

Is Facebook a Cyber Threat to Your Marriage?

Part One of a Two-Part Series: Facebook and Your Marriage

by K. Jason & Kelli Krafsky

Ever since the internet has become a regular part of the human experience, cyberspace has been implicated as an accomplice in online affairs, real life adultery, and the break-up marriages.

With every new online fad have come the stories of spouses wandering away from their marriage to a new cyber love interest. Media has spotlighted tales and trends of online affairs starting through chat rooms, MySpace, Second Life, websites and online forums.

Is Facebook, the world's fastest growing online social network, just another in a long list of cyber threats to your marriage?

Having been active Facebook users for awhile and experiencing the good, the bad, and the ugly of participating in an online social network, we recognize there are potential threats to your relationship. But the ultimate threat is not the latest technology ... it is the choices you make online and offline ... in cyberspace and real life.

Being raised during the divorce culture, we've witnessed too many marriages break apart due to infidelity. Spouses that seemed to have a strong and healthy marriage gave in to the ultimate temptation.

Before meeting Kelli, I (Jason) was given the book *Hedges: Loving Your Marriage Enough to Protect It*, and I read it with great sobriety and humility. The opening sentence of the first chapter gripped my heart and mind, "*sexual immorality hits frighteningly close to home. Without being aware of the need to protect ourselves against it, we are vulnerable.*"

At age 11, my home was devastated by sexual immorality when my dad had an affair...eventually breaking our family apart. Committed not to follow in his footsteps, I devoured the rest of the book and at age 21, established my own set of hedges, setting boundaries in my relationships to protect my future marriage.

When Kelli and I met, fell in love, and made the decision to marry, we also chose to do everything in our power to protect our marriage. *Hedges* and *Boundaries in Marriage* are great books that share practical ways to set up safeguards for your marriage with the other relationships in your life.

Establishing personal boundaries is a part of everyday life with friends, co-workers, clients, and extended family members. Setting up boundaries around the marriage relationship is a key step to proactively protecting yourself, your spouse, your marriage, your kids, and your reputation.

In the final book of the Old Testament, Malachi 2 talks about setting up a protective perimeter around the covenant relationship, "And what does he want from marriage? Children of God, that's what. So guard the spirit of marriage within you. Don't cheat on your spouse. 'I hate divorce,' says the God of Israel...'I hate the violent dismembering of the 'one flesh' of marriage.' So watch yourselves. Don't let your guard down. Don't cheat." (The Message).

One of the boundaries we set up as a perimeter around our relationship is that neither of us will be alone with someone of the opposite sex. Not because we are worried about the other cheating, but to avoid the

appearance of impropriety or being caught in a potential he said/she said situation. We've heard too many stories of how an accusation (some true, some false) has tarnished a reputation or ended a career. Being active Facebookers, we have adopted our real life set of boundaries for our online world with Facebook friends (FB friends).

Five Ways to Diffuse the Cyber Threats to Your Marriage

- (1) ***Set Safeguards With Your Mate*** – Discuss with your mate: What FB friends and groups are inbounds or out-of-bounds? How much information about yourself and family is too much information? Are either of you uncomfortable with potential FB friends? Are any communication methods off limits?

We keep our correspondences with people of the opposite sex public by posting on their “walls,” or limited to commenting on status updates. We also keep each other informed of Facebook emails from people, and avoid chatting with people of the opposite sex. Whatever your safeguards, be sure that both you and your spouse are on the same page when it comes to what is or is not acceptable for each other on Facebook. A little bit of prevention can go a long way in safeguarding your relationship.

- (2) ***Don't Post Negative Things About Your Spouse*** – A lot of banter, complaining, and sharing occur when people post their status updates. It is common for FB friends to whine about the weather, joke about a frustrating work issue or report on something new in their life. But it is always uncomfortable when someone complains about their spouse or kids. While it may not seem like a big deal to the one posting, the majority of the readers don't have enough context or information to know if something is a simple tease or an exasperated gripe. Avoid giving too much information about the annoying things your spouse is or is not doing, and be sure not to embarrass them in your status update, or through posting pictures or videos. Don't get back at your spouse for something through a public comment.

