

An interview with Nancy C. Anderson, author of *Avoiding the Greener Grass Syndrome*



It's human nature for people to want something bigger and better than what they currently have. When problems arise in a marriage, the grass can look greener in every other yard in the neighborhood, luring them to believe they will find true joy and fulfillment on the other side of the marital fence. In *Avoiding the Greener Grass Syndrome: How to Grow Affair-Proof Hedges Around Your Marriage* (2nd edition, Kregel Publications), Nancy C. Anderson assures readers the greener grass is only a mirage and shares how to grow the greenest grass of all in their own backyard.

Q: In the context of your book, what is “greener grass syndrome”?

It means thinking that something, or someone, on the other side of the fence will fulfill your needs—looking longingly at something outside of your own boundaries. In my case, I thought my own marriage was withered and brown, and I wanted to visit my co-worker's “lawn.” Of course, in life and in marriage, the grass is not greener on the other side of the fence; it's a mirage.

Q: How is *Avoiding the Greener Grass Syndrome* different from other books written on marriage?

Many marriage books are based upon theories, statistics, and clinical studies of infidelity. *Avoiding the Greener Grass Syndrome* is about *real* life in the *real* world. I'm an expert on infidelity because I lived it and survived.

Thirty-eight years after my affair and reconciliation, Ron and I are still helping couples prevent, predict, or pardon infidelity.

Q: When many people get married, they believe their husband or wife's job is to make them happy. Why is it dangerous to believe this lie?

No one can meet all the needs of another person. If we look only to our mate to fulfill us, we'll always be disappointed. Ron and I both had unrealistic expectations of what marriage should look like, and we were both waiting to be served by the other. However, it should be the opposite.

A healthy marriage is created when each person is willing to serve the other. Happiness and contentment come from knowing you are doing all you can to “water” your marriage. Trading partners is not a good solution to a troubled marriage because divorce rates go up with each subsequent marriage.

Q: Speaking of lies about happiness, the world discourages working through hard times by saying, “Life is short, and you deserve to be happy.” What does the Bible say about deserving happiness?

The truth is, marriage is both difficult and effortless, magnificent and excruciating, blissful and tedious. Sometimes it's all those things within the same day—even within the same hour.

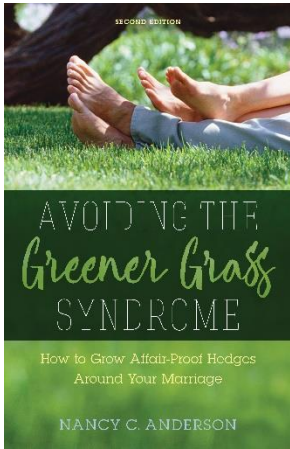
I know how hard it is to stay in a less-than-perfect marriage while TV talk shows and well-meaning friends are preaching “you deserve to be happy.” I looked for that verse in the Bible. Trust me—it's not there. What the Bible does teach about happiness is that it has little to do with our external circumstances (married or single, rich or poor, healthy or ill) and more to do with our choice to be content. Philippians 4:12–13 tells us, “¹²I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of contentment in every situation, whether it be a full stomach or hunger, plenty or want; ¹³for I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and power” (TLB).

Q: You confess that you complained and criticized your way through your first year of marriage. If you could go back in time, how would you have approached your new role as a wife differently?

On one hand, I wish that were possible, as it would have saved a lot of pain and heartache, but on the other hand, the lessons I learned in that dark valley shaped the rest of my life for the better. In a way, I am getting a

do-over when I help another couple avert a disaster in their marriage. By helping them avoid the snare that caught me, I am using what was evil for good purposes.

My role as a wife now is 180 degrees from what it was in 1978. My approach to Ron now is that we are on the same team, working toward the same goals. When we differ on which path to take, I don't see it as him against me. I also have learned to value our differences instead of resenting them, even though I still don't understand why he is relentlessly cheerful and chatty before I've had my morning coffee.



Q: The man with whom you had an affair was a co-worker of yours. How can we safeguard our relationships when it is inevitable we will encounter members of the opposite sex in the workplace and the course of daily activities?

