

## **“OUT OF THE SHADOWS”**

Modesto Bee - September 8, 2007

### **Couple tap own pain to help others recover from adultery**



Gary and Mona Shriver, who run a ministry called Hope and Healing and have also written a book called "Unfaithful," are pictured in the studio of their Turlock home.

Modesto Bee - Debbie Noda

**By SUE NOWICKI**  
[Snowicki@modbee.com](mailto:Snowicki@modbee.com)

---

### Adultery.

It's such an ugly, stark word, much worse than "an affair" or "having a fling." And like a stone thrown into water, it can create years of rippling consequences spreading out to many people.

Because of the pain, distrust and other issues that arise with adultery, many people, even those with a deep faith, choose to move on rather than confront and work through the problems.

But the adultery could be a springboard to a better marriage, said Sherman Glenn, a marriage and family therapist in Turlock.

"If you approach an adulterous marriage with good, wise counsel, you not only save the marriage but make it better than it was before," Glenn said. "It's very difficult, but not as difficult as going through a divorce, especially with children, where the damage is so much worse and the ripples go out through a lifetime."

Glenn counseled Gary and Mona Shriver of Turlock after Gary confessed in 1993 that he had been having a three-year affair. Their work on their own marriage and the discovery that there is a dearth of help to couples recovering from adultery led to the publication of a book, "Unfaithful," and to the creation of a support group ministry called "Hope & Healing."

This is their story:

Gary: "How does a Christian man have an affair for three years? Mona and I weren't fighting. It was just that both of us were going a million miles an hour. There's never a good enough reason for adultery, but we (discovered in counseling) we had time for ministry. We had time for soccer. We had time for everything except us. It left me vulnerable."

A Christian co-worker confronted Gary. "He thought I was in sin and had to do something about it. That's when I called my senior pastor to make an appointment and see him. And then, of course, I had to tell my wife."

Mona: "Gary came home, sat on the end of the bed and confessed. I didn't have a clue. They were very, very good (at hiding the affair). My immediate reaction was absolute shock. Gary and I asked each other, 'Do you want a divorce?' I knew my life would never, ever be the same again. I knew I would be going through hell. I knew I could work through it with Gary or without him. He decided to work on the marriage."

Gary: "If she was willing to work with this, I was absolutely sold on the relationship. I had dropped a bomb on our relationship and completely blew it apart."

Mona: "Our children were about 14, 10 and 7. Kids do not get over divorce. It really hurts them in the long run. So we started that long journey. We talked about counseling. I thought, 'What's a counselor going to do, make it go away?' But we did find a good Christian counselor, and that was so important."

"There was a study done by (secular author Shirley Glass) on marriage. Adultery is the second hardest thing to recover from

(physical abuse is number one). Because it's so huge, it's not fun to go through the recovery process. The wound's still sitting there like a big pus pocket. Before the adultery, I would have told you that he wouldn't cheat because he was too stupid and I would know. Now I trust him, not blindly, but because we've worked over the years to build that trust."

Gary: "A major need surfaced in us. It was when Mona and I both wanted so desperately to sit across from another couple who had been down that path who could assure us that we could get through this because they did and now had a marriage worth saving, based on trust and intimacy. We went to our counselor (Sherman Glenn), who has worked with thousands of couples, and he could find no one to step out of the shadows and help us. We didn't know if we could heal; we only heard about couples who divorced.

"After about a year of counseling, he released us and said we were stabilized and could move into an on-call basis. Another year passed, and the phone rang. It was Sherman. He said, 'Do you remember that heartfelt need for that other couple? Are you willing to be that couple for someone else?' We said no. Now we knew why others wanted to hide. You don't want to live in that valley. You don't want to tear those scabs off.

"But then Mona and I talked and said, 'If no one does this, who's going to help?' We decided to be Jesus with skin on for these other people. You really need that because you're so devastated in those early stages of adultery recovery."

