

Sexual Betrayal: Resource for Ministry Leaders

Dear Ministry Leader,

Your focus is on Jesus and making disciples, which is a wonderful thing! As someone who is involved in the lives of people, you know that people are messy. However, there's not enough time for any of us to become an expert in all the circumstances that will impact people.

That is why I have written this letter. My life experience forced me into a story I never wanted. As a result, I have spent over three years in the world of marital betrayal and sex addiction. I have spent countless hours talking with other women, walking with a mentor, reading books, watching videos, going to marriage counseling, and there's still plenty more for me to learn.

In the stories of couples dealing with infidelity, a recurring theme is the additional hurt caused by ministry leaders who often lack knowledge in the areas of betrayal trauma and sex addiction. I want to offer some basics that can help you be an instrument of care and not harm when you encounter this in your ministry.

Much of this letter applies more specifically to sex addiction, though plenty of this will apply to other types of affairs. I have included a second letter for a woman who might disclose to you she has discovered an affair in her marriage, to include pornography, sexting, physical affairs, emotional affairs, strip clubs, massage parlors, etc.

Please note, that though I refer to the man as the example of the unfaithful spouse and the woman as the betrayed spouse, I realize this could be reversed. However, for the purpose of this letter, it is easier to stick with one example.

For the UNFAITHFUL SPOUSE:

1. Not only is porn not about porn, it's often not the only thing there.

I cannot stress this enough – please do not assume that pornography use is “just typical” pornography use. Do not simply place the man in an accountability group and think that's enough. Accountability groups have largely failed in the church and in ministries. They tend to operate under good intentions but not well-informed methodologies, focusing on sin management without getting below the surface.

Plenty of men will admit to porn use because it's “not as bad,” but will conceal and hide the rest of an addiction. The unfortunate stats show that porn is not the end point, but the beginning. Access to porn and anonymous sex through the internet and apps have opened the floodgates!

2. Recommend he attend a RECOVERY GROUP, not merely an accountability group.

Addiction thrives in isolation. It is often said that the opposite of addiction is not sobriety, but connection. Recovery groups help a man practice vulnerability and vigorous honesty, receive grace, form relationship-based accountability, etc.



Some well-established recovery groups are:

SAMSON SOCIETY – Offers recovery meetings every day, multiple times a day, via Zoom and in-person (in certain cities). They also have a podcast called The Pirate Monk podcast.

PURE DESIRE, SA (Sexaholics Anonymous), and SAA (Sex Addicts Anonymous)

AFFAIR RECOVERY – Offers “Hope for Healing,” a course for the unfaithful spouse. This course is helpful whether the infidelity involves sex addiction. If sex addiction is involved, this course should not be seen as a replacement for a recovery group, but as a supplement.

3. Recommend he read books that will help him get honest.

Addicts lie, and they lie a lot. Whatever they’ve told you, likely that’s not all there is. An addict needs time in recovery in order to be honest with himself and others.

Recommended books and authors:

UNWANTED by Jay Stringer

Books by DAN ALLENDER, MARK LAASER, and PATRICK CARNES

4. Recommend he see a CSAT (Certified Sex Addiction Therapist).

In the matter of sex addiction, specialized counseling is needed, in the same way that specialized care is needed for cancer. A CSAT understands the layers of sex addiction and will help a man dig deep into his story, which often involves trauma.

A CSAT will also help a man work toward a therapeutic full disclosure. If the couple is considering reconciliation, a therapeutic full disclosure is an indispensable step. It establishes the truth – the whole ugly truth.

An addict may need six months of recovery work before he is ready to go through the full disclosure process. It’s a traumatic experience all around – for the man, because his deepest secrets are exposed, secrets he was taking to his grave; for the woman, because her deepest fears for her marriage are becoming her new reality.

5. Do not shame him.

Shame keeps the cycle of addiction going. He needs kindness and understanding from his faith community, or his faith community will compound the problem.

6. Encourage him to stay the course.

I once heard someone say, “The worst person to be married to is an addict; the best person to be married to is an addict who has been through recovery.” There is hope, if he stays the course.



He will be tempted to quit after a few months of feeling better, but the journey is just beginning. Help him think in terms of years, not weeks or months.

7. You will know a man has taken his recovery seriously when you start to see him develop empathy, particularly for his wife.

If sex addiction is involved, likely the addiction started around age 9-11. He might be successful in every area of his life (and *YES* that includes being a successful disciple-maker, pastor, deacon, or leader), but the part of the brain that feels and expresses empathy is stunted by addiction and has not developed since the addiction started.

