

THE ANATOMY OF AN AFFAIR

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Ryan: Every Christian married person you talked to would openly and rightfully say that affairs are bad. Yet—here's the tragic part—they still happen. And they still happen among Christian people. Not just happen, but they happen among professing, church-going, church-attending believers. It's tragic. So why does that happen?

Selena: Well, I mean, the short answer is we're sinners in a broken world. But like every sin, I think there's things that lead up to it, right? There's red flags, there's things that we're either ignoring, or we don't know about that we begin to fall into.

Ryan: So this episode is all about seeing those signs on the horizon. We're calling it the anatomy of an affair. In other words, what does an affair look like in its budding stages? What circumstances lead to the gestation of an affair and bring it to bear in the life of a married couple? What are those warning signs? So we're going to explore that here today in great detail and trust you'll find it helpful. We'll see you on the other side.

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Selena: So no couple... I love that you wrote this. He said, "No couple is immune to temptation. Every couple must talk proactively, strategize, and act to shield themselves from isolation and temptation that can lead to an affair."

Ryan: And we'll talk about this more soon. But it's funny there's no other area in life where we think, "Oh, I'll just neglect that thing and then that thing will still flourish."

Selena: Right.

Ryan: Like you know if you don't clean out your car it's going to be just a massive, monumental pile of mess. *[both laughs]* If you don't clean your house, it's not going to get cleaner by default. It's going to get worse.

Selena: Oh, how I wish that was not the case.

Ryan: If you don't maintain your health, your health will not just naturally get better. It will decline because we live in a fallen world. But for some reason in this area of marriage, couples just are diluted. I mean this... Okay, we work in the

space, we talk to a lot of couples. And I don't mean it that we are, you know, willing badly for our marriages. But we just think that if we kind of... we don't have to actually do any work.

Selena: If we just coast and we're not proactive about maintaining our covenant, maintaining honesty and truth and transparency and working on our marriage, we have this I think you're saying disillusionment that our marriage is going to be fine, it's going to flourish. Like, "we'll never have an affair. We would never do that. We would never let that happen."

But ironically, or I don't know what the word would be, the lack of maintenance actually allows... there's drift that happens because you don't just sit. We're not just unified automatically, right? We're two sinners broken, so we're going to drift. We're going to drift apart. So we have to be proactive about how we live in unity, how we are one flesh.

Ryan: So there's three purposes in mind with this episode really quickly is, as we talked about the anatomy of an affair, as we go through this, our hope is that it will help you detect it early in your own heart or see signs of withdrawing or isolation in your own heart.

Then we're hoping that will help you detect it early in your own marriage if you maybe you see some of these signs between you and your spouse.

And finally, we hope to help you get discernment among your own Christian brothers and sisters because that's what you're there for. If you see something, if you see them heading toward a cliff, you need to be the one to say, "Hey, there's a cliff. These are the signs I'm seeing. Is the cliff there? Am I seeing..." And hopefully the Holy Spirit will infuse those conversations with honesty and truth.

So for today, we're hanging our hat on Mark 10 starting in verse 7. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

So the two things that kind of jumped out at me as I was just reading through that passage preparing for this is that there's this leaving father and mother, there's a separating, and then there's the leaving and cleaving, holding fast.

Selena: Sorry, I just think it's interesting that the husband holds fast to the wife and not the wife. *[laughs]*

Ryan: I picture a koala bear.

- Selena:** I always picture the wife like clinging so hard to the husband.
- Ryan:** You're picturing me holding on to you like a koala bear on eucalyptus tree. *[both laughs]* It's what I picture because that's what it's like. And then at the bottom of this verse in verse 9-
- Selena:** So what are you saying?
- Ryan:** I'm saying that I'm very clingy. That's what I'm saying. It says, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." There's obviously a greater context to that passage. I think we can still discuss it in these terms in just talking about how as men, as humans are we prone to separating that which God has joined together.
- Selena:** Also maintaining the integrity of the context. Absolutely. Warning up front.
- Ryan:** Well, it's a mild warning. I'm not sure exactly how the conversation will come out but there may be some stuff that might not be appropriate for younger ears. So you've been advised. Maybe, I don't know, put headphones in or whatever. [00:05:00]
- Real quick, if you're not familiar with who we are, my name is Ryan. This is my lovely wife Selena. We're the faces, voices, founders of Fierce Marriage, Fierce Parenting, the Fierce Family on YouTube. If you're listening to this on the podcast, go ahead and find us on YouTube. We're really hoping to grow up that community because I just think there's much more... I don't know, it's fun to have interaction and-
- Selena:** More interaction. I think a little more personal-
- Ryan:** ...questions and comments.
- Selena:** Yeah, you can see-
- Ryan:** You can't really do comment interactions on podcast episodes. So we're doing most of that on the YouTube side, which I really love. We do post this stuff over to Facebook and Instagram if you're there. But the conversations really unfold on YouTube.
- So, again, I'm gonna reiterate this premise here. So it's all about the anatomy of an affair. What does an affair look like before it becomes a full-blown affair? What are those warning signs?

