

## ***Sin's Devastation and God's Restoration***

*Excerpted from Marriage Under Cover by Bob & Audrey Meisner*

Bob and Audrey Meisner had it all, a “perfect marriage,” three beautiful children, a fruitful and fulfilling ministry and a deep love for Jesus. Their life was an exciting journey filled with purpose and joy. Audrey was confident that she and Bob had what it took to stay together forever. Neither of them would have ever thought that they would experience the despair of sin threatening to tear apart their lives, marriage, family and ministry. Yet, similar to a slow growing infection, compromise and sin crept into Audrey’s life and almost destroyed them.

How could a committed Christian woman – and a happy, happy-go-lucky, and a happily married wife and mother – with a very public ministry – fall into the sin of adultery? What began as an innocent friendship became an “emotional affair” and eventually led to “romantic feelings.” Isolated from connection with her husband or anyone who could hold her accountable, Audrey pushed aside the feelings of guilt and continued to compromise. Many things led her to the place of adultery; she was burned out, far too busy and yet bored at the same time. Her confidence in her own “immunity” was the very thing that left her completely vulnerable to the infection of sin. Her pride in having an “exceptional” marriage blinded her perception and she fell to the sin of adultery.

Audrey never knew true pain until the day she confessed her adultery and confronted the shocked reaction of the person she loved the most. The tidal wave of disbelief, horror, and anger threatened to completely envelope and choke the life out of her. In that moment, she began to know pain – Bob’s as well as her own – and came to the first glimmer of understanding of the magnitude of her sin. Deafening, stifling silence and then suddenly, angry accusations and tormenting, probing questions that tore at her heart like a thousand knives. She knew her confession would hurt Bob, but she had no idea of the depth of the hurt he would suffer. Abruptly, Bob stood up and walked out and Audrey was left alone to wonder what would happen next.

Bob wondered how this could happen; how could such a disaster strike their “perfect” little world? The bottom fell out of his life and nothing made sense anymore. His first impulse was to run; to go somewhere – anywhere – to get away from his wife and the horrible reality that he could not yet face. His next impulse was to tell everyone he saw about what had happened, to broadcast his innocence and point to Audrey as the evil one who offended and betrayed her husband. Everything inside him wanted to blast out publicly at Audrey and shout, “See what she did to me!”

It seemed that no good thing could come of this revelation of Audrey’s. Both husband and wife were dazed and didn’t know what to do. Some might call it happenstance, but the Meisners know that Bob’s grabbing *Is God in Your Marriage* off the bookshelf in his office was the act of a desperate man guided by the very hand of God. The author of the book, Leo Godzich, had appeared on their ministry program and even though he did not know Leo well, Bob picked up the phone and called. He did not realize the importance of that call and

how it would affect their lives as they attempted to recover from the devastating sin that had shredded their marriage.

Pastor Leo did not allow Bob to wallow in self-pity and quickly challenged him, saying, "Bob, I know you feel like your flesh is ripped open. I know you are raw and wounded and bleeding. I know you feel devastated. But the question is; what are you going to do about it? Are you going to expose this thing and blow it up so that it brings down even more destruction just so you can justify your own self-righteousness? Or are you going to protect and *cover* your wife and children? Are you going to *cover* your marriage?" Bob and Audrey flew to Phoenix to receive counseling, mentoring, grace, love and the challenge to surrender their lives and marriage to the Lord.

They returned home and continued to work at restoring their marriage. They were weary, empty and just fighting to keep themselves together when a new dynamic entered their lives. Audrey's monthly cycle was late and after another couple of days she knew she had missed it entirely. They visited the doctor but were not prepared for the news they received, *she was pregnant*. The law of genetics guaranteed that this baby would look very different from their other three children. With an emotional jolt, Audrey realized that no matter what else she did in this world, she would probably be remembered for the one big thing she did wrong. Her "can do" attitude melted when she realized that she could not get through this alone.

Consulting Leo, Bob received this challenge, "You have a decision to make, Bob. Fatherlessness is the plague of this generation. You can either contribute to the fatherlessness, or you can choose to be conformed to the character of your Creator, who says, 'I am a Father to the fatherless.'" Bob knew it to be the right answer, but knew also that it would not be an easy thing to live out during a nine-month pregnancy. Through this time of intense pain, one thing became clear to both Bob and Audrey: they were committed to their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They were willing to do everything necessary to stay together, to see this crisis through and allow God to work a miracle in their lives.

They were committed to the marriage, but there also was the harsh reality of Audrey's pregnancy. There were times of deep despair; one day when Audrey sat in the snow, just wanting life to be over. Seeing Audrey's increasingly rotund belly and knowing that he had not planted that seed stung Bob beyond words. The torment of hearing her say she loved him while she was carrying another man's baby tore at his very soul. Bob badgered Audrey with questions of "Why?" and also about the details of her adultery. When? Where? How many times? It pained Bob to see Audrey's pregnant body and Audrey felt unloved and rejected. They both were in so much pain and yet there were rays of hope as they experienced God's grace and love at work in their lives and family.

A new Meisner arrived in due time and Bob gave him his name, Robert Theodore Meisner. Theodore means "gift of God," while he noticeably different than the other Meisners, Robert receives the love of two parents. As Robert grew, Bob and Audrey's relationship seem to turn a corner for the better. There were still questions and uncertainties as they faced the future, but they knew one thing for sure: they wanted their marriage to be even *better* than it was be-

fore. That meant rekindling lost love and working through the devastation of infidelity and betrayal. They knew that the key was to tap into true love at its supernatural source – God.

Submitting their lives, marriage and this sin to the Lord helped Bob and Audrey begin moving forward. Through the help of others, they were released: Audrey from her grief and pain over her sin and Bob from the pain and bitterness of having his life torn apart. Bob and Audrey are not over the sin of adultery, but they have moved through the pain and anguish to new levels of intimacy. Their friendship is deep, their laughter together is explosive, and their communication is blatantly honest. They are thankful for the healing balm of the Lord Jesus to forgive, restore and bring them into a relationship in which they communicate deeply. The God of restoration and unconditional love has brought their marriage to a place of rest and safety.

The Good Shepherd led them safely through the valley of the shadow of death – through the heartache and pain, anguish and sorrow, anger and bitterness, rejection and shame – back into the promised land of life and light, mercy and grace, and forgiveness and redemption. They enjoy a marriage that is stronger, better, and more vibrant than it has ever been. It has nothing to do with them, but everything to do with the God that loves them so much.

Bob had the *right* to divorce Audrey according to Matthew, chapter 19 since she had committed sexual immorality, but he did the *right* thing by loving his wife as *Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy by the washing of water through the word and to present her to Himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless* (Ephesians 5:25-27). He extended God's grace and mercy to his wife when he did not feel like it and in reality when she did not deserve it. Their marriage today is a testimony to God's great love for mankind – that Jesus would give His life for us when we did not deserve it.

We all must remember that we all could fall to sin – no one is exempt! We must guard our heart, flee temptation and remain focused on the Lord; depending on Him to get us through the tough times we will face in life and in our marriage. Don't allow yourself to become complacent or isolated from those who can help you, and continue to work on your marriage and building your relationship with your spouse. Yes, the Lord can restore your marriage when it has been devastated by sin, but it is never easy to go through the restoration process. Guard your heart and protect your marriage.