

### *The Anatomy of an Affair*

*Emma sat at the kitchen table, her head in her hands. Once again her mind drifted back over the events of the past year. What had she been thinking?*

*She shook her head slowly. It was all because of choir, she thought. If only she hadn't joined the choir. If only Jeremy hadn't joined the choir.*

*She remembered the first day he came. Tall, curly hair, athletic build. He looked pretty good for an old guy. Of course, she wasn't interested. Just observant.*

*They had kids the same age so there was the usual talk about school and sports. He was a nice guy, but she was married. She wasn't looking for a relationship.*

*That changed the day they stayed late to work on a song. It happened to be the same day she and her husband had a big fight, and she was feeling pretty fragile. She tried to lose herself in the music, but it didn't help.*

*As Jeremy walked her out to the parking lot, he asked her if anything was wrong. Something about the caring tone of his voice made her start to cry, and before long she was sharing her problems with him. He gave her a hug as they said good-bye, and he promised to pray for her.*

*That was the beginning. The beginning of a friendship, the beginning of a passion, the beginning of a sin.*

*Emma hadn't planned on having an affair. She always said it wouldn't happen to her. She was a Christian; she knew adultery was wrong. She had kids; she knew there were consequences to affairs.*

*Yet, like so many other women, she found herself in the midst of an adulterous relationship without having a clear idea of how it ever happened.*

*"I know," she told a friend later, "You hear it all the time ... it just happened. But it really did. Before I stopped to think, I was involved in a full-blown affair. I knew it was wrong, but I couldn't see a way out. So I just made the best of it."*

*It just happened ... or did it? Was there something Emma could have done way back at the beginning of the relationship to prevent the affair?*

### ***Freedom from Emotional Eating***

Has it ever occurred to you that emotional eating is a little bit like having an affair?

I know, that sounds extreme, but think about it. Emma really enjoyed spending time with the new man in her life. She liked the way he made her feel, even though she knew he wasn't good for her. When she was with him, she forgot all her problems. She also forgot all the problems that were caused by her relationship with him. When they were together, he was worth it.

Emma hid their relationship from other people. She didn't want others to know how much time she spent with this man or the nature of their relationship. He brought fun and excitement into Emma's life, but he was also the reason for her depression.

Is this beginning to sound familiar? Read those last two paragraphs again. Couldn't we say the same things about our relationship with food? Eating may be pleasurable at the moment, but it certainly has its downside.

Let's go back to the original question—could Emma have prevented her affair, or was it inevitable from the moment she met the man? Here's another question—would it have been easier for Emma to prevent the affair before or after their evening of intimate conversation?

I think we both know the answer to that question. It would have been easier to stop the relationship in its early stages, before her emotions got involved. The problem,

of course, was that the relationship didn't seem dangerous at the beginning. Emma felt like she was engaging in an innocent, fun friendship. She didn't foresee the heartache that this relationship would bring to her life.

In order for her to have prevented the affair, she would have had to set boundaries in her relationships with *all* men. This would have kept her from being seriously tempted to commit adultery with one man. Once she became close to Jeremy emotionally, it was very difficult to put the brakes on the progressing relationship.

Let's talk about boundaries for a moment. What exactly is a boundary? A boundary is any restriction we put in place to enhance our lives. Think of a fence at a school playground. The fence is built to protect the children—to keep the kids safe. In like manner, we put up boundaries in our own lives to keep us safe.

For example, one of the boundaries my husband and I have is to pay off our credit card each month. This keeps us from spending more than we can afford to spend. It also keeps us from buying everything we want to buy and doing everything we want to do.

Now, would it really be that big of a deal to charge something small and not pay it off, say a \$50 shirt? Of course not. The problem is that a \$50 shirt could lead to a \$200 coat or a \$500 stereo system and before you know it we could have a huge credit card debt that *would* be a big deal. Living with strict boundaries in this area makes our lives better—it's worth the sacrifice.

In like manner, Emma's life would have been better if she had had strict boundaries in place regarding her relationships with men. What if she had set and followed this rule? "*I will never spend significant time alone with any unrelated man.*" Or this one? "*I will never discuss intimate matters with another man unless my husband is there.*" Practicing either one of these boundaries would have prevented her affair from "just happening."

It's easy to see how boundaries in other areas of our lives help us, yet we're often deceived when it comes to food. We think eating is fun, and we only impose boundaries when we go on a diet. We don't realize how dangerous it is to live without boundaries in this area of our lives. Take a look at the chart below.