- Selena:** What do you mean by affair? Are you talking both emotional and physical?
- Ryan:** Yeah.
- Selena:** Okay. Just to be clear.
- Ryan:** Yeah. And so what are the signs and circumstances that lead to the emotional affairs or the physical affairs? And then how do we guard our marriage from an affair? How do we recover from one? We may not get into that recovery part. We do have a recommended episode that we'll give you at the end.
- Selena:** We have couple episodes about that.
- Ryan:** And then this question is equally as important is how do we support couples in our life who are recovering from an affair or headed that way, or you can sense that there's some isolation and drift?
- Selena:** Right. Right.
- Ryan:** So here's a caveat, though, is that this episode is necessarily broad and that we can't really get into your specific circumstances. We don't know you. In most cases, we don't know you, we don't know who you are, what the circumstances are.
- There are tons of factors and contributors to consider in this particular conversation but here's the thing. At the end of this, like I said, we'll give you some resources if this is something that really resonates with you. We're not going to leave you hanging. We'll do the broad overview, have a conversation, then we'll give you some resources to go deeper as you find appropriate in your context.
- Selena:** So a lot of this was written not from personally experiencing an affair but having walked face to face close with couples who have experienced an affair. And we've also done a lot of research on it as well because the signs are pretty obvious. The signs are... they're consistent. So I think-
- Ryan:** So we'll break them into three big categories.
- Selena:** Okay. I see how you did that.
- Ryan:** Again, talking about what are the early signs, three big categories. I'm just gonna say them here and then we'll go into each one.

The first one is increased distance and isolation. The second big category is boundary erosion. So you start to see the boundaries that you had that you know are healthy they start getting blurry and gray and harder to distinguish. Those will begin to erode.

Then the final one, and this is just a general category, is other warning signs. Things like vague communication, excuses, your history.

So let's talk about the first one: increased distance and isolation. So in marriage, our default, even if you're believing Christians, you're in church, your default, unfortunately on this side of glory is not going to be more connection, it's going to be drift and isolation.

So there's some of that that just goes with the territory of marriage. You need to continue to build intimacy. But if that gets to a kind of inflection point where that distance and that isolation gets so far that you start to lose sight of one another, then these other kind of delusions start to work their way in and you start to believe a lie about the nature of your marriage or the nature of your commitment, the nature of what biblical love is, the nature of what God thinks.

You start to kind of believe lies and half-truths in those ways because you're losing sight of the shore. You're drifting out and you're being, you know, crowded out by the fog and just-

Selena: You're not being saturated by the things of God, which our first point in this increased distance and isolation is the isolation from God. You have no devotional life to speak of. You know, when you're asked, there's never really any substance there. You aren't really praying to God and you know, it is... isn't it somewhere that the prayers are-

Ryan: What is the prayer life like?

Selena: When there's sin, how does... I don't know I've always...

Ryan: Well, okay, so there's-

Selena: Is there a blockage? *[laughs]*

Ryan: I'm thinking of somebody who kind of looks the part on the surface but there is something deeper there that only the spouse can see and only you can see for yourself in yourself. And so you might be going to the church meetings and praying out loud in some cases, you might be standing there agreeing in prayer, but if there's no personal prayer life to speak of-

Selena: Right. That's your personal prayer life.

Ryan: ...or if your prayer life is purely convenience based and not based on any sort of desire to commune with the living God, that's a big red flag. So, again, isolation from God is what we're talking about now.

Here's another huge one in terms of isolation from God is you have habitual and persistent sin or addiction. This is funny. As you stumble so often you wonder if... I've been a part of small group where we talk to guys. [00:10:00] And every week it's like there's a stumble, right? And there's always a stumbling.

And there's part of that which is just working out your faith. But at some point you start to wonder, like, "Man, he stumbles so often I'm wondering if he's even walking. Is he even walking out his faith?"

Selena: Yeah, sure. That's a good question.

Ryan: Because it's stumbling just a way of existing?

Selena: Right. When really God calls us to walk in the light, walking is something that we can and are capable of doing.

