

Case Study: Laurel

We had the opportunity to speak with Laurel who at the time was not quite 2 months from discovering her husband's affair. She has made remarkable progress in not only restoring trust, but in other areas within her marriage as well.

Doug: Hi, this is Doug and I'm here with Linda with Emotional Affair Journey and we have the pleasure today to be talking to Laurel who's one of the readers of our blog. She has graciously agreed to talk to us today about the subject of rebuilding trust after an affair. Laurel, how are you doing?

Laurel: I'm doing okay. Thanks, Doug.

Doug: Good. Glad to hear it. We really want to thank you, first of all, for joining us. I know this is not always easy to talk about, but I'm glad you offered to discuss your situation a little bit and how you've been able to rebuild a semblance of trust in your relationship. Hopefully, we'll have some information that the listeners can certainly learn from.

Just to start things off, Laurel, why don't you just give us maybe a quick summary of the story of the affair that's affected you.

Laurel: I discovered that my husband was having an emotional and physical affair in mid-March of this year. It began in October. I was away on an extended teaching assignment. Actually, I was in Peru. He had been contacted by a woman that he knew in a couple of different contexts prior to this, but he was never involved with her before.

She had some needs. He's an attorney. She needed some advice for child support issues or something along those lines. My husband hasn't been real specific about this, but my guess is that he told her that he was alone and kind of lonely. I think he also may have given her the impression that we weren't doing really well in our marriage.

Following that, she contacted him. Again, I'm not totally clear on the exact specifics, but I know that she sent him at least one text message that was extremely graphic about things she would like to do with him physically. He said at first he was shocked by that, but then he started to think about it some more and it kind of got into his thinking and his brain.

So he asked her out again. One thing led to another. This was about two weeks before I came home. When I came home, I knew something was wrong, but I didn't know exactly what. He told me that he thought we were going in different directions. I didn't get that at all. I didn't understand it, but I did ask him at that time if there was someone else and he said no.

So the months rolled on, and I knew there was something wrong with him. But there were other things going on, too, at work – promotion type things, or possibilities, and he was really wrapped up in that. Our son was getting married. There was just a lot going on around the holidays and the first of the year.

I don't know. I had a real bad feeling in my gut about what was happening, but I was afraid that I was right. I confronted him again once after the first of the year and he denied it again. By the time I found out, it was just getting pretty out of control with the phone, particularly.

One night I just told him, "I know something is going on and I'm just not going to leave this room until you tell me what's going on." He actually did tell me. I made him call her with me in the room that night to tell her that I knew. I also told him that he was going to need to tell our four kids because – well, they're all adults, but I knew that I couldn't pretend to be okay around them. We're really close, and I just thought it was important for them to know what had been going on.

Then we proceeded from there. There's been a lot since then, but that's basically the story.

Doug: Just to recap, it's been going on since October as far as you know, and although you suspected prior to that time, you discovered it in earnest in March. Is that correct?

Laurel: Yes.

Doug: When that happened, I'm sure you felt devastated and felt all other kinds of emotions and things of that nature, too. But since we want to concentrate on the trust issue a little bit in this discussion, how was your trust affected?

Obviously it was shattered I'm sure with your husband, but did you also feel that you lost some trust in yourself as well?

Just tell us the affects that this whole thing has had on you as far as trust is concerned.

Laurel: Initially, after about a day and a half, I told him I needed him to move out because I felt it was too painful to be around him. When that first happened, I found myself feeling extremely nervous and scared about things.

And I'm not that way. I'm not a scared person, typically – at least not in my recent past. I felt very insecure in my house. I felt like maybe she's going to try and break in or something for some reason. I also started to really wonder, because I didn't even know what she looked like, so I was really insecure about that.

I have to say, though, that my kids really helped me with feeling okay. They were extremely supportive. They weren't hateful towards their father, because they love him too, but they were extremely supportive of me.

My daughter, the oldest, who lives in California came the first weekend to be with me. That really helped a lot.

Doug: Having good support like that is definitely very important and can certainly make things a lot easier for you. So you found a lot of comfort in that, then?

Laurel: Yes. A lot.

