

DESERT STREAM MINISTRIES

Where do I Go *from here?*



HELP FOR WIVES
FACING THEIR HUSBANDS'
SEXUAL BROKENNESS

By Annette Comiskey

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Most of you are reading this booklet because your husband has just confessed his sexual struggles to you. Whether he initiated the confession, you confronted him or he was “caught” acting out, you have been brought into the reality of your husband’s sexual brokenness. It is a painful, devastating discovery. It may bring into question everything that you thought was true. Many questions are probably running through your mind, “Does he love me?” “Why did he do this?” “Can our marriage ever be healed?” You are also having your own doubts “Do I love him enough to want to stay married?” “Why am I so stupid that I didn’t see any of this?” “What is wrong for with me, am I not a good enough wife?” Given the news you have just received another important questions might be “Where do I go from here?” I hope that this booklet with provide some answers, some tools, and the truth that Jesus can bring healing and restoration to you, your marriage and your husband.

This booklet comes from my experience of ministering to spouses of men who have sexual struggles. When we started Desert Stream Ministries in 1980 it soon became evident that the wives needed as much support has their husbands when dealing with sexual and relational brokenness. At first I met only with women whose husbands had same-sex struggles and the first wives support group started from those initial meetings. Over the years the group grew in its focus to include women who husband were dealing with heterosexual sin, pornography, sexual addiction, affairs, anonymous sex and other sexual sin.

I have wanted to put on paper some of what I have learned over the years. When we first started ministering, there were few resources for wives. This has changed over the years. But I am often surprised when I read material written for wives. Often the

authors have great wisdom but lack the perspective of a hurt wife. The healing process often starts with small, “doable” baby steps, not with sweeping life changing decisions. Also, so much of the material does not seem to proclaim the true intent of the Lord: to see marriages restored and husbands and wives healed and hopeful about their relationship. Though I know the healing process can be long, painful and difficult I have seen marriages restored and healthier than before the husband and wife started the healing process.

For those of us who are married, our marriages can be the primary relationship that God uses to perfect us. But that is often painful. We are used by the Lord not only to sharpen each other, but often our own sin and brokenness is often revealed as we face difficult issues. I hope that this booklet will be a source of greater understanding and hope for those of you who are faced with coming to grips with your husband’s sin and want to see your marriage restored in the Lord.

Sadly, I also have walked with many women through the painful process of separation and divorce. Both husband and wife need to be fully committed to the process of healing and restoration, if not there are times when a wife must make difficult decisions. For those women I hope to provide some help in moving out of a broken, unrepairable marriage.

Chapter One: Finding out the truth

*For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.
Jeremiah 29:11*

Coming to grips with your husband's struggles is very difficult and painful process. Whether you knew of the sexual brokenness in his past or it is a shocking revelation, the range of emotions you are feeling is very broad. From mild shock to shattering disillusionment you now know the truth about a very deep part of your husband's life. The truth often brings painful clarity to your perceptions and fears. But it is a difficult truth to accept. Ultimately the truth opens the door for healing and restoration, but it is a painful and long process to greater freedom and the ability to completely love and trust your husband again.

As you start down this road of healing you will experience many different emotions at many different times. Ranging from hurt, anger and hopefully to forgiveness and acceptance you need the time and support in this difficult process.

There are many stages of differing emotions. This chapter will touch upon some of the initial feelings wives might experience.

Stage One: Finding out the truth

How did you find out about your husband's struggles? Some of you discovered a receipt for a bar while going through his pants prior to putting them in the wash, maybe someone saw him with another women then called you to let you know, maybe you were

awakened at night by the police to pick up your husband after he had been arrested at a park.

Some of you were told directly by your husband. Maybe his sin and guilt became too heavy to deal with alone any more. Maybe in counseling for some other marital issues he took the risk to share with you deeper issues of struggle and temptations. Some of you were told by your husband about his struggles, but only because he was afraid of getting “caught” and wanted to let you know before you found out.

Whatever the circumstance, you are now seeing your husband, your marriage and yourself in a new light. You need to give yourself time to accept this news about your husband. Even if he is letting you know about an area of sexual struggle for him but has not acted out, you still are probably shocked and not sure what this means for you and your marriage.

It is important in this initial stage to not make any permanent decisions. Neither “I want a divorce” to “Don’t worry, your struggles don’t matter to our marriage” and all feelings in between are probably a true reflection of what you are feeling at any given moment. In truth, you probably don’t know how you feel and that is okay. Don’t rush into judgment or actions until you have been able to seek prayer, counsel and support during this time. Give yourself the time to hear from the Lord and receive His healing for your hurt and wounds.

It is also important to have some support during this process other than your spouse. Support can come in many ways, from marriage counselors, pastors and friends.

They can all play a part in your healing process. In most urban areas there are many counselors who have worked with those struggling with sexual brokenness and believe that the Lord can heal any marriage. If you are not in an area where marriage counseling is readily available many churches have programs for couples that need help in their marriage. While it might not be expressively designed to help you in your specific problems it should be a safe place to begin and can be a source of help for many important issues such as communication. It is also important to bring your church leadership into this process, if possible. Speak with a pastor, an elder, or a trusted small group leader if possible. I also believe you need to freedom to speak with at least one friend to support you and pray with you in this process. Many times husbands don't want their wives to share his struggles with anyone, often the wives themselves are too ashamed to share this information with a friend. I would urge you to risk disclosing to a trusted friend. The prayer and support of one good friend who knows the truth about your marriage and yet believes that your marriage can be restored will bring life and hope to you and ease a burden that you should not be carrying alone (*I will refer many times to your prayer partner in this booklet, please find one!*).

Stage Two: Accepting the truth

At first you might be in denial about what your husband's struggles. The feeling of "this really isn't happening to me" is very common and understandable. Many wives hear their husband's confession of sexual struggles and acting out, forgave him and believe that is the end of the story. These wives don't believe there is a need for anymore

discussion or help for their marriage. That reaction was not that atypical, most wives want to believe that their husbands really haven't done anything wrong or and that his struggles will go away. This denial is understandable. Your perception of your marriage, your husband and yourself as a wife took on a whole new meaning once you discovered or were told the truth about his sexual brokenness. It seems easier to deny or minimize the truth.

If you are having a hard time believing your husband's confessions I urge you to commit to praying with your prayer partner. Ask God to give you the grace to know the truth. Ask Him to open your heart. Give yourself the time to accept that your husband has sexual struggles. Ask God to help you face the truth of how your husband's brokenness has affected you and your marriage.

A simple prayer might be "Lord, I don't want to believe my husband has sexual struggles and has acted out. Help me accept the truth. Through your grace give me the strength to accept the truth about my husband's sin and struggles. I know that my healing and hope rests in you alone. I know that freedom is found only in you. Amen"

Even if you believe you have forgiven your husband immediately and that there is nothing to work through, be willing to let a friend pray for you that the Lord would take you to what ever place He wants you to go. In submitting to the Lord, you put yourself in a place of openness. In truth, you probably have feelings that are hard to admit. Over time you might begin to realize that all isn't right in your heart towards your husband. You might begin to feel anger. Feelings of betrayal and hurt began to surface. Most wives go through this same process and in time more feelings begin to surface.

Anger and Betrayal

Often the first emotion experienced, coming out of denial, is anger. Wives grapple with the question “How could he do this to me?” The feelings of anger are understandable and necessary to admit. Speak out these feelings of anger and betrayal before the Lord. He understands your anger and is not afraid of your expressing it before Him.