Ryan: And to be clear, we're not talking about moralism or - what is the term? Legalism—that somehow by acting right, you're going to be saved. No, but we're talking about the actual outworking of having been saved is naturally going to be the sanctification through the word, through the Holy Spirit, through prayer, through Christian community, which is another category we're talking about.

Again, I'm picturing-

Selena: Well, we've seen themes of this recently. Not just in our own lives, but in... I mean, you see it in the media, right? There's mega churches and people that are in employment and leadership in ministry that have-

Ryan: There was a big report that just came out with the SBC that was, you know, they've been... For decades there were sexual misconduct that had been covered over for years. So you can even be in the middle of church employment or ministry and still isolating yourself from God.

Selena: Right. And don't think that that employment will keep you outside of the target of the enemy, right?

Ryan: I think it'd be more.

Selena: Yeah, exactly.

Ryan: But be careful to not assume that your ministry vocation verifies your faith. Because it's very possible to put on a facade because that's what people love, and it's easy to feed the ego in that way and all the while you're not actually placing your faith in God.

Selena: You can get good at doing that too.

Ryan: I have another question. How can someone who is—and this is maybe a rhetorical question—how can someone who is earnestly seeking God in the word and prayer and persist... how can that person persist in unknown temptation and unconfessed sin?

And I would argue that's not possible. Maybe I'll put it this way. It's not impossible. It's just a lot harder to persist in sin if you're consistently entering into God's presence. He will convict you.

Selena: Yes, the Holy Spirit is faithful.

Ryan: That's the first area of isolation—isolation from God. The second one is isolation from your spouse.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: So you'll see drift happening. You'll see patterns.

Selena: It usually begins in how you communicate with each other. How you're either cold or distant, or there's kind of a quick shortness in the communication, right?

Ryan: Or very surfacey. It's not always the case because some are better at hiding it than others. But you'll realize there's no or little intimacy in how you communicate to one another. There's also no to little intimacy physically with one another, which is usually a symptom of finding satisfaction in other places. Not necessarily the affair yet, but having that habitual sin. Pornography, namely, being something that's being constantly divulged in or indulgent, I should say.

Another aspect of coldness is you have very little quality time. And this is the tricky one because if you're in the stage of life that we're in—young kids—it's

really easy to crowd out our time with one another with good things. Right? I'm reading a good book, I've got these kids which are blessings, I've got all this ministry work to do.

Personally, I'm very part-time in getting a seminary degree. So there's always work to be done on that front. It's good work. And all the while if we're not careful that good work will crowd out and justify our lack of connection with one another. And here's the key, it'll provide a cover for increasing isolation.

Selena: Right. Right.

Ryan: So you justify it, and then before you know it you are, again, losing sight of one another. We won't get on this hobbyhorse much here but this is why prioritizing dates and connection is an absolute must. And it's not just going someplace and spending \$100 eating food.

Selena: That's how much it costs these days. *[chuckles]* It's getting expensive.

Ryan: But it's actually connecting in that time and saying like, "How can I see your soul in this time?"

Selena: Engaging with one another. I think it's such a huge thing.

Ryan: Third isolation.

Selena: Isolation from Christian community. And I think this is one of the big ones. I mean, I think you can notice with your spouse how they're maybe drifting and how you guys are feeling more isolated with one another. But the biggest one, at least if you are involved in a Christian community, is the beginning of the isolation of that, right?

There's no real friendships of any depth with the same sex. So having more of a friendship with someone of the opposite sex than you do with someone of the same sex. I don't know. You can chalk that up personality. But I just don't know that it's godly for women to be having close friendships with men, especially if they're all married. That doesn't make a lot of sense to me.

Ryan: I can't think of a scenario where that's going to be good. [00:15:00] But what do you mean by depth? So if you have a friend of the same sex and the conversations rarely get past whatever the hobby is, whatever the mutual interest is, you never get into the "what does the word of God say and how does this word of God bear its weight on my heart?" How should it bear weight on your heart, friend? That's what I mean by depth.

And even in that you can feign depth, you can act deep without actually being deep. You have to be introspective in a way that's actually true and transparent. And the only way you can do that is if you are confessing your sin, which is another aspect of Christian community.

Selena: Repentance.

Ryan: No confession of sin and repentance first to God and into one another? How can that be a real friendship? Because everyone is somehow fighting their flesh, fighting their sin, needing prayer, needing more sanctification. So many times somebody who's drifting into an affair or is going to be isolated from this type of healthy Christian community.