Linda: I imagine that helped with your safety, having your family there with you and telling you probably the things that you needed to hear. I think so many times we don't tell anyone and we're alone. To have a support system, as Doug said, probably increased your safety.

Laurel: I think so. And I know in the past there have been other issues with my husband. He's been addicted to various drugs through the years. Things like this are shame-based things and it's very difficult to get support without "narcing" on somebody.

The other thing, too, that was really strong in me – I did not want to have people pity me at all. I just really didn't want that feeling when I'm coming into the room people are going, "Oh boy...."

Linda: "Poor thing."

Laurel: Yeah, poor thing. Exactly. You have to be careful who you tell.

Linda: In all aspects. It could backfire where they want to attack the other person or later on they end up throwing it against you. It is hard to choose who's going to be your support system and what kind of support you need.

Laurel: Exactly.

Doug: Did this support group then help you to regain some confidence? How did they help you as far as rebuilding trust within yourself, or helping with your confidence or self-esteem? What did they most help you with?

Laurel: I don't know. I think it was just the fact that they knew, and I knew that they knew. The other thing is we're people of faith, and I felt like the thing that's helped me honestly the most is just knowing that God was there for me. I literally felt like He was carrying me or holding me a lot during the first couple days. I was sort of in this bubble of protection for a while.

I don't feel that so much now a couple months later, but I really felt it a lot at first. And that was very helpful, just that feeling of security that I knew that he wasn't going to leave me by myself in this, even though I was very alone in my marriage.

Linda: I think from your actions it seems like for you, you trusted your instincts and you did things that a lot of people didn't do in the very beginning. You made him call the other person and end it and you took a stance. You actually asked him to leave, where so many, we're afraid to do that. I think for you having that confidence and that security to do that, you were probably a step ahead of a lot of people in this situation.

Laurel: The other thing I did, and this just kind of came to me probably the first night or second night after I found out, I decided that I wanted on paper a property settlement agreement. My husband is a lawyer, so I told him that I wanted him to draw this document up as if I were his client and I had come to him with my situation.

We've been married for a very long time – almost 35 years this year. I wanted to see on paper that I would be taken care of financially, and he did do that. He was very, very tired and exhausted himself, but from the beginning he took steps to show me that he was willing to do what I was asking him to do. That helped a lot I think as well.

Linda: Yeah, to build trust in him that he was following through on the things that you were asking.

Laurel: Right.

Linda: In many ways, it sounds like you were ahead of the game in those aspects. For him following through, ending the affair, doing what you're asking so you were able to begin to build trust within your relationship.

Laurel: I think so. Actually, as I said, it's been a very long relationship. There have been many, many issues over the years that I haven't dealt with this way. I think that this was the deal breaker for me. I took my wedding rings off.

Linda: I was curious. I remember reading your comments and I wanted to respond to you because I think it shows such a different aspect of what we've been seeing. I just applaud your courage to do all those things. So many of us were afraid. I was wondering how you got to that place so quickly.

Laurel: Well, quite frankly, I think it was just having a lot of different disappointments and things that I knew weren't right that I had to confront over the years. I finally got to the point where – initially, I just thought, "This is my ticket. I'm going to walk away now. I am just done."

I really was. I was just done.

Linda: And do you think he realized that then?

Laurel: Definitely.

Linda: That was what he needed to hear, that you weren't going to stand for it anymore. I was just curious reading your comments about how you had so much courage just to go ahead and do that. I think we all wished we could've put our foot down like that and draw the line.

Laurel: And it needs to happen, I believe, with something like this. You can do a lot of things in a marriage and there's a lot of room for compromise, but in my view, if you want a real marriage, you can't have three people. It just doesn't work that way.

Doug: That's good. For a lot of people, and us included, the whole process of rebuilding trust seems to take quite a long time. Here you are just a little over – or not even – two months basically from discovering things. How has it gone as far as rebuilding and working on the trust issues between you and your husband?

Laurel: I would say we have more good days now than we did a month ago. I experienced what I think is somewhat of a miracle because about two and a half weeks after D-day, we had gone to a counseling appointment. We weren't living together, but we were talking about it in our house before he went and left.

But I just felt like I was able to bring up some things from the very beginning of our relationship. I talked about it with him before and he never really acknowledged my feelings or my concerns about that.

