying one offense with another. Marriage **teaches us about respect**, how to treat others, especially in front of others, how to show value to another when he needs it the most. And marriage makes it possible for **the process to be repeated in other lives.**

One reason God gives us families is that they are laboratories for loving, schools of grace. We can accept God's forgiveness for our failings and let ourselves be bearers of grace to each other. We can bring a chastened, tender humility to our relationships. Claudia DeVries Beversluis

Marriage shows us **how to sacrifice for the best of another, how to keep the vows that we made, how to live in a covenant relationship**—a relationship that is unbreakable. *A covenant cannot be terminated. It can only be violated.* (Ross T. Bender)

Most of all, marriage can teach us about God.

Your marriage is more than a sacred covenant with another person. It is a spiritual discipline designed to help you know God better, trust him more fully, and love him more deeply.

(Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*)