Mona: "We have learned that not everyone agrees on the proper ways to recover from adultery. How much do you talk about? How much do you reveal? But we found there were nine or 10 areas we as couples needed to work through. That's what the (Hope & Healing) group focuses on. We have couples tell us we're often the only voice they hear that says it's worth going through the pain and the agony of the healing process. Most friends and relatives tell them it's too big a wound to keep trying. Even in the church, they hear it's time to move on."

Gary: "Hope & Healing is just coming alongside couples with the hope of Christ. We're not doing anything magic. We're just bringing them

into an environment to say, hey, here are some people further down the road who have trust, intimacy and hope. At first they don't want to come. By the end, they don't want to leave."

Mona: "You're not looking to get to a perfect marriage, because there is no such thing. You're trying to get to a relationship where there's love, trust, respect and intimacy. Then when an issue comes up, you handle it. The difference is that after recovery, you'll still have issues, but you'll handle it appropriately."

Gary: "Our mantra going through this was, 'We're not going back there, no matter what the price.' We both had to learn a lot of communication skills. Prior to the adultery, we didn't think we were vulnerable to this. We were very active in our church. Temptation never came knocking at the door.

"Then I found there were areas in my life I needed to change. I don't have friendships with women -- we have couple friendships, but neither of us has a deep friendship with someone of the opposite sex. I don't flirt anymore. I realize where it can go."

Mona: "The other key is absolute and total honesty, but not to be used as a weapon. Deception is the hallmark of adultery. That's the biggest hurdle to get around."

Gary: "Helping rebuild the trust meant being transparent about everything. We talked about things that were hurting Mona, and down the road she could see I was becoming a different person. I try to live my life so that if I were to die today and she would go to my desk or be on my computer, she would never question it. If I ever get an e-mail from a female that might seem even a little too friendly, I forward it to her. I don't want anything she could construe as questionable."

Mona: "I struggled with my anger issues. That's part of the support group. You have a right to those feelings. But that's why we tell people to have professional counseling. Part of the difficulty of the (recovery) process for me was that I seriously thought about getting drunk and picking up somebody so I would know what it was like to commit adultery. Thankfully, those were fleeting thoughts. God didn't allow that to happen."

Gary: "You can go into this adultery process two ways -- men can say, 'Get over it, honey. It's over.' But then the husband doesn't have the chance to see the wife go through the processing. They don't want to talk about it and it's just kind of spackled over, and then -- we see this all the time -- he has another affair.

"When we processed it, I saw the pain that I caused the person I love. I held her at night as she cried herself to sleep. I am never going there again. That's one of the hugest hedges I have, the memory of what we went through together. I am not going to have (another) affair; I know what it costs."

How many people deal with this issue?

Gary: "Barna (Group) research says 25 percent of people, whether in church or unchurched, have or will go through adultery. Most put it much, much higher."

Mona: "The first response we get from churches is 'Where are these couples?' We say they're sitting right next to you in the pew. They have smiles on their faces and acting like nothing is wrong. There's so much shame and guilt involved with this, and they feel as if they would be ostracized in their church if this gets out. Then they go home and pull their curtains and die."

Instead, said Sherman Glenn, "Churches should offer a safe haven, give them a place to heal and provide support to people who want to heal. Make it safe for them to process their shame and guilt. What is the blood of Christ all about? To take away the shame and the guilt and make that person who God wants them to be."

Bee staff writer Sue Nowicki can be reached at [snowicki@modbee.com](mailto:snowicki@modbee.com) or 578-2012.

# Couples turn to God's help on 'slow journey from the pit of hell'

Modesto Bee – September 8, 2007

By SUE NOWICKI  
snowicki@modbee.com

---

Adultery, a relationship between a married person and another person, doesn't always come in the same package or hold the same issues. It's not always the husband who strays. Sometimes pornography or prostitution is involved.

But it's always premeditated and a choice, said Sherman Glenn, a Turlock marriage and family counselor. Most of the time, it's preceded by "baby steps" toward intimacy.

Here are the stories of three couples who have survived infidelity and participated in the Hope & Healing support groups. Names have been changed to protect their privacy and their children. The stories, however, are true.