I recently read about the guidelines Vice President Pence implements in his relationships with coworkers and other women who are not his wife. He is very careful to avoid any appearance of and opportunity for inappropriate behavior, and I agree with his high standards!

If you're in doubt as to what conduct is inappropriate, ask yourself, *Would I do this in front of my spouse?* If you're still not sure, ask yourself, *Would I do it in front of the Lord?* (You are, you know.) Here is a simple rule to keep you on the straight and narrow: If you'd have to hide it or lie about it, don't do it!

In the workplace, make sure your emails and other correspondences are not suggestive, inappropriate, or flirtatious. Talk about your spouse positively, making it clear that you're married and intend to stay that way. Be careful not to have any lingering eye contact or make comments that are suggestive. The book has suggestions for safeguards for business travel, relationships with neighbors, babysitters, and even co-laborers at church.

Q: Once a couple decides to commit to repairing their marriage, what is the first step toward reconciliation?

After we made the decision to reconcile and reform our marriage, we immediately sought advice from many different sources. We went to a Christian marriage counselor who helped us learn to communicate more effectively. We also read several books about "starting over" and attended marriage retreats and workshops. One of the most important things we did was join a wonderful church and faithfully attend worship services and adult Sunday school classes. We received solid biblical teaching from a godly pastor and acted on his instruction.

The new chapter, titled "Affair Repair," offers seven steps to recovery. The first step is reveal, which means coming clean and admitting the betrayal. Without that first step, the others are not effective.

Q: How long did it take for your marriage to heal after you and Ron decided to remain committed to each other?

The transformation was a slow process. We'd developed many destructive habits, and some of them took years to die. My feelings were still connected to Jake, but I decided to stay with Ron and hoped and prayed that my affection for Ron would come back with time. I worked hard to regain his trust, and we both made a big effort to be polite and kind to each other, hoping to rebuild a friendship before a romance. I would estimate that it took two years before we felt whole again.

Q: You write about Ron forgiving you but also about how you struggled with the sorrow of regret. Why do you think he was able to trust you more than you could trust yourself at that time?

Ron is an amazing man, and one of his best qualities is his optimism. He saw my sincere apology and changed behavior as indicators that our marriage could be healed. He heard me break it off with Jake and quit my job, so he was confident I'd really changed. I knew, however, I still struggled with trusting myself and was distraught I had fallen so far. My healing took longer than his, perhaps because I had prided myself on being the stronger Christian and knowing I'd also betrayed the Lord broke my heart.

Q: What are the hedges you planted around your marriage to protect it from intrusion?

A hedge makes the statement, "Private property—no trespassing." The symbolic hedges around our marriages serve the same purposes. As a married couple, your goal is to keep the good things in and the bad things out.

The HEDGES consist of simple principles that will protect your marriage from external invaders and internal discontent.

They consist of action words:

- **Hearing:** listening and speaking with patience and understanding.
- **Encouraging:** helping each other.
- **Dating:** keeping it fresh and fun.
- **Guarding:** agreeing on your boundaries and enforcing them.
- **Educating:** becoming an expert on your mate.
- **Satisfying:** meeting each other's needs.

Q: What kind of work goes into maintaining the hedges?

Remember, these hedges must be watered, trimmed, and kept pest-free for the rest of your life. Hedges are living things, and your marriage is alive and growing, too. All the things that affect our lives also affect our marriages.

We're all responsible for watering our hedges. To have enough water to offer our marriages, we must have our own reservoir to draw from. The foremost kind of water is spiritual water, which we get from our relationship with the Lord, who is the Living Water (John 4:10–15). The second way to water your relationship is with intellectual water: new information about each other. Share what happened during your day and build your connection based on communication. A marriage that is well-watered will have deep roots and will withstand the storms of life. If your relationship is in a drought, however, and its roots are weak and shallow, then the wind and erosion—life's problems—will damage and eventually destroy your marriage.

Don't be hesitant to trim your hedges as your lives change. Just because you plant strong, healthy hedges today doesn't mean you won't have to replant or transplant them next year. If your husband loses his job, you have a baby, your elderly parents need care, or one of you has a medical or emotional crisis, you will have to redesign or move the hedges accordingly.

