



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Dealing with Marital Infidelity

Guest(s): Dr. Sheri Keffer

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Dr. Dobson: Hello everyone. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and it is such a pleasure to have you join us again for another edition of Family Talk. Today we're going to talk about the highly sexualized culture in which we live and one which traps many husbands and wives into what I called the lure of infidelity.

My colleague, Dr. Tim Clinton will interview Dr. Sheri Keffer today, and she's a licensed marriage and family therapist with over 20 years of experience in Southern California. Dr. Keffer holds a PhD in marriage and family therapy and a master's degree in theology from Fuller Theological Seminary.

As we began, these two therapists discuss the difficulties in repairing trust when it occurs in a broken relationship. It's a topic that Dr. Keffer knows very well, because her first husband betrayed her, ruined their marriage, and caused deep emotional scars. What she learned from that painful experience might also be relevant in your life and family. Here now is Dr. Tim Clinton and Dr. Sheri Keffer.

Dr. Clinton: Sheri, welcome back to Family Talk. Thanks for joining us.

Sheri Keffer: It's great to be here.

Dr. Clinton: As we get started, we're going to talk about a pretty tough subject today. It's not easy. As a matter of fact, some people listening, this is really going to cut to the core for them, but sexual betrayal is, man, it's a tough road. Whether it's having someone you love be unfaithful to you with another person. Or, you know the whole pornography issue, Sheri. It's changed the game.

Let's go back in this story for a moment. What'd you do? You find out, hey, we got a nightmare going.

Sheri Keffer: It is.

Dr. Clinton: This is awful.

Sheri Keffer: It is awful.

Dr. Clinton: I mean did you want to throw up? I mean, I'm just ... What was the moment like?

Sheri Keffer: Well, the first time I ever found out Connor was doing something in this world was when we were dating. I go back to that moment all the time, because he made a 900 number call, and that was a sex line in that day. Today we've got cybersex, the internet. It's so much easier to get than even back then.

Dr. Clinton: I know.

Sheri Keffer: But you know, I was shocked. I felt kind of icky about it. I mean I felt gross. I was like, "What is this?" But I was so naive, I didn't understand what it was, and so I asked his brother. We went to the same college campus. We were at Bible college, and I said, "So what is this?" His brother said, "You know what, Sheri? Probably every guy on this campus has made a phone call to the 900 number at some time or another." So, I discounted it. I minimized it. I didn't probe. I didn't ask more.

It was cancer that had already been a part of his life, but because I chose that day, I said, "You know, I'm not perfect," I felt like I needed to forgive him and then I moved forward. But my naivete, my inability to know what questions to even ask, my inability to dig deeper, I walked right into a marriage with a man who had been struggling since he was a young boy. Many sexual brokenness, many of these people find it early on, right? They find that porn stash in their dad's garage. Kids today, I mean these-

Dr. Clinton: They just come across it on their cell phone, like you said.

Sheri Keffer: These devices today-

Dr. Clinton: Even randomly. It's unreal. What they're getting exposed to, Sheri, is very different than like when I grew up. Seriously, what they're seeing, mighty men can't handle. You know that.

Sheri Keffer: It's true. It's true. And their brains, right? I mean, we've found this out in the last years that our brain gets really addicted to those dopamine, that feel good drug, the adrenaline is the rush, and then oxytocin, which is the same chemical that is released when we are lovemaking or we're nursing babies. That is a bonding chemical. You put three of those things together and they get bonded, hooked, and it becomes ... it's inside of them.

Dr. Clinton: Yeah.

Sheri Keffer: Taking me back to my story, the first time I think I was shocked, hurt, and devastated. When I realized it was in our marriage, that is when I was scared out

of my mind and I didn't know what to do. It came to me. He said, "I think I'm burnt out," and I'm like, "Burnt out?" Because he was pulling away from me early on in our marriage.

I was a newlywed. I waited to be sexual with him until we were married, so I was excited about developing our sexual intimacy together. But when one day he was washing the dishes, we had just eaten, and I went up to nibble on his ear, and he pulled away. He was repulsed from my advance. I thought there was something wrong with me.