And part of that also comes with a lax of view of the church, and I'll say this, and lax of view of doctrine. Or a combination of the two, right?

Selena: Right.

Ryan: So you can be really involved in church but your views of doctrine have turned your involvement into basically just a social club because you're not actually engaging with the deeper things of God.

You don't actually see God as God. You see God as just a name on the title of the church, or his law doesn't bear any weight on your hearts because you've not actually... you've taken a very lax view of doctrine. It's irrelevant. It doesn't matter. We're here to tell you, doctrine matters. Doctrine matters in every fathomable way.

So here's a question in that vein. Do you have true Christian community? And what do we mean by that? I don't just mean Christian friends. We have talked about this at great length in our book, *See-Through Marriage*. What does it mean to have true distinctive Christian community?

Well, here's a few aspects. You actually are committed to one another. That means you're going to work things out even when it gets hard. You're going to be truly transparent. There's going to be-

Selena: Being known by one another.

Ryan: ...gospel centrality, meaning that you don't meet around the cult of personality that is the church; you meet around the gospel. And the church is the outcome of that.

Selena: Which means you may not like my personality, but we are meeting under the umbrella of the gospel. So even if I don't like your personality, I can still find value in a conversation with you because you're made in the image of God. "We both struggle, let's work this out. Let's figure out how to be on the same page." So yeah, the Gospel centrality I feel like is huge.

And how we love one another, right? That's another mark of the Christian life is we love because he first loved us. And the mark of us is loving one another as Christ loved the church.

Ryan: The final aspect of isolation is... and this one's huge. We're gonna get into I think more recognizable anatomy parts of an affair here. Isolation from accountability. So here's what I mean by that is when asked-

Selena: With your spouse.

Ryan: With your spouse. So when asked, there's going to be some defensiveness or gaslighting. What gaslighting is, is it's a manipulation tactic that basically makes the other person feel crazy for even asking the question. Like, "Can I see your phone?" "What kind of person do you think I am? You think I would do anything? How dare you? You don't trust me?"

Now all of a sudden I've turned the tables on you. Instead of you asking me accountability questions, I'm accusing you. So that's a manipulation tactic. That's isolating me from accountability.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: Or in very, I think, overtly, your spouse will hide their phone. They will lock it. They won't tell you the code to unlock it. They're hiding text conversations, messaging conversations. There's just general elusiveness around their phone usage.

And then here's the thing is they will always find ways to technically... so technically they'll justify some questionable behavior while making you feel bad for even asking the question. Like, "Why are you texting so and so? I don't get why you're doing that." "Well, because I have to work out this. It's for work. Or it's this..."

Like, you know that it feels weird and I know why it feels weird because it's drifting. Maybe you haven't engaged in the emotional affair yet, the physical affair yet, but there's something about it that I'm keeping it secured from you.

Selena: I'm thinking about the fact that you enjoy getting the attention from that other person and the type of attention that you're getting from them, right?

Ryan: So I can argue my way out of that because I can technically justify there's a good reason to do that. "Because I have worked to accomplish." I'm not letting you read the full text. So you're now made to feel crazy for asking about it.

Selena: Which gets us into the second part of-

Ryan: Second major category.

Selena: Major category, which is the boundary erosion. And I really liked how you titled that, by the way. Good job.

Ryan: [inaudible]

Selena: So connecting with the opposite sex in seemingly innocent ways but appropriate ways, which is kind of that technicality of texting messaging. [00:20:00] How do we know when it's inappropriate? One on one. There's never a good reason for me to text any of our guy friends one on one.

I've done that once or twice to ask about a certain gift for someone, but their wife is always included in that group text. I never am texting one on one. And if I do, he's always... There is no real reason. I don't even know why there would be a reason. But for some reason, if there was reason, he always knows about it. Like there's nothing hiding there, right?

Ryan: And one of the giveaways for that too is the texting one-on-one will oftentimes happen when you shouldn't be with your family, with your spouse and other inappropriate times. Late at night, or, you know, when you should be working, or if it's taking you away. It shouldn't be one on one at all, but this will look a certain way.

And even within the content of that you could be joking and flirting. You're saying, "It's just a joke. We are friends. We're just being friends." And you could see it as flirting. You can see it as a joke.

You only know how that looks and how that feels. You can either own it and say, "You know what? You're right. It's drifting that way, I need to repent and turn or you can go even further down that hole and make everyone who asks you feel crazy for asking you.

So another way that we could connect and have our boundaries erode when it comes to connecting with the opposite sex is co-rides alone together. Right?

