

## Before You Cheat

It seems that every few months or so we learn of another celebrity caught cheating on his or her spouse. To say adultery is an epidemic in our current culture is an understatement. And it doesn't seem to be a respecter of position. Regardless of what we do for a living, cheaters are in our midst. It seems to be so prevalent today that the question isn't who is cheating but rather — who isn't?

Too many treat their most important relationships casually and their commitments to them as optional. Our microwave society mentality (quick and easy) has infiltrated our most sacred institution — marriage. Many cheaters try to justify their reasons for infidelity. To a cheater, their reasons make sense. Perfect sense. To those who have never strayed they just don't understand why.

Our thirst for affairs has become so accepted and normal in our culture that most shows on television mention an infidelity reference somewhere throughout the episode. Not to be outdone, we even have a reality show (called Cheaters) that is designed to reveal an indiscretion and exploit the humiliation on national television. Honestly, I'm not sure which is worse — the immoral action of the cheater or the people who produce the show. The fact that the series is in its 12th season is an indictment against us. I'm not sure which is more devastating — discovering your lover's unfaithfulness or discovering the crushing news at the same time as the train-wreck watching public. We live in a very sad day and age.

I have seen first-hand the destruction of adultery. Cheating devastates relationships and shatters dreams. If you have entertained the idea of cheating on your spouse or significant other, let this serve as your official warning. Your handsome boss, cute secretary, or sultry neighbor comes with a price tag that you can't afford. Before you cheat here are 13 facts you really need to know.

1. You will become a liar. It's bad enough to bear the title of "Cheater," but if you cheat, you will also wear the hat of "Liar." Cheating cannot occur without deceit on some level and normally the white lies in the beginning become full-fledged lies at the end. "I'm working late at the office tonight" may be a half-truth but you'll need to redefine the word "working" to silence your compromised conscience. Cheating and lying go hand in hand (Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9)
2. You will get caught. It may not be today. It may not be tomorrow. But eventually, your affair will come to light (Numbers 32:23; Job 12:22). Your world will come crashing down on you. If you are fortunate, your indiscretion may avoid a public display, but your circle of friends will know your deeds. And everyone likes to share juicy news. Your poor decision will become as obvious as a billboard. It's not a matter of if but when. As the Chinese proverb goes, "If you don't want anyone to know it, don't do it."

3. You will disappoint everyone. Everyone. Your spouse. Your friends. Your co-workers. Your God. Your parents. Your nephew. Your children. Yourself. The disappointment you cause will be like the stench of skunks and it will take a long time to remove the smell.
4. You will be a bad example. Everyone is either a good example or a bad example in everything we do (cp. 1 Timothy 4:12). Cheating is a not only a very bad example in relationships but brings with it a cloud of doubt that hovers over you in other areas of your life. If you cheated in one area, would you cheat in another? Cheating communicates to everyone that you took the easy road. It tells others that you were willing to cut corners in your most primary relationship. No one ever admires a cheater. No one looks up to an adulterer. Even if you did a lifetime of good, this one bad deed can erase it all and condemn you (Jude 7).
5. You will lose your moral authority. It's hard to tell your children (or others) to be righteous when they know you weren't. Saying "Do as I say, not as I do" is the fastest way to lose the respect of others (Matthew 23:2-3). Every moral judgment you make in the future will be weighed against your adulterous action of the past. It doesn't mean you can't speak the truth in the future, it just means that few will listen to you (Matthew 5:13-14).
6. You will create trust issues for your spouse. Forever. You will single-handedly damage the precious self-esteem of the one you promised to love. Every relationship they have after you will be one that they struggle to trust. If that were not enough, you will rock the world of children and cause them to question the stability of every meaningful relationship they have. For children, their parents relationship is their anchor and cheating cuts the line.
7. You will lose your standard of living. Depending on what you do for a living, you may lose your job. Many lose their home. Most end up with enormous court fees since cheating is usually the precursor to divorce. Betrayed spouses have a way of making you pay and that payment is always expensive. Every check you write is a constant reminder of your foolishness.
8. You will spend years trying to rebuild your life. Literally years. Even if you somehow weathered the storm financially, you will find it takes years for you to recover emotionally. It takes years for you to restore certain friendships, if you even do. It takes years for you to rebuild your character. It takes years to rebuild trust. It takes years to truly forgive yourself.
9. You will lose relationships. You will lose a LOT of relationships. Lifelong friends will walk away. Close friends that you have helped countless times will not be around to help you. Even some family members who are supposed to love you no matter what will vanish. A cheater can end up living a very lonely life. It's hard for many people who used to call you friend to get past that skunk smell of disappointment.

10. The grass is not greener on the other side. The “grass is greener” idea is a common misconception. Because we have never been on that grass, we assume it must be better than where we currently stand. It’s not. In fact, though it may look greener from a distance — once you get there and make yourself comfortable, something interesting happens — the grass changes color. This usually happens soon after you get caught. You will then see that patch of land differently. You will also have a strange desire for the green grass you left ... except now it is burned and won’t let you back. The best way to enjoy green grass is to water your own yard.
11. Would you want this done to you? Thieves like to steal wallets but hate when it’s done to them. If we all lived by the golden rule (“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets,” Matthew 7:12), most of life’s problems would be solved overnight. Think about this action as if it were being done to you. The problem is that it requires thought, and thinking is often the last concern a cheater has on his/her mind.
12. You will eventually regret this decision. In the heat of the moment, cheating appears to make sense. It feels good and sometimes even feels right. Feelings are deceitful. Soon afterward, your eyes will be opened and you will regret that you ever partook of the forbidden fruit (cp. Genesis 3:6-7). Don’t we all have enough regrets in our lives? Why add another one — particularly one that can only destroy everything you have worked so hard to build? Your home may not be perfect but it sure beats living in a tent.
13. The pain outweighs the gain. No one ever says from their deathbed, “I wish I would have had an affair.” No one ever leaves their lawyer’s office with a smile on their face — grateful for the experience. No one loses dear friends and is glad they have one less Christmas card to receive this year. The loss is immeasurable. The pain can be unbearable. Entire kingdoms can be lost for a few minutes of pleasure. It is just not worth it. In November 2008 I looked in the mirror and did not like what I saw. I was finally at the point where I was willing to admit the dark side of my soul. Days later, I confessed to my wife, children, and church that I had been unfaithful. Needless to say, it was the most difficult series of conversations I have ever had in my life. There is no pain like watching people you love sob in tears because of your selfish actions. Within one year, I had lost everything dear and precious to me.

The 13 points above come from an extremely painful personal experience. Truly Solomon was right when he wrote to the man contemplating adultery: “Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death” (Proverbs 7:25-27). I know what it’s like to fall and not be able to get up. Over the last several years, I have accumulated many scars and now try to learn from each and everyone of them. I have hit “rock bottom” and realized something amazing in the process. God is still here, even if others are not.

That’s my story. Chapters are still being written. It’s not easy to share but as I read the Bible with a humble set of eyes, I see that it is filled with great men and women who

have fallen in some pretty big ways. With the proper repentance and the blood of Christ, God forgives them and uses them in spite of their past.

Adapted from Rod Arters