A simple prayer for anger might be: “Lord, I confess to you I am angry at my husband. I am angry with him for his struggles and how he has sinfully acted out. I am angry at his disregard for our marriage and me. *(Give yourself time to feel your anger before the Lord)*

“Lord, I do not want my anger to have the better of me. Lord I release my anger towards my husband to you. I know that I have many other feelings to experience and a long way to go before I can forgive him. But thank you for understanding my anger and that through your cross I can give you my feelings of anger and betrayal. Amen”

The Lord desires to release you from anger so you can get to the feeling that anger often masks: hurt.

Hurt

For many wives anger is easier to admit to than hurt. Anger is often a protective emotion. Anger becomes a boundary in your heart from the person who has sinned against you and more vulnerable emotions. As you are able to release your anger to the Lord a deeper feeling of hurt begins to surface. The true impact and devastation of her husband’s sin upon your heart rises up. You might feel that he didn’t love you enough to

be faithful. You are hurt in his inability to be true to your marriage vows and devastated that he has sought out others for sexual gratification. Though painful, you must be willing to be honest with how your heart has been broken by her husband's sin.

A simple prayer might be "Lord, I so hurt by my husband's sin. I am devastated that he has broken our covenant. Even though he says he loves me he still choose to seek sexual gratification outside of our marriage. Lord, I know that only you can bring me healing and restoration for the places of wounding and hurt in my heart. Lord, my heart has been broken, but I am willing to submit to you and want your healing for my heart. Amen"

Other emotions

Most wives experience many other emotions besides anger and hurt. Trust is often destroyed. There are often feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. For others, there is humiliation and shame at the prospect of others finding out. Some take on the burden of "finding healing for their husbands" while others judge his sin as the worst expression of sin ever. Others simply are too hurt and leave the marriage, no matter how much the husband want to see the marriage restored.

All of these feeling are understandable and may be felt you in varying degrees at various times. It is important to allow emotions to surface, but not to act on your feelings. Time is needed for healing and restoration. Feelings will change as your understanding increases. Ask the Lord to give you the grace to feel all that is in your heart, but the patience to let Him work in you so that your actions are in line with His will for your marriage.

Questions:

- 1) How did you find out about your husband's sexual brokenness? Was it a complete shock or a confirmation of your perceptions or fears? What was his reason for telling you? What were your initial feelings?
- 2) Look over the different emotions mentioned in the chapter. Which emotions have you experienced? Do you think that there are other feelings that you might experience in the future?
- 3) Have you had other experiences that have caused you to feel the kind of anger, hurt, etc that you are feeling now? Were they in your marriage? If not, when did they occur?
- 4) What resources do you have available for you and your husband? Are there groups healing groups such as Living Waters or *salt*? Are there marriage counselors in your area; does your church offer groups for hurting marriages? Are you willing to find a friend to pray with you about your marriage?
- 5) Do you believe that God can heal and restore your husband? Your Marriage? Yourself?

Chapter Two

Sexual and Relational Brokenness: Understanding your husband's struggles

In the first chapter we discussed the initial reactions that are common for wives when they first learned of their husband's sexual struggles. The initial disbelief gives way to anger and hurt. As wives begin to accept the reality of his sexual brokenness they often want to try and understand the nature of his struggles. When couples begin to face the husband's sin they often reach out for help. But it is often the wife who calls, not the husband. Her desire? She wants to know if there is a book that she can read that will help her understand her husband. Why? Women feel the need to know, to know what her husband is feeling and why he has sexual struggles. Is it helpful for the wife to better understand sexual and relational brokenness? I believe that greater understanding may help ease fears. For many wives the type of struggles or sin confessed by their mates is very foreign to them. Same-sex attractions, anonymous sex, pornography via the internet are much more common among men than women. Though a wife may be as "broken" as her husband, it is often expressed in very different ways (more on that in chapter three). Greater understanding can help in being more objective in one's emotions and reactions to a husband's sexual struggles. Also, as a wife understands her husband's struggles and sin as no different before the Cross as any other sin, there is greater reason to have hope for healing and restoration of the marriage. But I have also seen many wives succumb to two common pitfalls as they seek to understand their husbands' sexual brokenness.

First, many women, as they learn about sexual struggles and sin, begin to judge their husbands struggles as the "worst sins". The more they learn the more they come away feeling superior to their husbands. Many wives feel that because they have never acted out or struggled sexually in their marriage they are better than their mates. Nancy, came to a group I was leading and stated that she believed that she was a better Christian than her husband. While Nancy would admit she herself was a sinner, she had been so disgusted by what her husband had confessed she felt that his sin was worse than her own. The more material she read only reinforced her belief that her husband was weak and ineffectual for succumbing to such "lowly desires". She felt her ability to say no to her own areas of sin made her superior to him. Some of the other wives shared how their

initial feelings of sexual sins as the “worst sins” had changed as they had learned more, Nancy stated that she had no compassion for any sexual sinner. She also did not want to be part of any group that extended any mercy or grace towards her or any other husband. While Nancy’s reaction was extreme I often hear subtle strains of her beliefs when I speak with wives.

Some other women go to the other extreme of Nancy. One wife, who went to a group for over two years, became more and more convinced that her husband was not responsible for his actions. Barbara was a very caring and compassionate woman who had discovered her husband, Don, had been in a sexual relationship with a man for the past few years of their marriage. At first she had been outraged at the violation but as she learned more she began to see the complexity of her husband’s struggles. The many layers of his sexual struggles seemed overwhelming to her and she couldn’t see how the Lord could really heal something so deeply broken in her husband. Fearful of losing him, she decided that she would accept Don for who she believed he was, a deeply broken man, unable to be healed. She began to believe that he couldn’t help himself from sinning and she needed to accept it and to incorporate his sin into their lives. For her this meant becoming friends with her husband’s lover and including him in family functions. She believed that when her husband and his lover acted out sexually they were unable to say no to each other. She then felt that she needed to accept his sexual acting out with other partners. She came to the group for support because she wanted healing from how his actions hurt her even though she didn’t hold him responsible. Through the support and acceptance of the other wives she was finally able to admit that she didn’t feel like he was strong enough to say no but that she could no longer accept his infidelity. She also began to see the effect of their choices in the life on her children. Though tremendously difficult for her, she was able to set boundaries for her children’s protection (Don and his lover often acted out in the family’s home). At first Don was furious at her challenging him in his behavior but he was willing to seek counseling and help for the sake of their children. Through time and a growing desire for the truth they were both able to see that his brokenness was deep, but not too deep for the healing touch of the Lord. The husband started attending Living Waters, completely broke ties with his lover and Barbara and Don began working on restoring their marriage.

While both of these examples are at far ends of the spectrum they represent ways in which “knowing more” can hinder rather than help a wife believe in the Lord’s healing power for her husband’s sexual brokenness. But for most women, the more they learn the more they begin to see that sexual brokenness is just one expression of sin. Though the consequences of sexual sin can be greater than other sins, we all come before the Lord in need of forgiveness and healing.

Sexual Brokenness – a basic understanding

The roots of our sexual identity run deep in each of us. Our gender as male or female is determined before birth and is intrinsic to who we are as man or woman. Even though our sexual identity is deep within our hearts and souls it is often a delicate part of our development effected by our personality and the environment we are raised in. Growing up many things can disrupt the way we feel about who we are as a girl or boy. Those experiences affect how we see ourselves and how we relate to others.