His emotional capacity could still be at 11-years old, which can help others understand if after he is discovered, his emotional reaction seems vastly immature. It's because that part of his brain is underdeveloped. However in recovery, he will grow leaps and bounds and you will absolutely notice.

8. Educate yourself as a ministry leader.

You may not be a professional counselor or have experienced sexual betrayal, but sex addiction is in the church, so learn what you can!

Recommended resources:

Book	UNWANTED by Jay Stringer
Movie	THE HEART OF MAN
Podcast	THE PIRATE MONK by Samson Society (particularly some of the testimonies)

For the BETRAYED SPOUSE:

1. Validate her feelings.

She might have felt “crazy” for a while before the betrayal surfaced. She was finding things that were “off,” but her husband always had an explanation. Remember, addicts lie, and they lie a lot – and they lie very convincingly because lying has been their survival mechanism, often for many years.

So, if a woman's husband has not admitted to anything yet but she feels like something is “off,” validate her feelings. Tell her to trust her gut.

Ask questions so that you can take in the totality of her circumstances. She may have tried to expose him several times to no avail. You might be the only person in her life who will encourage her to do the hard thing, such as tell her husband he can have either porn, extramarital sex, strip clubs, etc. OR his marriage/family, but he can't have both. In my case, I put my husband out of the house even before he came clean.



For married women, generally speaking, the only trauma worse than infidelity is losing a child. God made us for attachment by designing the wiring of our brains for it. God designed marriage as the closest attachment a human can have with another human. When a woman is betrayed by her husband, something breaks inside of her.

Recommended Resource:

LAUGH YOUR WAY TO A BETTER MARRIAGE by Mark Gungor, Chapter 7, Sections “*Strong Women, Open Your Eyes*” and “*The Role of the Church*”

2. There is no “right” way for women to respond when they discover infidelity.

Some women will be filled with rage; others will completely shut down. Women can experience numbness, denial, become hyper-vigilant, and more.

3. Be aware of “advice” that can add to her trauma.

DO NOT tell her to have more sex with her husband! Sex addiction is more than sex, so telling her to have more sex with her husband is not going to help.

DO NOT over spiritualize the situation. Sharing a bunch of Scripture or Christian clichés isn’t going to help her right now. Listening, praying, and encouraging her to take the next healthy step is what she needs.

DO NOT tell her to go home and submit to her husband’s authority, or to win him over by her quiet and gentle spirit, etc.

DO NOT encourage reconciliation *before* consistent change has been seen in the life of her husband. Beware of valuing the appearance of a marriage above the woman’s life or safety. Pressure to reconcile before the marriage is ready for reconciliation will collapse the marriage.

4. Remind her that this is not her fault.

She didn’t create the problem and she can’t fix the problem. Being a better wife (more sex, better sex, cleaner house, more prayer/fasting, less nagging, more fun, a quiet and gentle spirit – you get the picture) would not have prevented the infidelity. God was a perfect spouse and Israel, His bride, still cheated on Him.

5. Prepare her and yourself for the “rest of the story.”

A woman wants to believe that her husband has told her everything, but more often than not, this is not the case. Confessions unfold, but generally not all at once. You’re not sowing fear, but you are helping her make room in her mind for the “more.”

6. Help her set good boundaries.

Her husband needs to be in recovery. She needs to be in recovery. When we are in pain, we want a quick fix, but recovery is a long road. Help her stay the course with her own recovery and remain strong in her boundaries when it comes to her husband's recovery.

If the husband has anger/control issues, she needs a practical plan in place to protect herself if he retaliates against her boundaries, which can include locking her out of their bank accounts.

7. Read *Letter to a Betrayed Wife* (the accompanying letter to this document).

In that letter you will read about encouraging her to see a therapist experienced with betrayal trauma. Studies have shown that a woman who has discovered her husband's infidelity (no matter what that looks like) experiences the same symptoms as someone with PTS. This is why a good counselor operates from a betrayal trauma model, not a co-dependent model. The symptoms can look similar, but the treatment plan is very different.

Also, do not try to get her to make a decision about her marriage right away. Support her in what she needs *now*. Maybe she needs space from her husband (a therapeutic separation), but she doesn't need to make a permanent decision right now. It's best not to make life-altering decisions in the first six-months of a traumatic experience. If her husband is pressuring her to make a decision (e.g., "forgive me and move on"), that is manipulation on his part. Forgiveness and reconciliation are two different things. She will learn about forgiveness versus reconciliation along her recovery journey.