So again, the co-worker scenario. All right. So Sally from accounting wants to go out. I should use *Office* references here. *[both chuckles]* Angela-

Selena: Angela.

Ryan: "You know, we have a work meeting or whatever so we're gonna ride together." Right? Or "we just decided to go get lunch together because we both need to eat, and we're friends. What's wrong with that?" Well, why are you gonna go just the two of you? Go with somebody else.

Selena: It's a work thing, ask more people to go.

Ryan: There's no reason to be one on one. Sometimes you could justify, "Hey, we're at this work event. We're traveling. We're not staying in the same hotel room. So back off." It's not like we're just getting dinner and drinks together. Gateway to bad decisions.

Selena: Right. Hello temptation.

Ryan: That's a piece of advice. Don't drink when you're on work trips alone. Just don't do it because it lowers your inhibitions. So that's going to work trips and spending time alone together for work. And here's the other thing. Or for ministry. There's gonna be opportunities. Maybe you're in a ministry scenario or you're working for a nonprofit and working for a church where you can go to retreat together or go to a conference or whatever.

Selena: Have every excuse in the world to say, "Hey, we got to go meet and talk about this," yada yada.

Ryan: Again, boundaries are being eroded. It's not that you're going to have a tryst, an affair. It's that the boundaries are being eroded.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: This is how it starts to look. This is where it begins. So we're moving on to the next part of this, again, boundaries eroding. You have seemingly innocuous but inappropriate touching.

Selena: Right. Hahahaha.

Ryan: Yeah, when you're laughing, you know, touch a shoulder or a leg, or- *[both laughs]*

- Selena:** Sorry, I just think of... We shouldn't be laughing. But I'm thinking of Toby on The Office when they get locked out of the... or they get locked in the parking lot of the office and he laughs. Somebody says a joke and he puts his hand on Pam's leg and Jim's just like, "Why are you touchy?" They're all just...
- Ryan:** And he's like, "I don't think I'm gonna go home." *[chuckles]*
- Selena:** And he runs in like *[inaudible]*. So awkward. But anyways.
- Ryan:** Well, it should have been awkward.
- Selena:** Yes. Because it was inappropriate.
- Ryan:** So again, this could seem technically fine. You'd be like, "I was just touching her shoulder. There's nothing wrong with touching someone's shoulder." And you can argue your way out of it and you can make everyone who asks about it feel like they're just complete and utter prudes.
- Selena:** Right.
- Ryan:** Right. But you know-
- Selena:** With such a telltale, right?
- Ryan:** Yeah. And so if you ask them about it, then you're the one who's made to feel bad. Now here's the right litmus test. Because if someone's doing that and they're truly unaware, and they're laughing, and they touch a coworker in a way that could be construed like we're discussing here, if someone said that to me, I'd be like, "Oh, no. I'm sorry. I did not mean to do that. That was not my intention. I need to ask you for forgiveness. I'll ask her for forgiveness if you think I should. I'm really sorry." That to me feels like a very easy response if that's your heart orientation.
- Selena:** Right. Right. You're not getting defensive, you're not making excuses. Absolutely. Another one of inappropriate touching is probably like hugging too much. That's a church culture thing, man. People just like to hug all the time I think. And I don't anymore. I'm like, "That's weird." We'll side hug a little bit but we don't really do that. Like women hug women and men can do whatever they do, whether it's high five or whatever.
- Ryan:** I've always understood and embraced the not hugging women thing. It's just I've not felt comfortable with that. And I used to hug a lot of my guy friends more. Like it was a bro thing. And something happened over the last year and

a half where I'm just like, "I don't want to hug you. *[Selena laughs]* I care about you." [00:25:00]

Selena: High five, man.

Ryan: "We'll shake hands." [inaudible] *[laughs]*

Selena: Anyway, it's not trying to be judgmental, right, on that?

Ryan: No. But you know-

Selena: You know when the hugs are getting a little too huggy.

Ryan: And this is you looking in at yourself, okay? This isn't something where you're just pointing the finger at your spouse and saying, "You're hugging some and so too much and I don't like it. You need to stop." I think that's okay to call them on it, but really that's our heart here is saying you know when this is either... I guess you know either way whether it's you or...

Selena: Right.

Ryan: The final area where boundaries are eroded is your thought boundaries, where—you can't really know this about your spouse. You know this about yourself—where you're fantasizing about life together with the other person. And it might be like you're not having steamy fantasies, but you are thinking about like, "Oh, I bet he would be a lot more loving toward me," or "he would say nice thing to me.