Then our whole sexual relationship had been very intermittent. We would go two months, three months, four months. I remember calling my best friend Julie, and I said, "Hey, how is it after you and Kevin are close intimately?" She said, "Oh, it's like you kind of oil the next day. We're more playful. We're fun. We connect better." Just for me, it was disconnect.

Dr. Clinton: Wow.

Sheri Keffer: I was on the other end of someone who was pushing me away because he had such a fear of intimacy and of getting close.

Dr. Clinton: Which is by the way very characteristic of people who are caught up in pornography and more.

Sheri Keffer: Get this. The ancient Hebrew word for lust is awah, and what it means is the strong nail that binds you to itself.

Dr. Clinton: Wow.

Sheri Keffer: In contrast to the ancient Hebrew word for hope, which is a derivative of it, which is kave, which means what comes after the nail. That lust binds us to itself, and it is a weapon of mass destruction aimed right at our families today in relationships, and it's eroding the fabric of our families.

Dr. Clinton: You know, Frank Pitman was a researcher on this very issue years ago. He's passed on now. Not Christian, but he said that probably more than 50% of couples who go through this, which he believed was the most difficult journey, the most difficult road in marriage, if it happens. He said they actually put their marriages back together again. He gave a hope-filled message.

But Sheri, let me say this too. We also know that there are just some who can't get through it. Maybe the words of Jesus are very appropriate here. Don't give yourself to a bill of divorcement except it before pornenia, sexual infidelity. And in this thing, what he was doing is he was teaching us a lesson here. I think it's that kind of brokenness between a trust with couples is really sacred and difficult to work through.

Sheri Keffer: It is. It is. Thank you for mentioning the word pornenia, because in my journey with Connor, I had actually gotten counsel around that, because porn is devastating. Chuck Swindoll wrote the book *Strike the Original Match*, and in there he talks about that, mentions just what you said, and then he goes in to say this. He says it represents a lifestyle of sexual sin. Someone that is unrepentant, is not turning around, and compulsive sexual acting out and addictive sexual acting out hooks people to it. They oftentimes don't know how to stop it themselves.

Dr. Clinton: Right.

Sheri Keffer: The shame does numbers on us.

Dr. Clinton: Sheri, some people describe that as like sexual anorexia I've seen. It's like because they are up on the internet so much, et cetera, they, you're right, struggle with intimacy.

Sheri Keffer: Yep.

Dr. Clinton: And so they avoid it. They don't do that piece. He actually shuts down. One of the cardinal signs is, is there a real disengagement on that physical attraction and that sexual connectedness?

Sheri Keffer: Totally. You know where I think as counselors we sometimes misstep with people, and it's actually called treatment trauma, I was being viewed at as something was wrong with me.

Dr. Clinton: Wow.

Sheri Keffer: Like why am I not being as available to Connor as I could have been? I had clergy and counselors moving me in that direction. When I said, "I'm available. I'm not withholding," there was kind of the raise of the eyebrow, or "maybe it's not what you should, not enough." I didn't know what to do. But the problem was he had been shut down for a very long time, and there was a secret and shame that he was living with, and so people couldn't get close to him.

Dr. Clinton: So as a result, breaking free or breaking through this stuff and trying to keep yourself together is going to be a pretty tough road. Scrubbing that from the mind of a man is going to be a lot of work. You know that.

Sheri Keffer: I do know that, and I'm sitting here going, "Scrubbing from a mind of a man, is it even possible?" But I don't say that to not have hope. It's just there's no bleach for the brain, and so the longer ... It's like having your brain in a crock pot of sexual acting out. It's hard to retrain your mind to these images.

But the guys that I see that are going into good recovery, and that are moving away from the porn, and that are actually working in sobriety, they're taking

that toxin and they're moving away from it and they're beginning to reconnect, because now they're safer, in a way of learning how to connect, and attach better, and connect with their wives as real women. Actually, some of them end up saying, "I've experienced stuff I never had before," but they've got to get sober and safe before the partner can even be ready to reengage with them.

Dr. Clinton: There you go. You can't do this marital work right there?

Sheri Keffer: No. It's-

Dr. Clinton: You've got to get some individual stuff done here.

Sheri Keffer: Yeah.