We are born, male or female into our families. We are born with emotional and physical needs that God intends to be met by our mothers and fathers. Often our mothers and fathers are unable to meet those needs. The impact of one’s family can be a primary root of a person’s sexual brokenness. Often parents are too broken in their own lives to meet the needs of their children. There can be other reasons why they are unable to adequately meet the needs of their children, perhaps they are ill or have been absent in the family because of jobs or the military. Whatever the reason the relationship a boy has with his mom or dad helps shapes how he sees himself as a male. Often a father is emotionally or physically absent from the family. Many times the mom will then look to the son to fill the emotional void she feels from that absence. The son, unable to relate fully to his father, is also uncomfortable with the needs of his mother. He grows up feeling inadequate about being a man and his ability to meet the needs of woman.

As some boys grow into men they feel unsure of who they are becoming as men. Many have needs that were not met by their fathers, and yet those needs are still present. For some young men those emotional needs are directed towards other men. Genuine needs meant to be met by their fathers become eroticized when directed towards other

men. Often these needs are seen as an attraction to the same-sex. Other young men react differently to those unmet needs. Rather than projecting them onto other men, they simply wall their hearts off from those places of need. Emotional needs might then be interpreted as a sign of weakness. It becomes easier to ignore those needs rather than risk being seen as weak. Though they are attracted to women, the emotional needs of women seem overwhelming. Often these young men find physical release through pornography or sexual relationships without emotional commitment.

There are many other factors that can contribute to sexual brokenness in men. Sexual abuse of a young boy by either sex is a traumatic, always sinful violation of any person. Early sexual experiences with others, while may not have been seen as abusive by those involved can very traumatic, and contribute to feelings of insecurity about one's sexuality. Lack of peer acceptance or rejection can also be very harmful. Young men that are rejected by other young men often feel inferior. Rejection can also be accompanied by teasing and labeling. Names like "sissy" or "gay" can be internalized and begin to be believed by those being labeled by such names. The legitimate needs a young man might have for same sex friendship might be interpreted as homosexual feelings, if he has not had success in same sex friendships or is labeled with derogatory names.

For others, rejection in opposite sex friendships or the pursuit of romance with young women can lead to feeling insecure and unworthy. Many of these men can find comfort and "acceptance" in pornography, which leads to sexual addiction in men. Even if these men are able to enter into relationships with women they often retreat to the "affirmation" they find in pornography as adults.

This is a very brief overview of some of the common themes among sexually broken men. I would urge to read any of the books listed in the suggested resources section for more information.

As a wife begins to understand some of the roots of her husband's sexual brokenness, it is important to avoid the two pitfalls I mentioned earlier. Seeing your husband as a helpless victim is nor more accurate then seeing him as a reprobate sinner. What is important in recognizing any of these factors in your husband's past is that all

the ways we have been wounded and sinned against can be given to the Lord at the Cross and healing and release can be experienced by your husband.

The road to healing can begin with greater understanding, but that is just one step. If you see your husband as unable to be the victor of his hurtful past, or too much of a sinner for Jesus to heal, understanding serves no purpose. If your husband has understanding, but no desire to submit himself and his past to the Lord, then he will never get find the healing he needs and hopefully desires. If education and understanding have been the first step for you, then what is the second?

The second step depends on your husband. If he desires personal healing for himself and restoration of your marriage then you are on the right road. The following are a few attitudes to look for in your husband:

- **Need for Jesus:** Your husband, no matter what his past has been, must believe that all of his healing is possible through Jesus. He needs to believe that there is nothing Jesus won't heal in him if he is willing to submit his heart, fully, to the Lord's healing authority.

- **Change of Heart:** Does your husband really want to be healed? Is he submitting to this process to please you or others? Has he been discovered acting out sexually and the shame of discovery, for the time being, is motivating him to seek healing? God can only change your husband's heart if he is truly willing to submit it to Him. Do you see true remorse and repentance and is he just saying the right words? This is often hard to discern at first, but time will bear out the true commitment of his words. You must also ask yourself if you are prepared for him to change. As your husband receives healing he might seem like a different person to you. Are you willing to let the Lord bring out new aspects of your husband that you haven't seen before? Are you willing to live with him during times when things are hard for him emotionally? Are you willing to forbear with him when he continues to have struggles?

- **Realistic expectations:** Change does not come overnight or after one prayer session. Is he committed for the long haul, knowing that there might be setbacks and struggles along the way? If your husband is looking for a quick fix, chances for true change are slim. It is also important for you to have a true understanding that the process of healing can be a long one. Many wives are convinced that after the first time her husband goes to counseling or a healing group (such as *Living Waters* or *Salt*) he will never struggle or fall again. Are you willing to be patient with him and your marriage during the process? If you are looking for a guarantee that healing will come quickly, you will be quickly disappointed.

For many husbands this a time of giving up being “sexually-centered” and becoming Christ centered. God will honor your husband’s desire to change and be healed, as he is faithful to let Christ into those places of his struggles and weaknesses.

It is also important for you to be honest with yourself about your reactions and feelings to his past experiences. Your feelings towards your husband’s brokenness may change from day to day. It is important to be honest with yourself. One day you might have feelings of compassion as you begin to understand how his family history helped influenced some of the choices he made. The next day that same understanding that before evoked feelings of compassion might today make you angry at his family and hurt at the consequences of his past sexual choices upon you and your marriage. Each expression is as legitimate as the other. What is important is to not make decisions based on your feelings. Since your feelings can change, decisions based on how you feel will be easy to live by on days when your feelings are congruent with your decision, but impossible to live by on days where your feelings have shifted. If one day you are feeling compassion you might too readily announce “All is forgiven, I am at complete peace with your background and struggles.” What happens the day you wake up angry

about the past and anxious for the future? Your earlier declaration will sound like empty words to you and your husband. It is best to be honest, but realistic. A more sensible approach would be to state the truth – “Some days I’m hopeful, others I’m more anxious, some days forgiveness comes easily, others days I still feel angry.” It is best to be honest in the assessment of your feelings, and not make decisions beyond what you can accept for the day.

In chapter one I introduced the need for you to have your own source of support. This is very important as you come to understand more about your husband’s sexual brokenness. The role of prayer, alone and with others, is a crucial part of your own healing and acceptance. Lift up this greater understanding about your husband’s brokenness to the Lord. Ask Him to give you the strength to accept the truth, to be honest in your feelings, but that His wisdom, not your own, guide your decisions.

Questions:

- 1) Before you knew of your husband's sexual brokenness what were your feelings about men who struggled homosexually, had promiscuous pasts, committed adultery, struggled with sexual addiction? (Focus in on the main area of your husband's brokenness)
- 2) How have your feelings changed in light of your husband's sexual sin and brokenness?
- 3) How have the roots of his sexual brokenness affected you, your marriage and your family?
- 4) How do you feel about his family of origin? If you see his family having contributed to his sexual brokenness how do you deal with that? Does your husband agree or disagree? Is his relationship with his family a source of tension in your marriage?
- 5) Do you see him making constructive steps towards seeking healing? Is he growing in reliance upon the Lord in the face of his struggles?
- 6) Are you growing in reliance upon the Lord as you deal with his background and current sexual struggles? Are you able to give your feelings to the Lord in prayer?