For the very first time, he actually listened to me. He seemed moved by it. He apologized more than once and it was a very emotional time. I think that's what actually helped me to get to the point of saying, "You know what? This doesn't have to be over now."

I really did feel my heart change quite a lot toward him in that conversation and over the next couple of days. We actually reunited very shortly after that, before

the end of the month, really. It was probably the last day of March when we got back together in the same house.

He still has the apartment, which is sort of a problem, because yesterday he was having a very bad day and so was I and he was thinking, "Maybe I just need to go back to the apartment." I wouldn't say we're there yet. I really do think he needs a lot of counseling, truthfully. And maybe I do, too. But him in particular because he suffers very much from low self-esteem.

Linda: Do you feel that when he's away that if he did go to the apartment that you trust him?

Laurel: No, I don't want him back there. I do not want him back there. He hasn't been living there. It's just that he's still renting it. He signed a six-month lease. He hasn't lived there since the end of March, but when he talks that way, that makes me feel extremely insecure.

So what does this mean? You want to go back to her or what?

Linda: And that's a constant cycle worrying about that, the insecurities. That's really hard to build trust when you don't feel safe and secure.

Laurel: Definitely.

Doug: Other than that one instance that you just described where he really listened to you and felt moved by what you said, are there any other things that he's been doing that's helped you along the way here as far as trusting him again and trusting your relationship?

Laurel: Yes. He's been communicating in deeper and more open ways than he ever has, and he's been willing to listen. But not only that, the hardest thing for him is actually talking. He's not a poor listener, but I tend to talk more than he does. I think he's realizing that he has to start doing more work in the relationship than he has.

That was something you said, Linda, that I really related to – the whole thing about the betrayed spouse is the one who ends up doing all the work to fix it. Well, that isn't right. And I told him yesterday, "I can't do all this. I just can't. I'm not up to it."

Linda: Right. And I think that realization takes the pressure off of you and puts more responsibility on them. And I think when Doug started doing that, I was able to trust him more because I felt he was making the effort to make our relationship better. I think that was the turning point of when I started gaining trust in our relationship and in him, when he started making more effort to make our relationship better.

Laurel: It's really important. I think that – at least I hope – that that's going to grow in my husband, too.

Doug: You hear a lot about, too, the need for the cheating spouse to have full disclosure and be absolutely transparent in everything that they do. Not only just showing the phone logs and things like that or making them available, but it's also sharing feelings and that sort of thing.

You said he's been talking a lot more, but is he also being transparent in different ways?

Laurel: He is, to some extent. However, yesterday we had a bad day, like I said, and he was stonewalling me like he did so much in the past. This morning, I just said, "I'm just not going to say anything. I'm just going to sit here."

Because he said something like, "Well, I could tell you, but I already know what you're going to say."

I said, "Well, then I'm just not going to say a thing. I'm just going to listen." And I didn't. I listened to him.

Sometimes I'm not sure if he's just trying to get me to feel sorry for him or if he really does feel the way he says he feels, because if he does, he really needs help. He's really... If there was an edge of a cliff, it's almost like he's going to jump off it.

Again, he did go to talk to somebody today at the guidance clinic locally. It's really kind of tough for us because we don't live in a large community and everyone knows my husband. He's an extremely visible person.

Linda: It's probably hard for him to do that, then.

Laurel: Yeah, it's hard. It's hard for him to do a lot of different things.

Linda: The thing is, I don't know why there's such a negative stigma with going to a counselor. I know when I went, I felt so embarrassed sitting there in the waiting room. Why? Everyone needs this at one point in time in their life. But for some reason, there's just so much negative associated with it.

Laurel: And I think that my husband feels like everybody knows why he's there, even though they don't. I think that there's just a lot of shame.

Doug: So if you were to rate your level of trust in yourself and in your husband at this point on a scale of one to ten, where do you think you're at?

Laurel: My trust of myself or my trust in our marriage?

Doug: Well, why don't we start with trust in yourself. Where do you think you're at there?

Laurel: I really think that I'm okay. I think that when I read all the things that I've been reading, I'm still very close to having found out this terrible thing and I know I'm going to be okay. Sometimes I have to say I really don't like it. It's not fun. I feel like I've lost my mind sometimes.

