

Sexual Betrayal: Letter to a Betrayed Wife

Dear Sister,

My heart breaks that you are reading this right now because it means the same earth-shattering event that hit my marriage has hit yours. Infidelity. It comes in many forms: pornography, physical affairs, emotional affairs, massage parlors, prostitutes, strip clubs, and/or any other violation of the marriage vows. There are truly no words to describe the flood of overwhelming emotions pulsing through a spouse who has discovered betrayal in her marriage. I want you to know that you are seen. You are heard. You are not alone.

I wrote this letter because in the aftermath of discovering infidelity, it can be a miracle to get out of bed in the morning. The mind is filled with racing thoughts and unending questions. Your brain has literally dumped chemicals into your body to prepare it for survival, so the heart pounds, digestion turns off, and muscles tense. Your soul is screaming inside for relief, but no one knows its pain, rejection, or shame. How does a woman even know where to begin? Breathe...breathe again... remember to breathe.

I want to start by providing an analogy, though by no means is this analogy comparable to the level of pain you're feeling. The analogy I will use is a car accident. Right after the crash, an ambulance is called. The injured person is placed into the care of EMTs who are trained to treat traumatic injuries. The EMTs care for the patient until arrival at the hospital. Again, the patient is met by trained personnel who will do whatever is necessary to treat the life-threatening injuries – maybe that means immediate surgery to stop internal bleeding. After the patient is stabilized, the patient may be treated in the ICU until deemed appropriate to move. Finally, the patient is discharged. BUT the patient will continue to receive care – such as physical therapy for a broken leg. Though the patient survived the initial trauma, it might take months or years of intentional recovery work until the patient is physically back to normal (or learns how to live their new normal).

We know through brain scans and research that the brain and body do NOT distinguish between physical and emotional trauma. To the brain/body, trauma is trauma. Period. Infidelity induces something called betrayal trauma. The brain/body interprets this trauma in the same way as the horrific car accident. Please allow that to sink in. You are not crazy. Your brain is reacting to trauma. Alarm bells are going off in your brain because the one person who was supposed to be “safe” has proven to be “unsafe.” Your brain is desperately scanning your environment trying to find safety again.

Therefore, it is vitally important that you are kind to yourself and make yourself a priority, especially in these initial few months. We would never say the person in the horrific car accident is being selfish because she took an ambulance to the hospital instead of driving herself. That would be ridiculous! Consider investing in your own healing from this trauma in the same way you would invest in specialized care after a car accident. It's worth it.



Specialized care is out there. Think of this letter as the ambulance driver. It's here in the initial aftermath to point you to that specialized care:

1. *Find a group of women who have walked this path AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.*

This group of women are like the EMT's, emergency nurses, physical therapists, etc. They are the people who will be there every step of the way. Being with others reduces the shame and isolation caused by infidelity. I will provide some examples:

SARA SOCIETY – sarahsociety.com. After joining the newcomers meeting, you will be invited to join the group forums where meetings are posted every week. Women also post book titles, articles, and other helpful resources. This is a free group. One-hour meetings are hosted on different days and times throughout the week.

HARBORING HOPE – affairrecovery.com/product/harboring-hope. This 13-week course is through Affair Recovery. A workbook with weekly readings and weekly videos is provided. In addition, participants commit to a weekly call (1.5-2 hours) that will be led by a mentor who leads six participants through the course. This is more structured and has a cost, but scholarships are available.

Affair Recovery also offers a free 7-day "Bootcamp." It can be done alone or with your spouse (if he is still in the picture and wants to do the work necessary for restoration). This provides some good initial "Do's" and "Don'ts" since the initial months can be utterly disorienting.

BLOOM FOR WOMEN – bloomforwomen.com. For a monthly fee, women have access to materials, meetings, courses, and more. Some material is free.

NOTE: There are intensives offered by organizations which are great options. However, intensives are like the ambulance care – they provide initial care to stabilize the patient. But similar to out-patient treatment after the car accident, ongoing care for betrayal trauma will be necessary. Healing from betrayal trauma is a long road, with layers, twists, and turns.

2. *Find a mentor/therapist who understands betrayal trauma.*

There is a time and season to see a general counselor just like there is a time to see your primary care physician. However, in the matter of betrayal trauma, finding someone with specialized training is like the emergency doctor/surgeon. A counselor with specialized training in betrayal trauma is preferred for this reason. Please consider spending the extra money to receive this specialized care:

CSAT – Certified Sex Addiction Therapist

APSATS – The Association of Partners of Sex Addicts Trauma Specialists

For twelve weeks I met with a mentor who offered betrayal trauma recovery in individual sessions.