Chapter Three

Personal Brokenness

In the previous chapter I gave a brief summary of sexual and relational brokenness as it applies to your husband. Greater understanding about sexual brokenness is important. Hopefully the more you understand the more you are able to accept his past and move forward toward healing your marriage. In this chapter I want to focus on how your background may have affected who you are today and some of the relational choices you have made. Some wives are surprised when I first mention the need to look at their own lives. It seems easier to focus the attention on the husband. “When he gets help then our marriage will be okay again” or “His problems really are worse than mine” are two common statements I often hear from wives. But it is important to look at your own history. Two main reasons are:

- Everyone is affected by his or her pasts. A person’s past affects choices made in current relationships. Your husbands are not alone in coming from families that were less than perfect. Many wives, when they begin to look at their marriages begin to see unhealthy patterns that they only dealt with when the issue of their husband’s brokenness was in the open. It is helpful to the healing process of your marriage to see how you have contributed to some of the unhealthy patterns in your marriage. Greater understanding of your past helps you to understand why you made some of the choices you have made as a wife.
- It is easy to see homosexuality, sexual addiction, infidelity, and other forms of sexual and relational brokenness as the “worst sins”. While certain sins carry greater consequences relationally than others (your sin of gossip might not harm your marriage as much as his sexual addiction) before the Cross we are all sinners in need of grace. As you see some of the sinful choices you have made in your own past (even if you were reacting from a place of woundedness, you can still sin) you begin to have more grace and understanding for your husband. This does not lessen the need for his repentance or the need for you to forgive and your

marriage restored. But as you see the grace Jesus has given you a sinner, you have more hope for the grace God will have for your husband.

A Basic Understanding

Each of you is unique. No person has the same history and the same reactions. Two people can be involved in the same situation and walk away with different stories to tell. Think of how different you are from your brothers or sisters. Raised in the same family, but probably ending up as very different people. But as I have worked with wives I have seen some similar characteristics and patterns in women who have married men who struggle with sexual and relational brokenness. So we look back, acknowledging the difference in each, seeing if there is some greater understanding to be found.

Family of Origin

What was the home like that you grew up in? Were your parents married, divorced? If they were married, was it a peaceful marriage or one with much anger on the part of your mother, father or both? It is also important to consider your relationship with your mother and father. Perhaps one of your parents was cold or detached, or maybe too invested in your life. Some of you had mothers who were more interested in their lives than your life. Some of you had caring parents, but worked hard to provide financially for the family and were not able to give the kind of care and nurture you needed. Some of you lived in families where you were victimized by abuse, sexual, physical, emotional or combinations of those terrible abuses. Many of you were raised in homes of alcoholic parents.

What your parents were like helped shape how your choices in marriage. Some of you came from homes where your parents loved and honored each other. They had respect for you as a child and provided for your needs. They nurtured and encouraged you in your talents and relationships with others. But many of you (if not most of you) were raised in homes that were less than perfect. Perhaps some of your emotional needs were met, but you grew up not fully cared for physically. Perhaps your physical needs were taken care of but your emotional needs were seen as troublesome by cold and detached parents or overwhelming to parents themselves not able to deal with

their own lives. Some of you were able to get love and attention but only if you were the “good girl”. There was always the unspoken threat that if you caused trouble you were unworthy of love. Some of you were violated by family members or neglected and your cries for help from outside your family were ignored or unrecognized. Many of you, especially those in a home of an alcoholic parent, became the caretaker of the family to your parents and other siblings. Whatever the experience of your family, many of you learned at an early age that your needs would not be met by your family and that it was easier and perhaps safer to look after others needs not expecting anything in return for yourself.

A family can be a source of great blessing; it can also be a source of great wounding. For most, families are a little of both. As you grew and matured you incorporated in your personality both the blessings of your families and the wounding. Your view of your self and what you deserved emotionally in a marriage was very affected by your family.

Common recurring themes in wives of sexually and relationally broken men

Low self-esteem – Many of you had families that didn’t nurture you, as you needed to be as a child. A lack of emotional caring and respect for your feelings from your husband didn’t seem that different to you than your life growing up. Low self-esteem is especially true for victims of abuse. Your wounding as a child (if gone unnoticed or unhealed) made you dislike yourself. You might also feel unworthy to receive in relationships. You might not feel that you are worthy of husband who would be faithful to you or respect you as his wife.

Need to be in control – Many of you, especially from alcoholic homes, are very good caretakers. You feel more comfortable if you are in charge of the family finances, if you make the decisions for the family about vacations, church, children, etc. A husband who is focused on his own struggles (or acting-out sexually) often gives over control to the wife because he doesn’t have time or the emotional strength to give to the role of husband and father

Fear of abandonment or rejection – Many of you might come from homes where one of your parents was emotionally or physically absent. Perhaps you were often blamed for the problems in the family. That fear of not being good enough to be loved might have played out in early romantic relationships as a teenager. That fear of being left alone has carried into your marriage. Many of you have turned your head towards your husband's behavior or not confronted him because you were afraid he would leave you. A bad marriage was better than not having a marriage at all.

The need to be needed – If you were a caretaker in your family of origin it is likely that has carried over into your marriage. If you were valued in your family for being a “good little girl” who did what ever she was told, your own needs went unmet. But you received affirmation and care for meeting the needs of others. Again, many of your husbands didn't have the room in their lives for your emotional needs, but affirmed you when you took care of them expecting nothing in return.

Assuming the blame/feeling shame for the problems in the marriage – This is a common theme for women from divorced homes. Many children wrongly assume the blame for their parent's divorce. Some of you might have even been blamed by your mother or father for the breakup of their marriage. No child is responsible for their parent's marriage, but many are never freed from this terrible burden of shame. Many of you wrongly assume that your husband is not responsible for his sinful acting out because you were not a satisfactory wife. You falsely believe if you were a better wife, he wouldn't need any other sexual or relational outlets.

Unrealistic view of your marriage – Many of you come from families where there was a high level of denial about what your family was really like. It looked good from the outside, and it seemed easier to not face the problems within. If you looked like a good, loving family then you must be a good, loving family. That attitude carried into your marriage. If you deny the problems but just go on acting like everything is okay, then maybe it will be. You really don't know how to deal with problems or find help. It is easier to pretend everything is all right, rather than letting the truth be known.

As you read these descriptions, you might feel as if you have experienced different aspects of these themes. It is important to remember, no one person is the same all the time. But your family background does, in part, shape who you have become as a wife. My hope is that these themes will not make you feel condemned or inadequate, but will help you understand some of patterns that are established in your marriage.

Recognizing yourself in some of these unhealthy patterns is another of the steps on your road to healing. You might begin to recognize that your husband is not the only one who needs healing from brokenness in his family of origin. You have also been wounded and shaped by our own family of origin. Both of you have contributed to dysfunctional patterns in your marriage.

Your road to healing

Hopefully you see the need for healing, not only because of the wounding you have received in your marriage, but for your own areas of brokenness. The admission of your own areas of weakness is an important step. As you begin to see how your background has helped shape you as a woman, you see how that affected your choice in who you married. While your husband's sexual and relational brokenness might be the source of greater wounding and sin against you, you too have brought your own area of brokenness into the marriage. They might be very different and less wounding or painful than your husband's, and are certainly no greater than his, but both of you are in need of healing and restoration from the Lord.

Accepting the reality of...

...***your choices***: You married your husband. That is a choice you made. Acknowledge before the Lord that you married your husband and want to see your marriage restored.