But I don't feel super insecure. He's told me enough stuff that I don't feel like he negatively compares me to her at all.

Yesterday someone posted something about not wanting pity love, and I forwarded that to him. That's kind of what put him in this deep depression. He thought that I think that he has that for me. I'm just telling him, "I don't want it. I do not want you to love me because I'm just a default here."

I don't know. I don't know if I can do it on a scale of one to ten, but I don't feel super insecure in myself and I don't feel super insecure in my marriage. What I'm really not that trusting in is my husband's ability to make a decision.

Doug: That's an aspect that still needs a little bit of work yet. Obviously a lot of that has to come from him through his actions, words, and as you stated maybe a little bit of therapy, counseling or something like that. It might help as well.

It sounds like you're making good positive steps in the right direction though and that is just wonderful.

Laurel: I've even wondered if I should keep myself off your website for periods of time.

Linda: You mean your comments or yourself, personally?

Laurel: I just feel like I'm getting addicted to it.

Linda: I know. I feel the same way sometimes. I don't know why.

Laurel: It's really interesting and it actually is really helpful, but sometimes it's almost like I have too much interest in it. I need to do other things, too.

Linda: Actually, though, I think your contribution of how confident and how strong you have been only after two months would be wonderful, because you are an exception.

Laurel: I appreciate that. I really do sometimes want to say things that aren't nice.

Linda: I do think your contribution, you're positive and how well you are doing personally would be very helpful because there are so many who aren't. Their self-concept and their self-esteem is at an all-time low. So if you had any hints...

Laurel: I just want them to know that they're amazing people to me, that they even want to hang in there with what sounds like unacceptable stuff.

Doug: It's shocking sometimes what you hear.

Laurel: I have felt from the beginning of this that there is the possibility – if my husband gets to a place of being healthy and wanting to do it himself. But there are so many people that could benefit from this. Even marriages that don't have affairs, per say, are in trouble. People don't really have healthy marriages anymore. Just hearing somebody go through something like this and seeing that it's possible is really good.

Linda: I think so. That's the hard thing. I know in our initial stages, and we hear it all the time, is there anyone who's been successful? You really want to know that after all this work that in the end, you will have a better marriage.

You look around and we don't have many good role models. What is a good marriage? Is everyone just settling for an average marriage?

I think it is good for the website for people to see the progression and how you worked through it and how you can have a better marriage if you both are willing to put in the work.

Laurel: I agree. I have to say that even if our marriage doesn't make it because my husband chooses to do whatever he could do, it's been better these two months even with the pain and the drama because he's actually been communicating. I feel like we're closer.

Linda: And I think that in most marriages that communication was probably the major problem in how you handled your difficulties. Previously you would probably end up stonewalling or withdrawing and things like that, where now that's not acceptable anymore. You have to start communicating about your issues. I think that's what brings you closer. That's what helps build trust, too.

Laurel: I want you to know, Linda, too, I felt really bad about your brother. That's so sad for his daughter. I hope that you can continue to help her out and be there for her. What a position to be in.

Linda: It's a hard situation. It happened a year after we were going through it, so it was almost like reliving it again and watching it in front of you. Unfortunately,

the kids lived further away so I don't get to see them very often, but it has really affected them.

I think we have neglected on our site to really talk about the effects that it has on the children. We've mentioned it a few times, but I think after this week I would like to get more into it because it is a long-term affect.

Laurel: I do think that's one reason why marriages are so fragile. I started volunteering at the detention center here in town. Almost all the kids come from broken homes. It's sad. And you probably see that often as a teacher.

Linda: I don't have very many students who have a traditional family.

Doug: It is sad. Laurel, we'll let you go here, but we really do appreciate you taking out the time to talk to us today. I think, as we've mentioned, just the fact that how quickly you've been able to make positive steps and everything towards not only trust but rebuilding your marriage and fixing the things that are wrong, I think that's inspirational for a lot of people. We really do thank you for taking the time with us today.

Laurel: And I thank you guys for what you do. I really do appreciate it. It's helped me a lot.

Linda: Thanks and take care!