She may need to go for STD testing, even if she has not discovered a physical affair. When she does, encourage her to have someone with her. It's possible that she will want to go alone, but I can't put into words how utterly invasive and violating that experience is. A shoulder she can cry on would be helpful.

8. Educate yourself on betrayal trauma.

Recommended resources:

Books	INTIMATE DECEPTION by Dr. Sheri Keffer THE EMOTIONALLY DESTRUCTIVE MARRIAGE by Leslie Vernick (See especially Appendix B)
Podcast	MELODY AND FRIENDS (particularly interviews with Catherine Etherington, Dr. Barbara Steffens, and Dr. Sheri Keffer)

For the RECOVERING COUPLE:

1. If both spouses are moving toward reconciliation, here are some suggested resources to help the couple seek healing and move toward a **new** marriage:

AFFAIR RECOVERY BOOTCAMP – This seven-day intensive is free. It is a very basic start and helps the couple immediately see that they are not alone, that there is a path forward, and there's hope.

EMS ONLINE COURSE – This 13-week Affair Recovery course is gut wrenching, but very healing. If the infidelity includes sex addiction, I recommend this course AFTER the couple has worked through a full disclosure with a CSAT. This course will address the necessity of truth as the foundation for relationship. If the truth hasn't been established, most of this course will be in vain.

WEEKEND INTENSIVES – Affair Recovery and other organizations offer weekend intensives. These can be good, but only if the couple has something else in place for the long term. Intensives are a starting place, not a fix-all.

MARRIAGE COUNSELING – They are going to need marriage counseling. If sex addiction is involved, I highly recommend a marriage counselor who is CSAT or APSATS trained (Association of Partners of Sex Addicts Trauma Specialists).

2. Recommend safety.

Trust is shattered. Before trust can be rebuilt, safety must be established. The woman can choose to help her husband feel safe by not engaging in rages or shaming him. The man can choose to help his wife feel safe by regularly attending recovery groups and sharing his location on his phone. The possibilities are endless! Again, recovery groups and therapists, trained in this type of recovery, are great for helping a couple establish safety.

3. Encourage them to build a new marriage because the old marriage is dead.

The man, the woman, or both, might try to pretend things are still normal or desire to "go back to how things were." This is a façade. There's so much death in the wake of infidelity, the extent of which cannot be fully realized right away. However, this is where God does His best work. God raises the dead, including dead marriages, and breathes new life. Encourage them to look to the new marriage He might birth.

4. Deepen your Scriptural understanding of how God operates in relationships.

Key truths:

God PROVES He is faithful (the whole Bible).

God REMOVES His presence from His people (His bride) when they are unrepentant and habitually cheating on Him. *Ezekiel 10; 2 Chronicles 35:15-16*

God hates divorce, but DIVORCED Israel. We would never say God was hard of heart. The one with the hard heart was the unrepentant spouse, Israel. *Isaiah 50:1*



God offers unconditional love, but NOT UNCONDITIONAL RELATIONSHIP. God has boundaries and sticks with them (the whole Bible).

When Christian leaders offer unhealthy “biblical” advice, it often stems from a “gospel” that is largely about “easy-believe-ism” and “forgiveness only.” If our gospel is just about how we get to heaven, then our expectations of how relationships should operate will be flawed. However, the biblical Gospel leads to following Jesus, which is a long obedience in the same direction. God expects us to change, grow, maintain our allegiance to Him, and endure to the end.

A fuller understanding of the Gospel empowers women to set strong relational boundaries, and calls men to rise up and be who God has called them to be. We need to be careful not to cheapen marriage as we have cheapened grace. Repentance, reconciliation, fidelity, belief, trust, obedience, redemption, sanctification – all this and more are part of the Gospel, and therefore, part of our Christian experience. These things must also be part of the marital experience if our marriages are to reflect Christ and His Church. *Ephesians 5*

5. Further your education.

Recommended MARRIAGE resources:

Books	WHEN TO WALK AWAY by Gary Thomas
	SACRED MARRIAGE by Gary Thomas

Recommended TRAUMA resources:

Book	THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE by Bessel Vander Kolk
Training	BETRAYAL TRAUMA RELIGIOUS LEADER TRAINING (BTRL) by The Association of Partners of Sex Addicts Trauma Specialists (APSATS).

Training includes how to:

- Support those who have experienced sexual betrayal trauma
- Support persons struggling with sexual behaviors
- Support families grappling with these issues

Podcast	THE PLACE WE FIND OURSELVES
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I genuinely appreciate your willingness to read this letter and hope that you found it helpful. May God use you as an instrument of care and hope in the lives of couples experiencing a deep, dark season.

In Christ,
A Survivor of Betrayal