## **'I got caught'**

Mike and Marie have been married 42 years. About 25 years ago, Mike had what the couple call "an emotional affair."

"There were no sexual relations," Mike said. "I really didn't think I did anything wrong, so we didn't go to counseling, even though it almost destroyed Marie."

Because they didn't address the underlying issues that caused the attraction, they both believe that's part of what led to Mike's adulterous relationship with a different woman about 11 years ago.

"It happened when we were extremely involved in a church," Mike said. "I was on the board of elders, on the platform every Sunday, involved with youth ministry. Marie and I headed up the young marrieds group. I became arrogant, spiritually as well. Of course, you don't see it."

"It was also a time of changing jobs, a promotion. A woman who I had worked with previously called. She was going into surgery and asked me to pray for her. I did that. She kept calling. She was separated from her husband, about 15 years younger than me. It was a series of terrible decisions. I had an affair; it lasted three to four months.

"I wish I could say I got right with God and got down on my knees before Marie and said, 'Forgive me.' No. I got caught. A friend tried to talk with me; I wouldn't talk to him. He went to Marie and she confronted me. I lied through my teeth, said no. About three days later, she confronted me again. This time I said yes, it's true. There was a range of emotions -- you're afraid of the consequences, anger, depression. I didn't know what was going to happen."

"The next couple of weeks were horrendous at our house," Marie said. "It was beyond horrible. I became a raging crazy person, and Mike didn't know whether to come home or stay away. I just wanted to get fixed, healed. As much as I hated him, I knew our marriage was worth saving, if only for the kids (who were out of the house by then). My only thought was, we need help and we need it desperately."

The couple began counseling. During that time, Mike admitted, he didn't really understand what was taking Marie so long to come to grips with his adultery.

"My thought was, I confessed my sin. I want to repair my marriage. I'm sorry. I can't take it back; if I could, I would. Therefore, if Marie would just forgive me, it would be OK."

Several months after his confession, Mike was driving on a wet road when he began hydroplaning. "I saw these cars coming toward me and I thought I would die. My thought was, at least now Marie will leave me alone. That was really my thought. I wasn't even afraid. I woke up, it was raining and some guy was praying for me. I don't know to this day who it was.

"About a month later, Marie and the girls were at a church retreat. I finally got to the point where I knew it had to be God putting (our marriage) back together. I finally got it. Then we started a slow journey from the pit of hell. When we came out of the wilderness, we met Mona and Gary (Shriver)."

The two couples met for months, then developed what is now the Hope & Healing ministry.

Why would any couple want to go through the years of healing or the "pit of hell" to have a chance at a restored marriage?

"I'll tell you this," Mike said. "I've never regretted going through the hell. I have eight grandchildren now. I think all the time, what would that have looked like if Marie and I had gotten a divorce? What would my relationship with my children look like? What would Christmas look like?"

"Certainly there are still consequences and pain and awkwardness and all that, but I think that's what the Bible is all about -- sin and repentance. I wish I hadn't been such a slow learner. I wish it didn't take this to get my attention to know that God's all you need. You only find that out when God is all you've got."

### **When the wife stays**

Renee, 28, and Joaquin, 34, started dating seven years ago and have been married for two years. Renee was the one to cheat, before and right after the wedding.

"I could give a thousand excuses of why it happened, but there's really no excuse," she said. "When my husband found a text message, I just came clean with everything. I knew that I wanted to change, regardless of how my marriage worked out. I couldn't keep living a lie."

Joaquin said he was working long hours and "had a really good idea something wasn't right. She just wasn't around, and didn't answer her phone.

"One night when I got home from work, I started going through her phone. I found a text message, and when I called, some guy said, 'Hey, babe.' That's when it seemed life had ended."

He moved out for about six months and tried to file for a divorce twice. "The first time, I started sweating and couldn't do it. The



second time, I made it through, but the next day, I went back and cancelled it.

"I don't want to sound like a Bible thumper, but if it wasn't for God, we wouldn't still be together. It took a lot of convincing from godly people."

The two began counseling and also went through the Hope & Healing sessions. Although they aren't the only Hope & Healing couples in which the wife cheated, they were the only ones in that 10-week session.