Dr. Clinton: I remember when I was a young therapist, I worked a couple of cases of infidelity, and in this thing I believed that I could help this guy get through this stuff, but he still liked her, and he was still connected with her, and he was still talking with her, and he was still trying to hang out with her. I thought, "I can break him free of that." I tell you what, I learned real fast that if the spigot's not turned off, this isn't working.

Sheri Keffer: Yeah.

Dr. Clinton: It doesn't matter how much you've got, because you're right, there is a hijack of that brain, and there's an insanity really that kicks in. Wouldn't that be a good way of describing?

Sheri Keffer: It is.

Dr. Clinton: It's like it's something that's so hard to turn off, but somehow we've got to get in, and that accountability piece needs to be there, and we've got to demonstrate to each other. If we're going to take a step forward, we're going to clean this up in the name of love. I know that we're struggling together. I know that we're not connected emotionally. We're not close. I know we're not intimate, but let's take a step. I'm going to hold myself accountable. How significant is it to you?

Sheri Keffer: It's like having one foot in the marriage and one foot out. You can't be torn that way. There's two pillars that a betrayed partner need. Whether you're male or female and you've been betrayed, you need two things. The first one is safety. You've got to know that you are safe and that relationship is safe. So boundaries, right? Drawing the lines in the sand, saying it's not okay. Sometimes I've had couples even have to live someplace else and be separated for a while if you're not willing to let go of that other woman. You've got to have a hard line.

Then the truth. You've got to know the truth of what's happened. There's something called a therapeutic full disclosure. It's very different than somebody

just confessing some of what they want to tell you they've done. This is a well-planned, well executed, well trained process by people who know what they're doing in order to bring truth in the relationship so that the person that's been betraying can "clean the deck" as you say. I love that. Then the betrayed partner can know what it is that they've done, what's happened right under their nose, so they can make choices about, "do I want to continue forward with you? How do we know what we can heal from or what we can eventually someday forgive if I don't even know what you've done?"

Dr. Clinton: You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, your host. Our special in studio guest, Dr. Sheri Keffer, she is a therapist par excellent, and she's a lot of fun. A good friend of the ministry, and you're going to be continuing to see a lot of her through our broadcasts and more.

She has a fascinating book out there called *Intimate Deception* that has done very, very well. "Healing the Wounds of Sexual Betrayal." If you or someone you love is going through that in their relationship, I'm going to tell you what, this is becoming a standard book. *Intimate Deception: Healing the Wounds of Sexual Betrayal*.

Hey, by the way, and I wanted to add this too, if you or someone you love is struggling right now and you'd love to get connected with us, please get up on our website. It's drjamesdobson.org, drjamesdobson.org, or please call us toll free. You can call us right now. (877) 732-6825. That number again, (877) 732-6825.

Sheri, let's keep this thing going. I agree with you. We've got a mess, and it's difficult to take steps toward healing because trust is gone. In the midst of this, there's this piece where I just don't know if I like you, and then there's a struggle with, but I want us. I don't know where to turn. I don't know what to do. I've sat down alone with many individuals, both male and female, who have been struggling on the receiving end of this. Like he cheated, she cheated, and it's like, "I don't know what to do. I mean, should I try to approach him? Should I try to love him or not?" You hear what I'm saying?

Sheri Keffer: Yes, I do.

Dr. Clinton: Sheri, those are tough questions to ask and answer upfront. You got any thoughts for our listeners?

Sheri Keffer: You know, it's so interesting you say that, Tim, because I think one of the main questions people ask is, should I stay or should I go?

Dr. Clinton: Yep.

Sheri Keffer: The first place I take them is, well, what have you done? A lot of times because people ... We don't know what we don't know. we don't know where to go. We

don't know how to get hooked into good recovery. We don't know how to find the therapists that have the "get it" factor.

Dr. Clinton: And safety is a really paramount issue, and more than that. I mean, you have the potential for sexually transmitted diseases, all kinds of things.

Sheri Keffer: Yeah. Well, I talk about that in my book. My kinsman redeemer husband when I was writing this book said, "You're going to talk about your STD?" I said, "Yes, I am." Because you know what? It's serious business. I want the partners who've been betrayed to know that no one else can take care of their body.

