

INFIDELITY ALERT:

ELEVATED

Deception and destruction mark inappropriate relationships

By Gary Bruegman

Due to the catastrophic events of 9/11, it's not unusual these days to turn on the television set and see flashing across the screen the words "Terror Alert: Elevated." The damage and destruction that previously occurred from not being properly warned has motivated an on-going alert system to prevent any future devastation.

How many of us really take these warnings seriously? We too often hear the words "if we had only known," "if someone would have just told us" or "if we had only listened."

Marriages and relationships that begin strong, with the greatest of faith and intention, continue to fail at an alarming rate of speed with little warning or explanation as to what just happened. When dealing with emotional or physical infidelity, a low level threat can quickly turn into the strong possibility of indescribable heartache and destruction.

What God intends for good in a relationship, the enemy subtly and often successfully works for destruction. Just when you think your relationship is safe and secure, deception begins and ultimately destruction prevails.

The most deceptive part of emotional or physical infidelity is our inability or refusal to see the warning signs. Many people engaged in inappropriate relationships, whether in work, church or social settings, will tell you it was never their intention

"to cross the line."

People who have already "blown it" will tell you they ignored the warning signs along the way before finding themselves stuck in something that seemed inescapable. Pay attention to the warning signs now! It may save your life.

Warning signs

- You consistently look forward to spending time with someone who isn't your spouse.
- You begin to dress up and care more about your personal appearance when you know you will be seeing that person.
- You begin to become aware of the cologne or perfume you are wearing and begin to think about attracting the other person.
- You create ways to "bump into" or "coincidentally" run across the other person, going to great lengths to know his or her daily/weekly routine.
- You create and embellish life experiences in conversation in order to keep the other person's attention.
- You look for opportunities to be alone with that person.
- You find yourself mentally comparing that person with your spouse, wishing your spouse was more like him/her.
- You fantasize about that person.
- You begin looking for verbal and physical cues to confirm his/her interest in you.
- You find yourself making negative or unflattering comments

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about your spouse in front of that person.

- You begin to notice all your spouse's negative traits, rather than his/her positive ones.

If two or more of the above statements are occurring you have reason to be concerned.

Once on the road to infidelity, the slope downward is very slippery.

One of the most important steps toward removing yourself from an inappropriate relationship is to recognize that you have already "crossed the line," even if the other person is completely unaware of your intentions (Proverbs 23:7). Chances are high that major damage is occurring, or is about to happen.

So how do you stop?

Here are some recommended steps to consider when attempting to remove yourself from a highly dangerous relationship:

- Seek to understand what the Word of God says about inappropriate relationships (1 Corinthians 6:18).
- Retrain your mind to redirect your thoughts toward your spouse.
 - "Renewing your mind" (Romans 12:2).
 - "Think on those things above" (Philippians 4:8).
- Recognize that personal needs are being met through an inappropriate relationship.
- Evaluate what's missing in

your life. What needs are you attempting to fill through that other person? Seek to meet those needs in a healthy way without that person.

- Partner with God as your greatest source!
- Reverse the messages sent to the other person by making

positive comments about your spouse.

- Keep your eye contact, tone of voice, and conversation very "business-like" with that person.
- Write a list of the damaging consequences, should you continue in the inappropriate relationship: i.e., broken home; heartbroken children; disobedience to God's Word; or loss of job, ministry, income, reputation, etc.

• Be sure your sins will find you out. As much as you might think you can keep it a secret, God has a way of bringing sin out into the open if you don't repent and change your ways.

- Pray that you not be tempted!
- Stay away from that person as much as possible, and never be alone with him or her.
- Be willing to become accountable and open to people in your life whom you highly respect and trust.
- Take heed to the pathway and lifestyle of others who have chosen to take that journey. Learn from their mistakes, and

in doing so avoid your own personal peril.

Words of regret

The word "regret" is often used to describe the overwhelming feeling that accompanies one's involvement in inappropriate relationships. Those of us who counsel individuals and couples in marriage crisis are in the position to see the crippling devastation that occurs as a result of wrong choices.

It is tragic to watch this take place in the lives of good people who weren't careful and didn't heed the warning signs. We hear:

"If I had only known how many people would be hurt by my choices."

"If I had realized the personal pain I'd be living with day after day, I would have never done what I did."

"I should have never been careless about being alone with that business partner or wrongfully engaged in an emotionally charged conversation."

"I should have immediately addressed the gradual distancing occurring in my marriage that resulted in an indescribable loneliness and sought every available resource to assist me."

The challenge is to recognize the seriousness of where you are and where it leads. Once on the road to infidelity, the slope downward is very slippery.

Screech to a halt now. Reverse any inappropriate signals you've been sending. Head in the direction of obedience to the Lord and experience a future of blessing rather than the prospect of defeat. **tpe**

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