Selena: "He would say nice things to me." *[laughs]*

Ryan: "He would open the door for me. My husband just shuts it in front of me." *[Selena laughs]*

Selena: Sorry. This is not funny.

Ryan: It's funny though because sometimes I do that to you.

Selena: He does.

Ryan: Or you do take it to the next level and you're actually fantasizing about this other person, because you've given yourself over. And you think well, "I'm not acting on it." Can you recognize that maybe the thoughts are inappropriate? But they're your thoughts. So you rationalize it by saying, "I'm never going to

act on this." And I didn't mean to think about it but I just kind of let myself think about it longer than I should have.

That's a sign. That's a sign that there's boundaries being eroded. That behind that, that justification, you have lowered your view of holiness, you have lowered your view of the covenant you have with your spouse, you've lowered the view that God has of your covenant with your spouse. And in a way you've lowered the view of the person you're fantasizing about because you're objectifying them in a way that God would not be honored by.

Selena: Right. So good.

Ryan: So recognize it for what it is. I think it's really easy for us to trick ourselves.

Selena: Right. Hopefully, this doesn't come across wrong. But I think that we are not perfect. I think there's been surfacey levels where we have been found guilty of probably some of these things, and not all consistent not all at once.

Just don't look at us as if we're like perfectly got it together. We've seen these from the outside happen and go into full-blown affairs, but we've also, you know, I think experienced certain things at certain levels that were like, "Oh, man." We've had to practice repentance and we've had to practice bringing hard things to the table and be known in those ways. I think it's a maintenance thing as well.

Ryan: I don't want to throw you under the bus here. I think this is something that wives probably struggle with in different ways.

Selena: Yes. I would say in the thought boundaries, probably. Guys could too.

Ryan: Especially imagine a life together.

Selena: That's the equivalent of probably, you know-

Ryan: Because I found early on, and I'm just going to be completely honest, temptation to flirt with someone of the opposite sex, whether it's work or whatever, it dissipates really fast when you actually see a human being there. Because you're like, "Wow, I actually didn't marry an awesome person." I'm romanticizing it.

If you think through all the different implications of what a relationship with that person would be like, you really quickly realized that it's pointless. I'm not trying to exonerate-

Selena: I better just stay with my spouse because... no.

Ryan: But you count your blessings and you also see the thing in reality, and you realize it's not this romanticized picture that I've conjured it in my mind.

Selena: And nothing ever will be, right? I just don't think that's ever the case. I think when you marry each other and you honor that covenant, there is a lot of blessing and goodness to be had, and joy. Yes, the equal like hardships and challenges and frustrations, things you have to walk through, but the fact that you are with each other through that and God is with you and present, that's the way to go 1,000%.

Last part. Other warning signs. These are just kind of I think the miscellaneous.

Ryan: Yeah. So this will be indicative of anyone or I guess typical of anyone who is in any sort of secretive, living, whether it's through addiction, sin, or whatever, is there will be vague communication and there will be lame excuses for things. So in other words, like unplanned absences.

Like, "Why are you home so late?" "I just had to stay late for X or Y reason." Late nights at work. You have delays. You have reasons. Oftentimes you'll find reasons or they'll find reasons to be away from you.

Selena: Consistently.

Ryan: And it can be consistent. And you might wonder, but in the back of your mind you still want to believe the best and trust the best. No, we're not trying to breed suspicion in your marriage. We're trying to help you notice some warning signs. And we hope that you're not walking away from this, listening to this thinking, "I need to be [00:30:00] more suspicious of my spouse." That's not what we're trying to do here.

If you have a question you should get a straight answer is what I'm trying to say. And if you feel as if your trust is being eroded, you need to express that. Saying, "I'm having a hard time trusting this because you didn't really give me a clear answer. It's been consistent. I don't think you're being honest with me. And please correct me if I'm wrong, but..."

Selena: "Help me understand."

Ryan: "Help me understand." You're not accusing them. You're not-

Selena: Policing them.

Ryan: ...assuming the worst, right? Paul says love hopes the best, hopes all things. But we're trying to kind of put these on your radar.

Another kind of vague communication... This is not the right category for it, but another sign I guess would be late nights awake but not in bed, or in bed but on the phone, and up late maybe well after you fall asleep or going out to the computer or whatever. That's a sign.

Then another kind of warning to consider is history. So if you married somebody, they were all saved by grace alone, by faith alone, through Christ alone, right? I didn't get that completely right but you get the point. So, but we have histories we have to deal with and we have different patterns of thinking that we have to deal with that are being sanctified at varying rates and degrees.