...***your marriage***: Your marriage is not perfect. No one's is. All marriages consist of two broken people in need of a Savior and the healing and restoration that only He can give you through His grace and mercy. Your marriage is what it is, but it can and will change as you both receive healing.

...*your vulnerabilities, his vulnerabilities*: Both of you come from less than perfect families. In both of you there have been areas of wounding. Neither one of you is less in need of a Savior than the other.

...*your behavior, his behavior*: Some of your actions towards your husband have been sinful. His actions have been sinful towards you. Even if his behavior has greater consequences and hurt deeper, it is important for both of you to acknowledge that you have both sinned against each other.

The next step along the way

After acknowledging before the Lord the reality of your past it is also important to acknowledge how hurt and angry you are because of the sins against you growing up. Next it is important to forgive those people who have hurt you in the past and release them to the Lord. Only when you forgive are you truly able to be freed from the past.

I was sexually abused as a small child. The sins against me were great and helped form who I was as a woman, wife and mother. I saw how that sin against me helped me need to feel in control. I was afraid of being hurt and rejected, but also insecure in who I was as a woman. Not only did I need to acknowledge before the Lord these sins against me, I had to take the scary step of feeling that hurt and anger before the Lord. As I cried out to the Lord He was faithful to assume that weight of the sin against me into His own body. I realized I didn't want the sins of others to affect who I was and the choices I made any longer. In order to be free from the weight of their sin, I needed to forgive the man who abused me. It wasn't easy, but only after forgiving him, was I able to receive God's healing in those deep places of wounding. I began to see myself not as a wounded, unlovely child, but began to see myself as God saw me, his beautiful daughter. Forgiving was a painful process for me, but crucial to my becoming the woman God created me to be. Forgiveness freed me to give up my need to be in control in my marriage and to trust the Lord. It also allowed me to believe that I was worthy of having a husband who loved and respected me.

In need of grace and mercy

As the freedom I experienced from forgiving those who had wounded me in the past settled into my heart, I began to react differently than I had before in similar situations. My need to be in control lessened, as I was less insecure in whom I was as a woman and a wife. I also saw how these changes in me didn't always "run smoothly". Some days I would feel secure, others I would feel insecure and I would react in old ways. As you experience your own healing from the past, there will be those days when everything is fine, but there will be others when you still feel bound by the past hurts.

As you see how hard the healing process is you should be able to have more grace for your husband in his healing process. The difficulty of this road is not an excuse for sin, but it does call for grace to the one who is on the road. Both you and your husband are on a road towards healing and restoration, both personally and for your marriage. While the roads might not be equally difficult and while his vulnerabilities might be greater and more hurtful, God has grace, mercy and freedom from past hurt and wounding for both of you.

- 1) Did you see yourself in any of the types of family of origin that I listed? If so, which one?
- 2) If you identified with any of themes, was this new understanding for you, or something you had long been aware of?
- 3) Can you identify instances where you feel your reactions in situations with your husband were influenced by patterns you identified? What were the situations and what were your reactions?
- 4) Do you feel that you have been able to release your hurt and anger towards those who wounded you in your past? Have you been able to forgive them?
- 5) If you haven't forgiven those in your past do you see the need for it? Are you willing to begin the process of healing, including forgiveness? Have you been able to find one or two friends who will pray with you during this process?
- 6) Regardless of how deeply you have been wounded by your husband's sexual sin, are you able to see yourself also as a sinner in need of a Savior before the cross? Are you able, without excusing your husband's sins, to give him grace and mercy during his own road of healing?

Chapter Four

The Need to Forgive

This chapter focuses on the importance of forgiving your husband. Most Christians are well versed in why we forgive. But many wives find that forgiving their husband's sexual brokenness and sin is much more difficult for them than forgiving him in other areas of brokenness. Yet it is another important step on the road to your healing. Once you have acknowledged his brokenness and how you have been wounded you can begin the process of forgiveness. Until a wife is able to forgive her husband she will stay bound in her own heart. Forgiving does not mean that your husband hasn't hurt you nor does it mean that your marriage is healed, but it opens the door for more healing for your heart and is part of the restoration process of your marriage.

What does it mean to forgive your husband?

Release of Emotions

When we begin to forgive we start by giving to God the emotions you feel towards your husband. Go before the cross, alone or with a supportive friend, and begin to express to God how you feel about your husband and how he has sinned against you. Hurt, anger, disappointment, betrayal are some of the common emotions a wife feels. For example, you would express to God how hurt you are that your husband has chosen pornography over you and how angry you are that he has chosen to spend his time with pornographic images rather than you and your family.

Giving up the Desire

Once you have expressed to God the true feelings in your heart, you also need to give up the desire to get even with your husband for the hurt he has caused you. You must also give up the desire for those needs that have gone unmet in your marriage in the past to be met. For instance, if your husband continually spent time with the computer on weekends rather than with you and your children you would give up the need for him to make up to you the **past offense** of how he spent his time.

Forgetting the Offense

“...For I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more.”

Jeremiah 31:34

This is the time to give to the Lord, before the cross, the exact sin and walk away from the sin knowing that it has been given to the Lord.

Why should you forgive your husband?

“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Matthew 6:14,15

First, we forgive because we are instructed to. Notice in the scripture Jesus does not qualify the command to forgive. No matter how violated or betrayed you have been by your husband's sin, the command to forgive stays the same.

“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

Matthew 26:26

Second, we forgive as we follow Christ's forgiveness towards us. The Lord has forgiven your husband for his sin; Christ's instruction to you is to do the same.

Third, if we forgive we are free to move from the past and have hope for the future. As long as unforgiveness is in your heart towards your husband you will not be able to believe that your marriage can be restored.

How do you know if you need to forgive your husband?

Unforgiveness keeps you bound and bonded to the past. Look for some of the fruits of unforgiveness in your heart towards your husband:

- **Anxiety** – are you always anxious about what your husband is doing with his time away from you based on what he has done in the past? If he has made himself

accountable and is seeking healing, do you still need to know where he is all the time?

- **Anger** – Does the amount of anger you have towards him still run very deep? Do you find yourself angrier than you thought you would be over actions by your husband in areas unrelated to his sexual brokenness? For example, if he forgets to go to the grocery store do you yell at him and accuse him of being completely irresponsible and a terrible provider?
- **Condemnation** – Do you judge him as a perverted, almost irreprehensible person based on his sexual brokenness?
- **Confusion** – At times do you love him and support him in his healing and have hope for your marriage and at other times, you can't stand to be in the same room with him and your marriage seems almost unbearable?
- **Resentment** – Do you resent the time he is spending seeking healing for his sexual brokenness? If he is in counseling or in a healing group such as *Living Waters* or *Salt* do you feel that the time would be better spent making up to you for the hurt he has caused you because of his sexual sin? Do you feel like he is getting more attention for his sin than you are for having been hurt by that sin?
- **Emptiness** – When you think of your husband or your marriage, are there no feelings? No hope, no care, no belief or desire for his healing or restoration?
- **Pride** – Do you truly believe that he is a worse sinner than you are? (I want to distinguish here between the hurt his sin has caused you and both of your positions before God as sinners – in this example I am referring to the latter)

Last, you need to consider your feelings when you consider past memories in your marriage. While you will never look upon the past times when your husband sinned

against you with gladness, the pain and the hurt subsides as you are able to forgive. In place of hurt and pain, there can be a peace that is in your heart when you look at the past, not joy, but a peace that comes only through forgiveness.

