

Date: February 19, 2010
To: Attentive Students of the Family
Re: **A Tale of Two Wives on Divorce and Spousal Infidelity**

There is a very interesting juxtaposition of two books on the best-seller lists this week.

These books are from two wives – both serious and deeply committed Christians – on how they both responded to the complete (and super-surreal) melt-down of their marriages.

- Jenny Sanford's: *Staying True*.
- Gayle Haggard's: *Why I Stayed*.

There are a number of interesting things for Christian students of the family in seeing these two books sitting side-by-side on bookstore shelves over the next few weeks.



- 1) These are two women who saw their very high profile – and otherwise very capable – Christian husbands absolutely flip-out and implode in bizarre ways due to infidelity.
- 2) They are both deeply committed Christian wives and mothers and have publicly expressed their commitment to their marriages and children.
- 3) It took both husbands some while to come to terms with how they so deeply hurt their families.
- 4) Both women have shown remarkable grace in expressing their forgiveness toward their husbands.
- 5) However, their conclusions are very different.
 - Mrs. Sanford has filed for divorce, but only after first committing to making it work and changing her mind when her husband did not take his promised steps to end things with his Argentine “soul mate.”
 - Mrs. Haggard has decided to work to save her marriage.

Given the shattered marriage covenants due to the husbands’ infidelities, both women have biblical grounds for divorce.

Is one’s decision more right, more virtuous than the other? Good question.

Both women have important, honorable and ultimately pro-marriage and family reasons for their very different decisions.

Gayle Haggard recently told *Christianity Today* her reason for staying,

“I stayed because I believe in the teachings of Jesus, that if we choose forgiveness and love, our relationships can heal. ...I wasn't going to let the struggle that had been going on with him disqualify or undo the 30 years of life we had built together... I wasn't going to let this thing deny all of what we have spent our lives invested in.”

That is a remarkably beautiful statement of profound faith and commitment in the face of a very real and very broken situation. Jenny Sanford said publicly she was committed to and very much wanted to save her marriage. But she later concluded that would not be possible because her husband refused to end his adulterous relationship. She made the love-must-be-tough decision that both love and dignity required for herself, her four boys, even her husband.

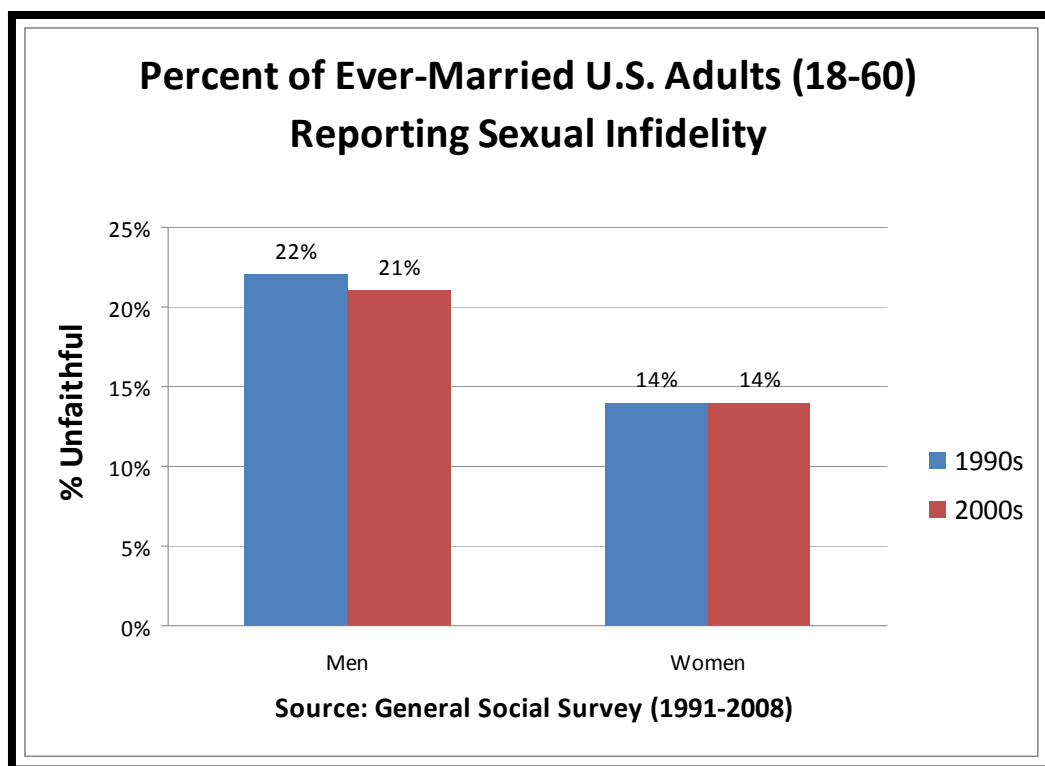
Take-Away: *Both are vivid examples of how real, pervasive and ever-present the Fall is. Both show how severe family problems can be resolved in Christ-honoring, but very different ways because there are significantly different circumstances surrounding each story. Dr. Dobson and Focus on the Family have strongly taught key biblical principles regarding marriage and family and then encouraged families to apply those faithfully to their unique family situations. I believe this is what we are witnessing here.*

These are two examples of very high-profile marriages plagued by the husband's infidelities. Our 24-hour news cycles have been littered by the names: Tiger Woods, John Edwards, David Letterman, Larry Craig, Eliot Spitzer, etc. We receive hundreds of calls and letters at FOF from wives telling of the pain of their husband's infidelities.

Is Fidelity a Thing of the Past?

Infidelity is not growing among marriages like one might be led to believe from the proliferation of such high-profile cases.

This chart from W. Bradford Wilcox, professor of sociology at the University of Virginia, reveals that *less than a quarter* of ever-married men and women are unfaithful to their spouses and that infidelity among married men has *decreased* just slightly in the 2000s over the 1990s.



There is hopeful news in significant increases among all U.S. adults who believe marital infidelity is “always wrong.” In the 1970s, 63 percent of U.S. adult men said marital infidelity was “always wrong” and that number increased to 78 percent in the 2000s. The comparable numbers for women were 73 percent in the 1970s, up to 84 percent in the 2000s.

Take-Away: *We can be led to believe that things are getting darker on the marital fidelity front from this seeming increase in high-profile and dramatic marital meltdowns. Fact is that marital infidelity is much lower than most would assume and attitudes toward infidelity are increasingly favoring marital fidelity. This is certainly good news.*