So if you married someone who had a history of promiscuity prior to meeting you, that can be sanctified out of them. And that has happened will happen. But there are chances that it's not completely... like there's patterns of thinking that we're there at one point and may or may not be completely-

Selena: They're probably heavily ingrained. And so the Holy Spirit is and can be fully at work to disintegrate those thought patterns. But again, we all have our challenges and sin that we're dealing with. And recognizing that.

Ryan: So what is the history there?

Selena: Yeah, recognizing that. And I think the thing with this conversation-

Ryan: Acknowledge it too.

Selena: Yes, acknowledging it. ...is again it's not just usually one thing. There's usually a culmination of a lot of these things that we've been talking about in this whole conversation. So the being up late at night... If your spouse is up late at night on the phone, and that's like the only thing, well, I mean, it doesn't hurt to ask and talk about it. But again, doesn't demand that you police them and question them and interrogate them.

Ryan: I mean, that combined with-

Selena: That's what I'm saying.

Ryan: Well, there are many nights where Selena is asleep and I'm on my phone. I'm not proud to say that because you're not supposed to have your phone in your

bedroom because you sleep terribly. I sleep like a baby. But I'll be like, you know, watching videos on YouTube or something silly-

Selena: Dove videos. He likes watching those, and pigs. *[laughs]*

Ryan: My Instagram feed is insane. Monster trucks and pigs. Baby pigs. *[Selena laughs]* I don't know how I got there, but I'm there and I love it. *[Selena chuckles]* But that's in itself is fine because Selena knows any moment she can say, "Let me see your phone," and I'd be like, "Okay, fine. Have fun. These are great."

Selena: "You should watch this one." This is what he says. He says, "Watch this one."

Ryan: There's no messaging history, there's nothing that... But if you have a spouse who is showing like... they're up late on their phone, and you say, "Hey, who are you talking to?" "No one. Go to bed. It's not in your business."

Selena: Wow.

Ryan: "I need my privacy." These are warning signs. So we don't want to leave you there. What are some ways to combat this? How do we actually move forward?

Now we're 35 minutes into this episode, so we're gonna honor your time. But here are some really tangible ways forward. Productive, tangible ways forward, I should say. Truth, honesty, and depth. Truth and honesty they go hand in hand, but truth is recognizing a truth. God's word is good and true. Honesty about who you are in light of that and who God is in light of what he's calling you to. And then depth in those conversations.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: Which means you're in the word, you're praying together, you're in Christian community together. That's a way forward. So fighting for true connection with one another. And don't settle—This is key—don't settle for those shallow conversations. Go deeper. Go deep with one another, ask questions, give true answers. And fight for that together.

Selena: Right. That's a blessing of your covenant. That's a privilege of your covenant, I guess you should say.

Ryan: And then another sign. Again, it's really hard for an affair to fester and to begin if this is the case—if your life is one of repentance. Think about it. Martin Luther opened the *95 Theses* like this. The very first sense was this: "Our Lord

and Master Jesus Christ will the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

Selena: Repentance is such a gift.

Ryan: It is a gift because you know who forgives. It's Jesus Himself. And so it's not like we're just groveling and constantly in the state of, you know, sackcloth and ashes.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: It's this "I need the constant intervention of Christ in my life. I am a sinner dead in sin. I'm made alive in Christ and I will live as one living in Christ." And that is to turn constantly from sin. To turn constantly from it.

Here's the final thing, and I alluded this earlier. [00:35:00] How do you find a way forward? Do the work. Do the work in your marriage. Literally, nothing else in your life can be left alone and you would expect it to grow and you'd never expect it to stay healthy. Right.

But for some reason people think that their marriage will just kind of gravitate toward a place of health. And we're saying, no, prioritize your marriage, connect with one another, communicate about God together.

Selena: Together. To each other. Yeah.

Ryan: Pray together. Pray together for one another. Pray together for your marriage. Pray together for your hearts to stay soft toward God's, soft toward each other. And then work hard to establish and maintain healthy... what we call threefold intimacy. So spiritual intimacy—that's the praying together piece; emotional intimacy—that's going deeper as a manner of being, as a manner of actually maintaining your marriage.

And then having physical intimacy with rhythms and routines that actually maintain it. Okay? Because so often we just leave it up to spontaneity or are we both in the mood. No. Say like, "This is what's healthy for us. Let's fight for this. We know that we start to feel distant if we're not sexually intimate this many times per week." Find that number, work for it, do so lovingly. Don't hold it over each other's head. But remember, you're serving one another in that.

We have some resources too for you.