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:7

Consequences of Unforgiveness

Read the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:21-35) to find out the result of unforgiveness. Jesus commands Peter to keep forgiving those who sin against him as God continues to forgive us. We see at the end of the parable that those who do not forgive are turned over to their jailer to be tortured until all is paid back.

Psalms 32 gives a more personal account of unforgiveness. David speaks of his body wasting away, the hand of the Lord heavy upon him until he acknowledges his sin. It was only after confessing his sin (unforgiveness towards your husband is a sin) was David able to feel the protection of the Lord and receive the Lord's deliverance. To be completely delivered and freed from the hurt of your husband's sexual brokenness you must be willing to forgive him.

Learning to Forgive

In the beginning of the chapter I discussed briefly what forgiving your husband entails, the following are more specific instruction on forgiving your husband.

Steps of Forgiveness

Acknowledge the hurt and memories: In prayer, name the specific sins of memories of when that sin has hurt you. If your husband has been unfaithful to you, you would confess

the times he was unfaithful and how much that hurt you. You might confess the memory of the time he confessed to you his infidelities and the betrayal and anger you felt.

Let the presence of Jesus into your heart: After you acknowledge the hurt and painful memories and emotions ask God to enter into those places in your heart where you have been hurt by your husband's sin.

Release at the foot of the Cross: If you can see the cross in you mind release the memories, the pain, the emotions and your husband to Jesus. Some women find release by placing their open hand over their heart during this step and after speaking release of their husband and the pain to the Lord then take their hand and offering upward to the Lord.

Forgive your husband: Simple, difficult, life changing words. Simply say "Lord, I forgive my husband for his sins against me and for his sexual and relational brokenness"

Ask God to forgive your husband: Ask the Lord to forgive your husband for the way he has sinned against you and your marriage.

Ask God to forgive you for any fruits of unforgiveness in you heart: If any of the fruits of unforgiveness I discussed earlier applied to you, ask the Lord to forgive you. In prayer, ask Him to forgive you for anger, resentment, anxiety, etc.

Ask God to heal your heart: This will not be immediate, but ask the Lord to heal your heart of the hurt, betrayal, disappointment, etc that you have experiences as a result of your husband's sin towards you and your marriage.

Bless your husband: Ask the Lord to bless your husband in his life and in the process of seeking healing.

Additional aspects of forgiveness:

I have focused on forgiving your husband towards the specific sins committed against you because of his sexual and relational brokenness, but there are three others areas I want to briefly touch upon that you might also need to go to the Lord with:

Towards your spouse's sexual brokenness: Even when you have forgiven your husband for the specific sins he still remains a man with sexual and relational struggles. It is very helpful to forgive him for that expression of his brokenness. Even if he is committed to healing there will still be times of struggle. In order to acknowledge that he is sexually broken and is continuing to seek healing from that you might need to forgive him. For example if your husband is a sexual addict, besides forgiving specific acts of addiction, you will need to forgive him for the way in which his addiction will continue to be a struggle for him. (This is not accepting his future struggles as okay, but simply an acknowledgment that they are present in his heart)

Towards yourself: In Chapter Three I looked at some ways in which your background have influenced you. You might need to forgive yourself for the false truths you have embraced about yourself. For instance, if you have felt unworthy, confess that and ask the Lord to forgive you and for you to forgive your self for believing you were worthless.

Towards the past: As you consider your husband's family of origin and your own, you might feel anger towards his parents, your own parents, or others who sinned against you or your husband. For example, if you see your husband's mom as controlling and demeaning towards him, you will need to forgive her for how she hurt your husband. Perhaps your own father was verbally abusive to you and that made you feel unattractive and unworthy. You would need to forgive your father for that sin and how that sin affected your self-image even as a wife.

Forgiving no matter the outcome -Forgiveness is a necessary part of your healing regardless of what choices your husband makes in regard to his healing and your marriage. It is necessary to forgive your husband even if your marriage ends in divorce. The fruit of forgiveness frees you to move forward into the future whether your husband continues to pursue

healing or not. No matter how great his sin against you, is it not worth being bound by that sin in your heart.

Receiving Healing and Moving Towards Restoration

As you forgive your husband's you are free to love him in a new way. That does not mean loving his sexual brokenness or how it has hurt you. It means being free from the bondage of unforgiveness and loving your husband for who he is: a sinner in need of a Savior. Forgiveness allows God to deepen the process of healing in your heart as well as give you hope for the future.

“Free to love all, bondage towards none: that is God's intent for each of us.”

Leanne Payne

Three Stages of Forgiveness towards Your Husband

Many women are willing to forgive their husband's sin against them, but then are dismayed when feelings of unforgiveness arise again in their hearts. I do not believe that they haven't forgiven their husbands, but that for some wives the hurt and betrayal is so deep that even the act of forgiveness is a process, one that is repeated over and over again. I have seen many wives need to forgive their husbands, often in the three stages described below:

Stage One

This first stage allows the healing process to begin, it is not necessary to feel total resolve towards your husband's actions. This stage is often followed out of simple obedience to God's instruction to us to forgive.

In this stage:

- Forgive any specific sexual acts of which you have knowledge
- Forgive your husbands for his sexual brokenness
- Be honest with God what your marriage is different than you expected
- Forgive yourself for not being a "good enough wife" (do not internalize his failings as your fault)

Stage Two

If you have forgiven your husband but still feel angry, hurt, etc, it is time to forgive again. This second stage is the time to acknowledge and release the bitterness, anger, betrayal, disappointment that you feel towards your husband. This can be done through counseling, individual prayer, prayer with friends or specific support groups. You must be willing to give to the Lord these painful, negative emotions. Freedom for you to love your husband and have hope for the restoration of your marriage depends partly on your giving the Lord these burdensome emotions you have in your heart. Often during this stage you will simply not want to be burdened by your emotions any more, it is more than simply being obedient to the command to forgive, but based more in your

being tired of feeling this way rather than really believing you can be free from the hurt of the past.

This is also the stage when the beginning of rebuilding trust begins. You must choose to trust again, though this must coincide with your husband's willingness to become accountable in his areas of sin and be actively seeking healing. Rebuilding trust is a slow process that is dependent on both husband and wife being willing to work on many areas of their marriage (i.e. communication, accountability, friendship).

Stage Three

This final stage is possible only after a true desire to be free from the hurt and the pain and true belief that the Lord will restore your heart. Whereas the first stage might be out of obedience, the second out of simply being tired of being hurt, the third stage must be heartfelt. No matter how deep the hurt, the Lord can give you the freedom to truly forgive. No matter how deep the feelings of anger and hurt you have felt because of your husband's sin and betrayal, Jesus understands. Jesus is your advocate, not just out of sympathy towards you, but because He suffered the deepest rejection and betrayal at the Cross, so that He could assume the burden of the sins committed against you. As Jesus humbled Himself to die for you, so must you give your feelings of the hurt and injury suffered by you because of your husband, and leave at the cross your husband's sexual brokenness.

As you release your heart before God, He is able to repair the damage done to your heart. He can only mend what is given to Him.