NOTE: Ask the counselor what her views are concerning sex addiction and betrayal trauma versus codependency. Codependency might be a weakness for you, but that can be addressed AFTER the trauma



is addressed first. Betrayal trauma and codependency can have similar overt symptoms, but differing underlying causes, which require different approaches to healing.

3. *Take care of yourself.*

This includes breathing techniques, taking walks, taking a bubble bath, drinking lots of water (trauma dehydrates the brain), eating well, etc. There are plenty of great tips out there, so just be on the lookout. God made our bodies interconnected with our emotions; therefore, betrayal trauma impacts our physical bodies too. Conversely, caring for our bodies can aid our healing from the emotional trauma of betrayal.

I say this with great gentleness in my heart – please make an appointment to get tested for STDs. This is recommended even if the unfaithful spouse swears there was nothing physical or he used protection. I know it's scary. Breathe. Lean on that support group.

4. *Educate yourself.*

INTIMATE DECEPTION by Sheri Keffer. This is an amazing book. It was instrumental in my journey.

UNWANTED by Jay Stringer. This book is written for the unfaithful spouse, specifically if he has a sex addiction. This is not written for the betrayed wife per se. However, I read this book because I wanted to gain at least some understanding of sex addiction. It shifted my perspective in surprising ways. Consider waiting to read this after you've read something for yourself. Your heart might not be ready to engage this material right away.

VIDEOS & PODCASTS

Affair Recovery has free videos on their website covering many topics

Melody and Friends podcast

Undone Redone podcast (though no longer making episodes, I still highly recommend the library of episodes)

Sheri Keffer on YouTube

The movie "The Heart of Man"

Bloom for Women – bloomforwomen.com

I understand the anger and disbelief in having to do this type of work. You didn't ask for this. It's demoralizing to even go to a meeting, make an appointment, etc., all because of what someone else has done. Like being in a car accident, the injured person must commit to her healing, even though the accident was not her fault. It's not fair, but you can do this. One day at a time.



Notice what has not been discussed. What your husband should do or what to do about your marriage. That's because right now YOU are the priority. In an accident, you cannot help other passengers while you are bleeding out. You simply are not able to take on that responsibility. You need care. So does your husband, but that's not the emphasis of this letter. I know the feeling of "if he can just get fixed, then I'll be better," but I promise you, that's NOT the truth. His recovery will be necessary if there is to be hope for future reconciliation, but it will not heal the depths of your mind, heart, and soul that have been impacted.

Someone told me shortly after discovering betrayal that it's best not to make life altering decisions (such as if you are going to stay in the marriage or leave) while experiencing trauma. However, you do have options right now to allow yourself breathing room. Some women have their husbands move out for a while – called a THERAPEUTIC SEPARATION – while they both do their own recovery work. If there's a spare room (even the couch will do!), then some have an IN-HOME SEPARATION. Again, there are options other than just "stay married" or "get divorced." These can be discussed with a counselor and within recovery groups. The biggest thing to remember is that your brain is experiencing trauma, but with care and recovery, your brain, mind, and heart will start to heal. These big decisions will be better explored once healing begins and the initial effects of trauma wane. This also provides you with time to observe if your husband is really taking his recovery seriously, which can only be known through consistency over time.

I realized I have come to the end of this letter, and I have not mentioned anything regarding God or faith. In the immediate aftermath of discovering infidelity, all the cliché Bible verses felt insulting to me, so I am not going to offer any here. However, reading the Scriptures daily was already a steady part of my life when I discovered my husband's infidelity, and it has continued since. In the pages of Scripture, I connected with a part of God I never had before, so I encourage you to read God's Word. I found the cries of my heart, the pain, and the anguish were all written on the pages of Scripture, in the books of the prophets specifically.

No matter what, your relationship with God will change as a result of infidelity. Discovering infidelity creates a type of death – death to the old marriage, death to the life before the trauma, death to your perception of reality, death to dreams of the future. But the hope of the Scriptures is resurrection and new birth. How will God do this in your life in the aftermath of infidelity? Only God knows those details.

I pray this letter has provided you with at least a starting point. I pray you take that first step in your recovery. Others who have walked this betrayal path are out there, waiting for you, ready to walk alongside you and help bear your burden as others have done for them.

In Christ,
A Fellow Survivor of Betrayal

