

*This short article is adapted from material New Creation Ministries uses to train leaders. If you work with individuals or groups struggling with sexual brokenness you may find this information helpful. If you are a struggler or the spouse of a struggler you may find some practical guidance here for yourself. If you are in any of these categories it is strongly advised that you do not treat this information as mere data to add to your “recovery knowledge.” It is crucial that you apply it conscientiously with the help of wise counsel.*  
-R.W.

## **Why marital disclosure is crucial but marital interrogation will destroy you and your spouse**

*What should disclosure include?* Generally speaking the disclosure should acknowledge all the major ways the offending spouse has acted out and betrayed their partner. It needs to give the betrayed spouse enough information to know how many sexual contacts there have been, whether they were one-night stands or long-running affairs. Were they with men or with women? Was it intercourse or something different? Did it involve someone at work? Someone the spouse knows? Was it one year ago or one week ago?

As painful as this information is to share (and hear) it is important to deal in truth so the injured spouse can know exactly what they are up against. The injured spouse needs to know if there was a sexual encounter in a family vehicle, in the family home, at the family cabin, etc. Yes, this will likely traumatize the innocent spouse and may prompt them to want to sell that car or move out of that house, etc. But it is always better to be upfront about things like this than for her to find out that she just made love to her husband in the same bed he had a prostitute in.

As awful as it is to voluntarily disclose such information it is far worse for it to be discovered later by accident or to slip out in conversation. When that happens it feels like a “double lie.” What little trust may have been restored up to that point is completely demolished and it appears that any work the offending spouse has done in the meantime was just an act (no matter how genuine it may have been). Scripture promises: “You may be sure that your sin will find you out (Nu 32:23 NLT).” Keeping secrets just isn’t worth it!

*What should the disclosure leave out?* During the disclosure the spouse may ask follow-up questions. This is understandable. In fact, you should expect it and prepare the offending spouse for this likelihood. Questions that fill in the rest of the story are okay to answer (for instance, “When we were on vacation and you were on your cell phone all that time

—were you talking to *her*?” Or, “Those extra charges on our credit card statement, those weren’t business expenses *were* they?”).

The spouse has a right to know what reality is so she can reconstruct the missing or confusing parts of her past. But there are times when a spouse’s morbid curiosity gets the better of her. She may then ask questions for which she demands answers. But these particular questions will do her no good whatsoever. She may ask questions like:

- Was she younger than me?
- Was she prettier than me?
- What color hair did she have?
- Was she thinner than I am?
- Was she Black, Asian, Hispanic?
- Did she like to do\_\_\_\_\_ in bed?
- Did she have bigger breasts than I do?

No matter how much pressure a spouse puts on a husband to answer questions like this they never promote healing or *helpful* transparency. They only embed images in the spouse’s mind that will haunt her the rest of her life (as if she doesn’t have enough already). Once the offending spouse answers these types of questions the wounded spouse can never “unhear” it.

We are commanded to speak the truth. But there is one rule that Scripture puts on truth-telling; Ephesians 4:15 says we are to speak the truth “in love.” There is nothing loving about giving someone information that is guaranteed to needlessly harm them and plant evil thoughts in their mind that have no redeeming value at all. A husband may think he is being heroic if he shares everything. But in this instance he wouldn’t be heroic, he would be cowardly.

Some husbands finally cave in to their wife’s incessant pleading. They might even be deceived into thinking their wife will finally have peace if she just knows the answer to this particular question (like one of the questions just mentioned). But it never ends with that question. That question is always followed by another, and then another.

Keep in mind the questions regard details that are of no help to the healing process (sexual positions? Did she wear lingerie? Specific words used in sex? etc.). The spouse may even

say that without detailed answers to these questions she will never be able to trust her husband again. Or a failure to get these specific answers is “proof” to her that her husband is still lying, not trustworthy, etc. And because of this (she may insist) she will have no choice but to end all efforts toward reconciliation.

This is one area where you as the counselor must exercise strong leadership. If you cave in, if the wife will not let it go or the husband breaks under pressure a literal Pandora’s box gets opened. At that point (depending on how obsessive/compulsive the wife is) she may continue with the questioning. If the husband tries to draw a boundary she may say, “You answered my *last* question—why are you holding out on this one?”

The fact is he should have never answered the last question (we’ve heard many husbands regretfully acknowledge this afterward) but since he did he won’t have a leg to stand on. Usually the wife will wear him down until he answers yet one more completely inappropriate, heart-rending question. Of course this new information doesn’t bring peace but more torment.

We have seen marriages become one long-running fight over details the wife doesn’t really need to pursue and husbands don’t really want to share (or have trouble remembering accurately—another fight!). This easily becomes an exhausting diversion (not to mention it drains all hope from the relationship) which takes away from truly important areas the couple needs to focus on.

We’ve had spouses accuse us of “siding with the addict,” “enabling the addict,” “protecting the addict from the painful truth” or “trying to make it easier on the addict.” It would take a small book to explain why none of these are true. Ironically we are striving to protect the *spouse* and make things easier for *her*. Yet there will be some spouses who are convinced that NCM is in league with their husbands (no matter what we say or do).