Questions:

- 1) In relationships other than your marriage, is it easy for you to forgive those you hurt you?
- 2) In your marriage have you and your husband practiced forgiveness towards each other (in areas outside of his sexual brokenness)? Has it been easy to forgive him when he has hurt you or disappointed you?
- 3) What are the specific areas of how his sexual brokenness has affected you do you need to forgive him?
- 4) Look at the list in question 3, do you want to forgive him? Why?
- 5) Look at the list of fruits of unforgiveness .Which, if any, of those apply to you
- 6) If you feel like you haven't been able to forgive your husband, are you willing to pray out of obedience as described in Stage One of Forgiving Your Husband?
- 7) Are there other areas towards yourself, your marriage or your or your husband's family that you need to forgive?
- 8) Have you felt release and greater healing as you have been able to forgive your husband?

Chapter Five

Letting Go

What does it mean to let go of something? Letting go means to relinquish, to give over possession or control of something to another. This chapter focuses on letting go of your marriage and your husband to the Lord and truly trusting in His control and will for your marriage. This is not easy to do, but the rewards of being able to rest in the security of the Lord for the restoration of your heart is worth the effort.

Three Aspects of Letting Go of Your Marriage

Giving Up Your Rights

Whether you are willing to admit it, many of you believe that you have a right to a perfect marriage. Most of you married as Christians, believing that God had called you together as man and wife. God honors marriages and many assume that is enough for your marriage to be successful. But the reality of your marriage is probably very different than your expectations. Both of you are broken, wounded people in ways that have affected who you are as husband and wife. For many couples, the husband's sexual brokenness might be the deepest area of brokenness that needs healing, but many other areas are also in need of repair. Your marriage is far from perfect (as is any marriage) but the belief that it should be perfect needs to be released to the Lord.

Some of you also believed that your husband would be perfect. At the very least he shouldn't struggle with any areas of sexual brokenness. No one marries someone looking forward to her husband's sexual struggles in areas of addiction, homosexuality, infidelity, etc. And the reality of your husband's sexual brokenness make it very clear that he is not perfect. Some wives cannot believe that their husband can be an honorable Christian man who has sexual struggles and is committed to seeking healing from the Lord. The simplistic hope that God will simply remove the struggles and then your husband will be instantly set free is unrealistic. Many women hold that hope in their hearts but have difficulty acknowledging even to themselves. This is a false belief that brings hurt and disappointment and also needs to be released to the Lord.

Giving Up Your Beliefs and Desires

Many of you had beliefs about what your husband should be, what your marriage should be. He should love you unconditionally, you should never fight, your marriage should be an example to the church of how two people really love another, you won't ever be the kind of wife that has problems in her marriage and needs help from others, Christians like you and your husband would never have serious problems. Do any of those sound familiar? Many strive under the pressure of living up to unrealistic expectations. When you base your beliefs and desires for your marriage on false standards (other people's opinions, fear your marriage will be like your parents, etc.) and not on what God's heart is for your marriage you let yourself in for constant disappointment and frustration. As you are able to give to the Lord those false beliefs and desire God's heart for you His truth finds room to live in your heart.

Loosening Your Hold on Your Husband

I have spoken to countless women who ask me the same two questions, "How can I help change my husband so that he doesn't struggle sexually" and "Shouldn't he change just for me because I love him so much and I have been a good wife?" The problem with questions like that is that while there is some truth in them, believing that you can change your husband and that he should love you enough to change are not true. Your husband needs healing so that he can become the man God has created him to be, fully true to the Lord, your marriage and you. The desire to change for another person will not be strong enough to help him in times of struggles. It is only the desire to be healed for the Lord, that will give your husband the strength he needs in times of weakness and struggles. You are part of the support system he needs while he is seeking healing, and his desire to love you aright is important but only part of the process of the healing he needs. Only God can change him, and the change and healing your husband needs is not because of you but because of the Lord.

The Rewards of Letting Go

Letting go is not easy, but the rewards are great. False beliefs, rights and understanding are given to the Lord and His truth is revealed. His truth brings peace in your heart, not strife and worry.

All Good Gifts are from God

Do you believe your marriage was the Lord's will for you and your husband? If you struggle with that now because of your current difficulties, did you believe that truth before your husband revealed his sexual brokenness and struggles? Most Christians marry with the belief that God has brought them together. Even if you aren't so sure, God does honor the covenant of marriage and will honor all efforts you make towards the healing and restoration of your marriage. Rather than holding on to your husband and your marriage are you willing to give them to God? Are you willing to entrust the care of your marriage to the Lord as Hannah did of her son, Samuel? (Read I Samuel 1-2:11) Hannah longed for a child, when the Lord honored her prayers she did not hold on to the child, nor desire him to be what she wanted, rather she dedicated him to the Lord asking the Lord for his direction.

"I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of Him. So now I will give him to the Lord. For his whole life, he will be given over to the Lord."

1 Samuel 1:27-28

If you believe the Lord brought you and your spouse together or did believe that at one time are you willing to give your marriage and your husband over to the Lord? If you feel weak and broken as a wife, unsure of your future, allow the Lord to take care of you and know of his restorative healing power for you. God's healing and restoration of your heart and soul is a great gift of love for you.

(For those of you who are unsure of the future of your marriage it is even more important to let go you marriage and your husband to the Lord.)

*“The bows of the warriors are broken,
but those who stumbled are armed with strength.
Those who were full hire themselves out for food,
But those who are hungry hunger no more”*

*“He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
he seats them with princes
and has them inherit of throne of honor.”*

1 Samuel 2:4-5a, 7-8a (emphasis mine)

True Security

If you have looked to your husband or marriage for a sense of safety and security you have probably realized that is an unsure foundation. If you felt good about yourself because your marriage was good, or that your husband truly loved you, that has probably been very shaken by the truth of his sexual brokenness, your areas of brokenness and the need for restoration to your marriage. As you are able to give to the Lord your need for security and safety and trust in His provision, you will know true security and safety. If you have looked to your husband, you need to confess that to the Lord as sin. Ask God to forgive you for looking to your husband for security that can be found only in Him. Whether or not your husband and marriage are restored your source of security is not in a person or an institution. Ask God to help move you in the truth of His provision for our life. Many of the Psalms speak to a heart in need of shoring up. Read and meditate on those as you learn to look to God as your source of strength. Then and only then will you know the truth peace of being protected and safe.

*“If you make the most High your dwelling—
even the Lord, who is my refuge—
then no harm will befall you—
no disaster will come near your tent.”*

*“Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him;
I will protect him for he acknowledges my name.
He will call upon me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and honor him.
With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation.”*

Psalm 91:9,10,14-16

True Freedom from Worry

When you release your marriage and your husband to the Lord you can be free from the emotional “roller coaster” you have been on. For some of you, your husband’s moods, emotions and struggles cause you great fear and worry over the future. You have allowed the state of your marriage or other’s opinions of your marriage to be the basis of your own feelings about yourself. If that foundation is shaky, fear and anxiety grip your heart. Your life needs to be based in the one who always loves, affirms and supports you, your Heavenly Father.

“Then Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, and what you will eat; or your body, what you will wear.... Consider the ravens; They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?’”