There was tremendous shame when I found out that I had an STD. I mean, do you think I wanted to go to our family doctor and talk about it? Do you think I wanted to go through all those tests? No. But nobody else could have walked through that door other than me, and I had to because it means if I don't care for that, I'm going to end up with cervical cancer, right? I'll go first and I'll say, "Hey, I am so sorry that this has happened to you and you've just found out, but I want you to go get checked. I don't want the shame of what's happened to you bear out in something even more harmful to you."

Dr. Clinton: Just listening to you, I'm sitting there thinking, don't do this alone.

Sheri Keffer: Yeah.

Dr. Clinton: You can't. Don't do this alone.

Sheri Keffer: You know what? Many of us, most of us do, and let me tell you why.

Dr. Clinton: Because of the shame.

Sheri Keffer: Because the shame.

Dr. Clinton: Secrecy.

Sheri Keffer: You know what I love about God? The biggest parable in the Bible is the woman at the well, and what was she dealing with? That's the longest. It's the most scripture, most words, most digits, and it's because she was a woman who was covered by shame that she didn't even want to go out until the heat of day. As a betrayed partner, I get that, because that shame makes us want to pull away from others.

Come out into the light where you can some help. Give y'all a call. Write your show.

Dr. Clinton: Find a safe place.

Sheri Keffer: Find a safe place.

Dr. Clinton: Get a therapist. Get somebody you can talk to, somebody who's going to-

Sheri Keffer: Because you can't do it alone, Tim. Just like you said, there's too much, and there's too many moving parts. The person that's acting out needs to get into sobriety.

Dr. Clinton: What do you do with the anger, like when you want to punch him? You hear what I'm saying?

Sheri Keffer: I know.

Dr. Clinton: When you want to scream and say, "Why did you do this to us?"

Sheri Keffer: Yeah.

Dr. Clinton: How do you start processing this? Again, we're probably talking more about individual therapy and not couples yet, right? But we've got-

Sheri Keffer: But anger's a part of it.

Dr. Clinton: What we're looking at each other, and we've got to figure out how to talk to each other.

Sheri Keffer: Right.

Dr. Clinton: We've got work to do.

Sheri Keffer: Let me tell you when, when Jesus, he's our friend, but this is when he really ... I love why he put himself in scripture. What did he do in the temple? What did he do when the temple was being defiled?

Dr. Clinton: He was fired up.

Sheri Keffer: He was fired up. He was mad. He was angry, and he gave us a verse.

Dr. Clinton: He flipped up a few tables. He sent a message.

Sheri Keffer: He did, and he gave us a command, a double command. "Be angry, but don't sin in your anger." The difference between-

Dr. Clinton: That's tough to do. Yeah, I got it.

Sheri Keffer: But rage is not helpful, and it's hurtful. I have partners who end up in that rage frame, and they end up in bitterness and hurt, and they don't even like who they are at that point, because I don't want to stay in anger.

Dr. Clinton: We've got work to do. We've got work to do. I mean that's part of it here.

Sheri Keffer: I know. I know.

Dr. Clinton: We're fighting the time, but forgiveness becomes a big time issue here.

Sheri Keffer: Right.

Dr. Clinton: Forgiveness and grace. Somehow we've got to, as we press through this, Sheri, we've got to get to a place where we move back in together. I'm not talking necessarily physically, but I am talking emotionally.

Sheri Keffer: Right.

Dr. Clinton: We've got to start embracing one another if we're going to go back into this place of trying to make it work.

Sheri Keffer: I agree. This is what I say. I am an advocate of forgiveness. I mean it's also a command, right? Because God wants us free, and forgiveness is so much about ourselves. We've got to have it to restore.

Dr. Clinton: Yeah, because if I don't forgive, I'm swallowing the poison, I'm swallowing the pain, I'm swallowing the hurt.

Sheri Keffer: Absolutely.

Dr. Clinton: I've got to let this stuff go. I've got to, but that doesn't mean that I have to sit here and allow you to keep cheating on me or treating me like dirt or anything like that. We're not talking about that.

Sheri Keffer: Right. No.

Dr. Clinton: We've got to let this thing ... Somehow we've got to get beyond this moment.