Q: Communication in marriage is of the utmost importance. Can you share a few keys to good communication?

Agreed! Many couples haven't communicated in years. Oh, they talk about the weather, the bills, and the children, but they don't share their inner thoughts, fears, or disappointments. That's how some affairs begin—by having deep, meaningful conversations with the "other." Once an emotional connection is formed, a physical one usually follows. That's why healthy, meaningful communication connects and bonds a couple and builds a bridge that will help them when difficulties come.

We like to talk about three Cs to cut out or reduce (complaining, criticizing and controlling) and three As to add into communication (apologizing, accepting, and appreciating).

Q: Why is it important to continue to date your mate?

Most couples, especially if they've been married for a while, get into a rut, and the longer they're married, the deeper the rut might get. Rut-dwellers usually just stay home and play on their phones while watching TV, sometimes in separate rooms. On special occasions, they might have dinner at the usual neighborhood burger barn or go see a movie at the local theater, but that's about as exciting as it gets. Can you say, "Boring!"?

If you want to climb out of your rut and try new things, here are some easy-to-implement ideas to give you a boost. Think of the word DATES to stimulate the "creative dating" quadrant of your brain: delicious, adventurous, thematic, educational, and surprising.

Remember all this rekindling takes time and patience. Take it slow, and if you're sincere about wanting to please each other, you'll both feel much better about your relationship. All that's necessary for a date to be great is the two of you being together, creating a happy memory.

Q: What are some of the warning signs that your spouse may be having an affair?

At work and church, in our neighborhoods and during our daily activities, we all encounter people of the opposite sex who are attractive. That's not the problem. Our selfish choices *after* the attraction create the problems.

Changes in your spouse's behavior may indicate that your spouse is having an affair. The cheating spouse often has changes in eating and sleeping patterns, wears a different style of clothes, frequently starts arguments, works longer or different hours, pulls away from church and extended family, takes more showers than usual, and compares his or her spouse to other people.

Q: Do you think more temptations for extramarital affairs exist now than when the first edition of the book was written thirteen years ago? If so, why?

The first edition was written in 2004, and the biggest change since then is the increase in secrecy that smartphones and tablets have provided. Many affairs are started through apps that connect people, such as Facebook and Instagram. Also, it used to be that pornography had to be attained through a magazine or movie, but now secret web access to pornographic material has ruined many marriages. The temptation to stray has always been there, but now technology gives us easy access to feed the monster. That's why Ron and I have the same passwords and have full access to each other's email, texts and computers. Transparency in all areas of our lives keep us accountable.

Q: What new additions are in this second edition of *Avoiding the Greener Grass Syndrome*?

There are updates and additions throughout the new 2017 edition, but there is a whole new chapter titled "Affair Repair," written specifically for those who have committed adultery and want to repair the damage they've created. I received so many heart-wrenching emails asking for my advice on this topic that I was eager to add this new material. The other new feature is the question and answer appendix with Ron's point of view on my affair, his healing, and our life now. He is the hero of this book, and I am glad readers have this opportunity to hear from him. His willingness to tell our story still amazes me, but he sees it as a valuable opportunity to offer hope and healing.

Q: To close, what words of encouragement would you offer to someone in a struggling marriage who thinks divorce is the only option following an affair?

Adultery can be grounds for a divorce, especially if there is repeated infidelity and no willingness to change. However, we encourage couples to try all other options first, with divorce as the last resort. We know that God can heal any marriage if both partners are willing to figure out what went wrong and make positive changes in attitude and behavior.

The "Affair Repair" chapter offers seven action words, which describe the steps I recommend to all couples who are suffering: reveal, repent, reconcile, rebuild, resolve, renew, and rejoice. Your marriage restoration will take some time, so be patient with each other. You may even take a few steps forward, then two steps back. Just don't give up. You could be in the midst of a miracle.

Learn more about *Avoiding the Greener Grass Syndrome* at www.NancyCAnderson.com. The author is also on [Facebook \(Greenergrassysyndrome\)](#), [Twitter \(greenergrass55\)](#), and [Instagram \(greenergrassysyndrome\)](#).