	<b>No Boundaries</b>	<b>Boundaries</b>
<b>Belief:</b> Eating whatever I want is fun.	<i>Our normal lives</i>	<i>Our diets</i>
<b>Belief:</b> Eating whatever I want is dangerous.		<i>Our goal</i>

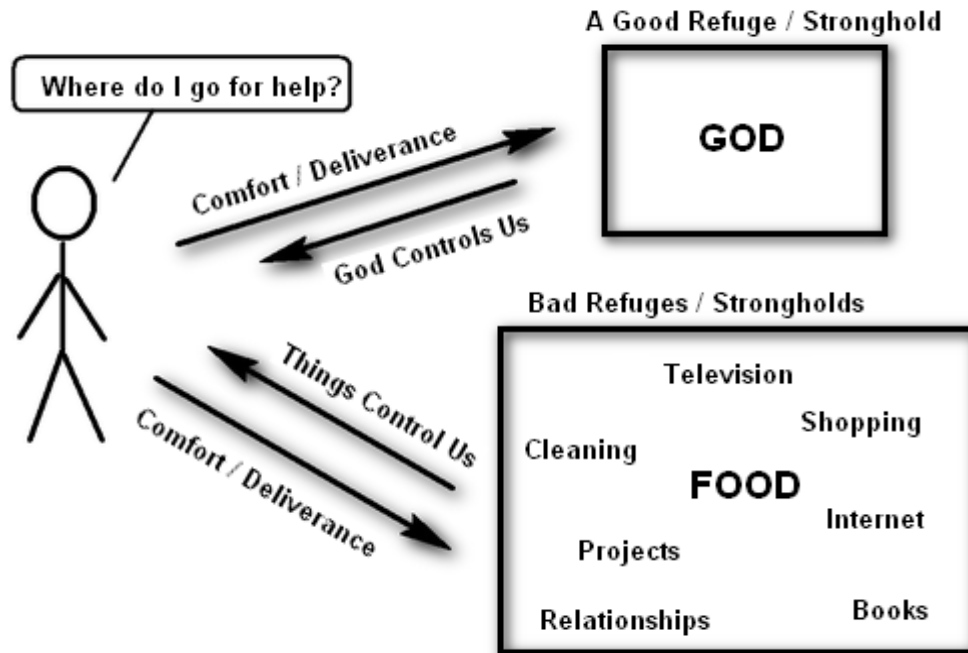
In reality, it is just as dangerous to eat whenever we feel like eating as it is to flirt whenever we feel like flirting. Both actions lead to emotional attachments. In order to have lasting change, we need to develop lifelong boundaries in the area of eating, and we need to see them as a good thing. This will be hard to do since we're already emotionally involved with food. We're not trying to *prevent* an affair—we're trying to end an affair that's already in progress.

Think about it. We eat when we're bored, we eat when we're upset, and we eat when we're happy. We eat because we want to eat. We eat because it's there to eat. We

eat because we *need* to eat.

In truth, we have become emotionally dependent on food. Remember Emma? She didn't get into trouble until her emotions got involved. Unfortunately, we're way past trouble.

So what can we do? We need help, and God is the only one who can help us. Let me explain with the following diagram.



Life isn't always easy. There are things we don't want to do, emotions we don't want to feel, and people we'd rather not deal with. Yet we're stuck. We can't always escape our situations. So what do we do? Where do we go for help?

God says, "I'm your refuge—come to me." But it's so much easier to grab a bowl of ice cream, turn on the television, or call a friend. The ice cream will deaden the pain. The television will numb the mind. The friend will listen and feel sorry for us. But God will say, "No wonder you're unhappy—you're not living for me," or "You need to get off the couch and get busy; I have things I want you to do for me today."

You see, the bad refuges don't require anything of us, so they're easy escapes. Going to God for refuge is much more difficult, because He *does* ask something of us. He wants us to live for Him, and living for Him isn't always comfortable.

But who is the better refuge? The more we go to God for comfort and help, the more He begins to control us. His peace and joy flood into our lives as we submit to Him. The sacrifices we make for Him are well worth it.

When we go to other refuges for comfort and help, they also begin to control us. I said that they don't require anything of us—that's only true in the beginning. If we go to them too often, they require everything of us, for we are no longer in control. They wreak havoc in our lives, yet we can't seem to change our behavior.

These bad refuges are referred to as strongholds in the New Testament. They may

actually be good things in our lives, but if we consistently go to them for refuge rather than turning to God, these good things become bad things. Read what 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 has to say about the tearing down of strongholds.

*For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

We'll study strongholds in depth later this week, but for now I'd like you to grasp the concept that strongholds are not overcome by self-control and discipline. Instead we are to take captive every thought to Jesus Christ. If food is a stronghold in your life and not just a weakness, then you will need to overcome it with the truth. Let's look at another chart.

	<b>Man's viewpoint</b>	<b>God's viewpoint</b>
Problem	Weight	Stronghold
Solution	Lose weight	Tear down the stronghold
Method	Diet, exercise, behavior modification	2 Corinthians 10:3-5 - take thoughts captive
Tools (weapons)	Will power, self-control	Truth

As you can see by this chart, we've been fighting the wrong battle—not only have we been fighting the wrong battle, we've been using the wrong weapon! No wonder we've failed so many times in our struggles with dieting. If food is truly a stronghold in our lives, then we need to use the *truth* to fight against it. Listen to what Jesus said in John 8:32. *Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*

My friend, God can set you free from emotional eating. As you saturate your mind with His truth, He will begin to change the way you think. And what you think will control what you feel which will influence the way you act.

Behavioral psychologists know this. They use a little diagram like this one to show how it works.

Thoughts → Feelings → Actions

Can you see the influence that our thoughts have on our actions? No wonder God uses the truth to set us free! We'll explore this idea more in the first week of our study. For now, though, I want to tell you the rest of Emma's story....