Sheri Keffer: Yeah, and I get it. If somebody is still acting out, it's not the time to forgive. It's the time to get safe, right? You need safety and the truth. But once you get a couple that's gone through that place where they have become, that person's become safe and you've gotten the truth, right, through a full disclosure, and there's an impact letter that's written, there's an amends letter on the other side of it, which is starting to move that person towards the teshuvah.

Now, I love ancient Hebrew, and there is a principle in ancient Hebrew that's called the teshuvah. What the teshuvah means is turning around. It's a process of owning and atoning. Judaism is filled with these amazing principles, and this is the steps of the teshuvah. I see this. When couples are willing to go through these steps, they actually heal and get to the other side. Let me just give you a handful of them.

The first one is, recognize what you did that was wrong. That means you're not minimizing, you're not blaming, you're not justifying. You're owning it. Reveal how you did that through confession, which includes a therapeutic full disclosure. Regret what you did wholeheartedly. You've got to have some guilt over what you did. Guilt is a part of healing. Refrain from doing that the next time, because I've got a sponsor. I got a whole group of guys that I call before I actually go to the strip club. Then I've got to repair the relationship and then: restore. That means putting us back together again from what was stolen in that sacred trespass.

Dr. Clinton: "Bravery After Betrayal," some workshops you do to help couples on this journey. I love that title, by the way.

Sheri Keffer: Thank you.

Dr. Clinton: Sheri, here's what I know in closing. This isn't done. This is not easily done. It's a rough road, but I want to say this. Some of the strongest marriages I know today walked this road, and God gave them an amazing recovery and repair. You know that?

Sheri Keffer: I do know it.

Dr. Clinton: They're mad in love. They're mad in love.

Sheri Keffer: I know. I have at my "Bravery After Betrayal: It Takes Fierce Strength" retreat weekend, it's for partners, my team. I've got two women there who actually divorced their husbands, the guys got to work, and they got remarried. I've got some folks that are on the other side like myself. Their marriage was a casualty, but their life hasn't been.

But when I see couples like you on the other side, there is such a hope in that, because these folks that go through it, it changes them. They grow deeper and stronger. The pain of the past doesn't consume them anymore. They now become powerful advocates for other people to help them give them hope to get to the other side.

Dr. Clinton: Yeah. Those who have been forgiven much, by the way, love much. I've learned that through the years.

Sheri Keffer: It's true.

Dr. Clinton: Sheri, thank you for joining us.

Sheri Keffer: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Well, this is a hope-filled end to an honest discussion about the painful effects of marital infidelity here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. You've been

listening to our cohost, Dr. Tim Clinton, and his recent conversation with Dr. Sheri Keffer. If you are experiencing similar problems or a similar hurt in your marriage relationship, we would love to pray for you. Call (877) 732-6825 and a member of our team will be happy to lift you up in prayer. God knows your pain and your struggles and wants to provide comfort to you, so keep that number handy and call it if you need to. (877) 732-6825.

Roger Marsh: Now, for additional content from today's guest, Dr. Sheri Keffer, simply visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. There you'll find a link to her website and her many helpful resources as well as more material. Go now to drjamesdobson.org, tap on the broadcast icon at the top of the page, and you'll be all set.

Thanks so much for joining us today. Tomorrow you're going to hear a timeless presentation from Dr. James Dobson from his popular *Bringing Up Boys* teaching series. It's foundational wisdom for every parent, whether you've got sons in the home or you are involved in the life of a boy that you are playing a mentor to. So tune into that program coming up on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

Roger Marsh: Hi, this is Roger Marsh for the James Dobson Family Institute. I want to quickly tell you about a new initiative we've created here for the year 2020. One of our core values from the inception of this ministry has been the undeniable worth of life at every stage. So, as we celebrate our 10 year anniversary, we encourage you to become a JDFI life ambassador. Our goal with this effort is to equip thousands of men and women to stand with us for the cause of life.

As a life ambassador, you will receive monthly emails to prepare you to be a voice in your community. You'll hear from pro-life leaders and experts in the fields of medicine and public policy who are making a difference in this battle. For more information or to partner with us in this vital effort, go to drjamesdobson.org/life. That's drjamesdobson.org/life. Stand for righteousness and become a JDFI life ambassador today.