Selena: Yeah. We've done a couple of past episodes, but this one in particular: rebuilding trust after betrayal. Check that out on-

Ryan: You can search for that. Just search-

Selena: You can search for that on any-

Ryan: You can go to our website and search for it. The podcast and the transcript are there. Or you can go to YouTube. Actually, that one's not on YouTube, is it?

Selena: No.

Ryan: You can go to I think just the podcast.

Selena: I think it is podcast too. Yeah.

Ryan: And I might put these links in the description on the podcast episode as well.

We actually have a course. Actually, it's called Seven Ways to Affair-Proof Your Marriage. I think it's seven ways. [*chuckles*] We'll just say seven. [*Selena chuckles*] It's a number of ways to affair-proof your marriage.

And actually, that's part of our online learning platform. So if you want to go deeper, that online learning platform will help you do that. And it starts by rooting your marriage in the Gospel. And then you can then take this mini-course called seven ways to affair proof your marriage. But don't try to do that without the gospel at the center.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: So if you want to learn more, it's actually eight bucks a month. Super cheap. We lowered the price because we want more people in on it. We're actually doing just a limited time thing. Go to gospelcenteredmarriage.com and you can find out how to sign up there.

And then finally, there's a book. The book is called *Anatomy of an Affair*. And I didn't know that.

Selena: When you were writing that.

Ryan: When I was writing this podcast rundown I didn't know that. But here we are. It's by a guy named Dave Carder. And as far as I can tell, it seems like a really solid book. I've not read the book of course since I didn't know the book

existed until a couple hours ago. So we'll leave a link to that in the description. You can search for that on Amazon or go to the link that we'll leave.

So with that said, if all of this is you're hearing us talk, you hear us talk about connecting around the truth of God, you're wondering, what is the truth of God? We're here to tell you the truth of God is this. That He loves you, He died for you, and He wants you to be part of His family. And the way you do that is to place your trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

It sounds simple, right? Well, it is simple, but it's also very profound. So we've set up a website for you to help you understand and help you make steps in that direction. If you want to be a Christian, we want you to be a Christian, we want to call you brother, a sister, the website is this. thenewsisgood.com.

Go there, read a little bit, check it out, find a church, boom, get into a Christian community, start walking it out. We'd love to meet you one day. If not in this life, in the next.

Also, we want to give you an opportunity. We mentioned to you... I don't know early on if we mentioned this, but this ministry, if this has blessed you... One of the primary ways that this ministry is sustained is through partners.

So if it's blessed you and you feel compelled or led by the Lord to partner with us financially, you can do that. Just go to fiercemarriage.com/partner. There's options there. You get some freebies if you are so inclined. Don't do it for that. Do because Lord is calling you.

And know this. Whether or not you partner with us, we're gonna continue to make this content because we have this burden that God has put on our hearts to point couples to Christ and commission them for the gospel. And we'll keep doing that as long as the Lord allows.

So with that said, why don't you pray us out?

Selena: Okay. Lord, thank you for all the marriages listening. I pray for those that are struggling to know whether or not an affair is budding or if there's sin and temptation that they are being made aware of in their hearts. Thank you Holy Spirit that you make us aware of those things that we can bring to our spouse, God, that is the person who's on our team, who's on our side, who've made a covenant with you.

Father, I pray that there'd be wisdom discernment and clarity around how to ask hard questions and how to lovingly prod and not start a fight but to find true reconciliation and oneness in you, God. I pray that we would go forth in

boldness. God, that we don't have to fear. You've already overcome [00:40:00] everything including death and we can walk in your spirit of truth and boldness. And again, we do not have to be afraid because you are with us. You never leave us or forsake us. Thank you, God. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Ryan: All right, thank you so much for watching to this point or listening to this point. Love you guys. Thank you. We hope this helps you. Remember the whole point of this was to help you recognize signs of affair kind of brewing in your own life, in your own heart, in your own marriage but also in those around you. May you wield this information wisely and with discernment as you move forward.

But with that said, this episode of Fierce Marriage is—

Selena: In the can.

Ryan: We'll see you again in about seven days. Until next time—

Selena: Stay fierce.

PODCAST NOTES

- **Referenced scripture**
 - Mark 10:7

- **Recommended resource**
 - [See-Through Marriage](#) by Ryan & Selena
 - [Anatomy of an Affair](#), David Carder
 - [Rebuilding Trust After Betrayal](#)
 - [Six Ways to Affair Proof Your Marriage](#)
 - thenewsisgood.com

FIERCE MARRIAGE RESOURCES

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