Typing is not the same as talking ... so don't use the keyboard in an attempt to resolve an issue, talk it through in private!

- (3) ***Choose Your Friends Wisely*** – When first getting started on Facebook, finding FB friends and accepting FB friend requests can be very exciting because you're reconnecting with people from your past. Ultimately, it is your decision to accept them into your social network. They can be family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, associates, long-lost friends or past flames. Once FB friends are accepted, they see and view everything you post publicly and vice-versa. One question to ask when requesting or accepting a FB friend is, “would my spouse be comfortable with me being ‘friends’ with this person?”

Listen to your heart, and if you're still not sure, ask your spouse.

- (4) ***Play It Smart With Who You Talk About What With*** – A common pattern arises when reading a variety of news stories on internet affairs. A spouse starts chatting with someone of the opposite sex about their relationship woes. Over time, the live chats turn to emails that turn to phone calls that turn to face-to-face meetings that turn to... you get the picture. And when the adulterous relationship becomes public knowledge, the confiding spouse proclaims, “I never meant for this to happen!” Learn from other people's mistakes. Avoid discussing your relationship difficulties with people of the opposite sex, and be careful of developing too close of a confidant online.

In the book, *Not “Just” Friends*, infidelity expert Shirley Glass writes that building too close of a relationship with someone online enters the danger zone “because it meets all three criteria that discriminate between a platonic friendship and an emotional affair: emotional intimacy...secrecy...(and) sexual chemistry...sexual contact is not a requirement for betrayal.”

The best way to avoid going down the slippery slope is to avoid climbing the hillside in the first place. *(Take a free online quiz at shrileyglass.com to determine if your online friendships are getting too friendly.)*

- (5) ***If In Doubt, Defriend Them*** – Because you can’t judge a person by their profile picture, you may have regrets of becoming FB friends with someone. Their posts might be offensive or uncomfortable to you. Or it may be that you have a FB friend who sparks feelings in you and you find yourself looking at their profile often or looking for their next post. You may be chatting with them or online flirting with them. Or your spouse may be uncomfortable with your being friends with a past love interest. Defriend the threat! Go to their profile page and in the bottom left column is a link to remove them as a friend (and they don’t get a notice that they are no longer your friend).

Any relationship with someone else that jeopardizes your marriage is not a relationship worth keeping.

It is true that marriages have been broken apart due to a spouse’s inappropriate activities on Facebook.

If you or your spouse have crossed the line emotionally or physically with someone else, *Not “Just” Friends, Marriage on the Mend: Tangible Tools to Restore Your Relationship, Unfaithful: Rebuilding Trust After Infidelity, Close Calls, and Torn Asunder* can help you take steps to repair this serious breach.

Keep in mind the words from Hebrews 13, “Honor marriage, and guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy between wife and husband. God draws a firm line against casual and illicit sex.” (The Message)

While Facebook is becoming one of the most popular gathering places on the internet, it doesn’t have to be a cyber threat to your marriage. Marriages are vulnerable to all kinds of online and real-life threats because the couples have failed to set up proper boundaries of protection and accountability.

And while nothing is completely foolproof, these principles are practical tips to help you protect your most important and cherished relationship. Ultimately, it is up to you to make good decisions and wise choices and to have open lines of communication with your mate ... whether you’re online or not.

K. Jason and Kelli Krafsky have been married since 1994 and have spoken to couples on marriage issues for many years. Jason is the author of Before “I Do” – Preparing for the Full Marriage Experience. As a marriage junkie, Jason supports his habit by training leaders on marriage issues, writing articles and blog entries on marriage and family relationships, coaching communities, churches, and ministries on marriage strengthening strategies. Kelli has fourteen years experience teaching in public schools, a private school and homeschool settings. She is passionate about helping women develop healthy relationships and happy marriages. Jason and Kelli live in the foothills of Washington’s Cascade Mountains with their four children. Contact them at kjasonk@fullmarriageexperience.com or through Facebook.

Find out more about Jason and Kelli and their marriage efforts at their website (FullMarriageExperience.com) and blog (MarriageJunkie.com).

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