Our job is not to appear loving. Our job is to *be* loving. We have two options with a spouse who insists that her husband share these kinds of details with her. We can gently but firmly reassure her that each spouse that has pushed for this (no matter how insistently or sincerely) has eventually brought more damage into the marriage—not healing. And we can also respectfully and humbly ask the spouse what is behind this need.

Sometimes what is behind this need is a desperate grasping for control. Since many of us see knowledge as power this spouse believes if she can just know every single detail it will give her some kind of mastery over this horrific thing that has happened to her. But that’s like thinking that getting an in-depth description of death through decapitation will

help you make peace with a horrible auto accident that killed two of your children. Gruesome detailed facts don't help us process traumatized emotions.

Some spouses feel the need to know every single detail of the past because they believe it will equip them to see any danger before it reaches them in the future. Knowing their husband liked women who provided oral sex or blondes with big breasts won't help them see when danger is near (especially if the husband is walking in sexual sobriety now). It will only cause the wife to be paranoid whenever she sees a woman she believes fits this description (whether the woman matches the husband's "profile" or not).

Sometimes the insistence for "total honesty" is a grieving wife's search for *who is this man? Who am I to him? Can he change? Is there hope for us?* These are often the very real questions begging for answers beneath, "Did you see that woman across the room? Are those the kind you like? I'll bet you were totally lusting after her weren't you?"

When wives (for whatever reason) go down this path or insist their husbands be completely accountable to them for every thought or action they have unknowingly lanced the jugular vein of their marriage. As much unbearable heartache as her husband may have put her through she has just insured that her heartache (and his) will now be compounded daily.

For most couples the "total honesty" or "complete accountability to wife" scenario is a clear no-win. Naturally wives come to these situations with much fear, hurt, suspicion and anger. Though her feelings are completely understandable, not all of her perceptions are accurate. It is for this reason the conversation is doomed before it even begins.

If the wife asks the husband if he was looking lustfully at another woman and he admits it, his answer will not give her peace. If he says he noticed her attractiveness—in passing—but didn't lust for her (which can actually happen if a man is in recovery) she will assume he's lying (whether he is or not). Again, no peace. If he says he didn't see her (and he's telling the truth) she probably won't believe him due to his track record. Once more, no peace.

If she says, "You didn't feel *anything* for any of the attractive women in this room?" If he is an honest (and healthy), self-aware male he will say, "Well, of course I feel a natural response to female beauty. That's how God wired me. But know that I keep that under control now because of my relationship with Jesus and you." Even if he's describing where he's really at she will probably hear, "Lust! Lust! Lust!" Most definitely no peace. If the husband lies to his wife whenever she asks these questions they both lose. If he

tells the truth half the time (or all the time) but she believes he's lying they still lose. Why? Because she is looking to get something from him he can never provide: certainty. He can never provide the ultimate certainty she seeks. Only Jesus himself can give her that.

But along with that she's looking for certainty regarding two key issues in her soul. She wants to be certain that:

*1. He will never hurt her like this again.*

And she wants to be certain that:

*2. He really loves her and doesn't want somebody else.*

These longings in a woman's heart are one hundred percent valid. And every wife deserves to have them satisfied. But...(and I hate to put a "but" here but I have no choice)...but she will never be certain that he won't do this again by watching his every move and trying to intuit his every thought.

If his thoughts are unclean and he isn't making himself accountable to God and a few brothers he won't change until he does (and he certainly won't be honest with you). But if he is disciplining his thoughts by being accountable to God and men he is only being discouraged and worn down by your continuing scrutiny and suspicion. You need to stop and really think about this. Will your jabs or withdrawal encourage him to work harder toward continuing growth? Or will treating him this way move him closer to throwing in the towel?

Of *course* you are feeling devastated. You don't trust and you don't know if you will ever be able to. But are you really prepared to keep taking little bites out of him (at least you didn't drop a building on his heart, right!) so that he slowly loses all hope and all courage and ends up failing so you can have the satisfaction of standing triumphantly over his shattered life and saying, "See! I'm glad I wasn't stupid enough to trust you!" If that happens what do you win?

Nothing.

You win nothing.

In fact, you both lose—big.

There is another way.

Stop being his accountability partner, his conscience, his drill sergeant or his pastor. Stop living in resentment, hate and raging arguments you have only in your own head. You are wasting your time and effort (do you have that much to give away?).

If you want to make the most out of what little energy and fight you have, do this: insist that he continue in counseling. Insist that he be part of a small group that means business. Insist that he has one or two guys that he's being ruthlessly honest with. Insist that he seek God (but don't micro-manage that either).

If he will do these things and continue doing them him he is giving you the answer to your two questions. Your future looks hopeful. But please let go of prosecuting attorney, mind reader and prison warden. If he isn't doing what he needs to do make him leave (or you leave). But if you are going to stay:

- Forgive him every day
- Maintain healthy boundaries
- Have some shoulders to cry on
- Get counseling for yourself
- And be his wife