"I was the only female who had the affair, and my husband was the only male spouse who was faithful," Renee said. But she said being with the women who were the betrayed spouses helped her understand the damage she'd caused Joaquin.

"I could see these women broken, and I knew that was what my husband felt inside that he couldn't express," she said. "Also, we were able to see two couples who made it. Just hearing them talk about their marriages today gives us hope and reminds us it's worth holding onto. This is a terrible thing, but hopefully we can look back after 40 years and say this was the worst time we ever went through."

Joaquin said the Hope & Healing group "was really difficult at first. You know how the male ego is -- here were these guys with women on the side, and that wasn't the case with me. I was 100 percent faithful in my marriage. At first, I felt like I was lower or lesser than (the other men). In reality, that wasn't true."

He said the biggest lessons he learned during the 10-week program "is to spend time together, to teach me to understand what was going on with her and to communicate."

Renee agreed that communication was a big tool.

"He grew up in a different way, where if he provided for us, that was enough. Our pastor said, 'Welfare will do that. It isn't enough.' He's started taking me on dates. He took me to a play the other night, which he never would have before. Now when I see my needs aren't being met, I can say that to my husband. We've been taught to deal

with our problems and not ignore them because we know what it would fester into."

Joaquin said images of his wife with another man still plague him, and it's hard not to focus on her adultery. One day he'll feel forgiveness, but the next he'll be angry again. But they both continue to work through those feelings.

"I got a new cell phone and a new e-mail account," Renee said. "I make sure I answer the phone when he calls. I make sure I'm with the kids. I'm completely honest in everything. I think the hardest part is seeing the damage I've done to my husband. But I know that people can change, and that gives me hope. Through the spiritual process, I've seen myself change. We've both seen what God can do."

To other men whose wives have strayed, Joaquin has this advice: "Try to make it work. Obviously, this isn't for everyone, but if both parties want to try, then do it."

### **Dirty laundry**

Gary, 51, and Lucille, 47 have been married for 11 years and have three adult sons from their previous marriages.

Gary has had sexual problems since he was introduced to pornography as a teenager. He's been with prostitutes and committed adultery in his first marriage. Lucille said she knew he had cheated on her early in their marriage but didn't know he continued an adulterous relationship with the same "other woman" as in his first marriage.

"The first time I caught him, I didn't say anything to anyone," she said. "A lot of churches have divorce care, but they don't have marriage care."

Her silence didn't last.

"I discovered my husband had been cheating on me for quite some time with someone he had cheated on with in his first marriage. And he had some sexual addiction problems," Lucille said.

He moved out of the home the night she discovered the truth.

"I didn't want to bow down, but I didn't want to be this raging psycho, either," Lucille said. "It was very hurtful to be betrayed like that. I went out with someone for a couple of weeks, but then I realized I didn't have to do that. I never thought I was inadequate."

After individual and couple counseling, they signed up for a Hope & Healing program.

"It taught us how to communicate, how to perceive things," Gary said. "It kind of told me that I wasn't just a dog, just a pig, that I still had some worth. It was an excruciating two hours, especially at first. But it's all biblically based on what marriage should be. I look at things a lot differently now. It was excellent."

His wife agrees.

"They give you the tools to work through the hard times," she said. "He needed to hear my hurt, and I needed to express it. That was helpful for both of us. He didn't realize how much he had hurt me, and a lot of things that had happened in the last couple of years was because of my hurt.

"I don't think we'd be together today (without Hope & Healing). I was really close to saying, 'I don't want this.' Even though we were both in counseling, I didn't think he'd felt the godly sorrow for what he'd done to me and his first wife.

"They didn't get the laundry washed the first time. That's exactly what happened to us. Like our counselor said, you have to deal with these issues even if the marriage doesn't survive. Scripture says that adultery is the one reason you can divorce. But God says divorce exists because of hardening hearts against the Lord.

"God can heal anything. It feels really huge to us at the time, but it's really small for God. I totally put my faith in him, even at those times when I was tired of it all."