Luke 12: 22-26

How to Let Go

These steps of praying will help you release your beliefs, rights and hold on your husband and marriage to the Lord through these steps of prayer (*this is best done with your prayer partner or support group*):

- **Confess:** Tell God the ways that you have been holding on to your husband. Tell him the false beliefs and rights you have also held onto. Confession is simply telling God what you have done, no excuses, rationales, or reasons .
- **Repent:** Let God know how sorry you are that you have looked to your husband, your own rights, and the opinions of others for feelings of security and self worth. If you are truly tired of holding on to your husband (some of you might be praying this more from obedience than true weariness from holding on) repent of your own exertion of strength, not reliance on His.
- **Forgiveness:** Ask God to forgive you for the things you have confessed and repented of. Then receive the forgiveness He always extends to those who confess and repent
- **Release:** Give to God through your words, your marriage, your husband, his healing and your healing. Ask God to assume the burden of healing and restoring your marriage. Entrust to God your future if your husband is unwilling to seek healing at his time.
- **Leave it at the Cross:** See the things you have held on to and now have let go off as weights left at the foot of the cross. Your marriage, your husband, you, his healing, your healing, your need for control, etc. are all stone that you have taken from your heart and given to the Lord. End the

prayer by thanking Him that he has taken your burdens and you are free to leave them at His feet.

Letting Go

(This is a handout I was given many years ago that I have found very helpful to wives who want to understand more of what letting go means)

To let go doesn't mean to stop caring for my husband; it means I can't heal him myself.

To let go is not to enable him in his brokenness, but to allow him to face the consequences of his actions.

To let go is to admit powerlessness, which means the outcome of my marriage is in the Lord's hands, not mine

To let go is not to try to change my husband or blame him, I can only seek healing for myself.

To let go is not to fix my husband, but support him as he seeks healing.

To let go is not to judge my husband, but see myself as an equal sinner in need of a Savior.

To let go is not to deny the truth about my husband's sexual struggles but to acknowledge the reality of them before the Lord.

To let go is not to nag, scold or argue with my husband about his sin, but to ask God to reveal my own sin and seek forgiveness and healing.

To let go is not to assume that my beliefs are always true and to ask God to reveal His will for my marriage and my husband.

To let go is not to regret his past and my own, but to allow God to heal the broken places.

To let go is to not fear and be anxious but to trust in God for the future.

Questions:

1. Are there aspects of your marriage that you need to give up?
2. List any false “rights” you have believed about your marriage:
3. List any false hopes or desires you have held onto about your marriage:
4. List any ways in which you have held onto your husband and his healing:
5. What would be the benefits of releasing and letting go of your husband and your marriage to the Lord?
6. Can you truly give your husband to the Lord as Hannah gave her son? Can you pray the following words?

*I prayed for my marriage, my husband, and you Lord
have granted me what I asked of you. So now I
give my marriage and my husband to you, O Lord.
For the length of my marriage and for the whole life of
my husband, they will be given over to you Lord.
(my paraphrasing of 1 Samuel 1:27-28)*

7. How do you feel after having released and given to the Lord your marriage and your husband’s healing and restoration?

Chapter Six

Restoring Trust

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all ways acknowledge him,
and he will make your paths straight.”*

Proverbs 3:4-5

When we trust in someone we rely on the integrity, the ability or the character of the person to do that which they have promised us to do, but trust is also shaped by our past experiences with that person. If someone we know to be reliable promises to borrow a book and give it back, we rely on our past knowledge of that person and assume that they will return the book. We are less likely to let a person who we just met at a Bible study borrow the same book. It is not that the person we just met is less trustworthy, but we have no prior relationship with that person on which to base our decision. Human trust is based in large part, not on just the person who is asking for our trust, but also with our history with that person. Trust in God though is based on who He is, has been and will always be. Scripturally, we know that God is always trustworthy and we are instructed to place our trust in Him.

In God we have a firm and stable confidence that He will be faithful to what he promises. In Mark 4:35-41 we see a clear demonstration of the confidence that Jesus puts in His heavenly father. He and the disciples are out on a boat when a storm breaks out. The boat is nearly overtaken by the waves and the disciples discover Jesus asleep in the stern of the boat. The disciples awake Him to ask Him if He is concerned that they will drown. He calms the storm, but then asks them why they were afraid and had so little faith. Jesus, fully confident of the Father, was able to sleep in the midst of a storm. He trusted in the complete reliability of the Father to take care of Him.

“Now it is required to those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.”

1 Corinthians 4:2

But the trust we have in God is not so easy to have in humans. I believe Paul was speaking to the human tendency to let one another down in 1 Corinthians 4 (see above). Paul realizes that when we put trust in someone, that person must prove faithful to be worthy of that trust. Many of you have had the trust you had in your husband to be faithful to you and your marriage vows broken. Through his sexually acting out, whether it be through addictive masturbation and pornography, heterosexual or homosexual infidelity or other forms of sexual sin, he has no longer proven faithful to you. Your trust in his ability to be faithful in the future is placed in doubt by his past actions.

Why do we need to trust God and others?

Trusting in God brings rest. God has made us to trust in Him. Our hearts are restless until we are able to find peace in God. Without the ability to trust in God our lives are unsatisfactory because we are not able to connect to our creator. Our hearts are subject to fear, anxiety and insecurity when we can not fully trust in the Lord.

Trusting in others makes us feel connected. We begin life needing others. We trust in our parents to provide and take care of us. As we grow we put our trust in other relationships, and often posit the greatest amount of trust in our husband. The ability to trust our spouse makes it safe for us to reveal and be known at our deepest level of vulnerability.

When trust is broken...

If your husband's sexual brokenness has resulted in his sexually acting out during your marriage, your trust has been broken. Your husband's unfaithfulness has shaken you to your core and makes it difficult to trust him in the future.

Even your relationship with God is affected by your husband's unfaithfulness. If you believe that God is looking out for you, and will take care of you, you might feel that He should have protected you from the hurt and betrayal of your husband's actions.

The breaking of trust has far reaching effects in your marriage and your relationship with God. The road to restoring trust is a difficult and painful process, but one that must be traveled on for you to receive healing from your husband's infidelity and the restoration of your marriage.

Restoring Trust

Some of the steps to restore trust are the same as the steps of forgiveness. Before God and your prayer partner(s) you must be willing to:

Acknowledge the pain: You need to be truthful about the pain that you have experienced because of your husband's sexual brokenness. You must be willing to verbalize the hurt and betrayal you have felt. Many wives describe the pain as feeling as if a knife has been plunged and twisted in their heart. Even if you have forgiven your husband you still need to be honest about the pain that you have experienced. This does not mean you haven't forgiven him, or that you are currently blaming him, but is acknowledging that his pain has wounded you and broken your trust with him.

Acknowledge the anger: Many women have an easier time with expressing the hurt and pain, some women have a harder time expressing anger. Some women in trying to understand their husband's sexual brokenness feel that he, based on the brokenness in his background, didn't mean to hurt them. Some wives feel guilty in expressing anger towards their husband's actions. But regardless of the intent of your husband it is important to be honest with your emotions. It is unrealistic to think that you are not angry at your husband for what he did. It is not unreasonable to even be angry at him even if he has never acted out, but struggles with fantasy and undue temptations. At the very least his need for healing takes time and energy away from you and the marriage. If he has acted out you have been betrayed and your marriage is in need of much repair. Anger at the way his brokenness has affected you is a normal emotion. In order to trust

him in the future you must be honest with all that your heart is feeling. It is important to express your anger towards your husband and his brokenness before God.

Acknowledge the grief: Due to the effect of their husband's sexual brokenness, many wives feel as if their life and marriage will never be the same again. Many hopes and dreams have been shattered and they hope that through God the pieces of their marriage will be put back together. But most wives feel as if their marriage will be forever shaped by their husband's actions. Again, even if their husband has never acted out, many wives feel as if they can never be completely secure in their marriages. The grief of what has happened and how that changes how you feel about the future needs to be acknowledged. There is understandable sadness in your heart. There is a need to mourn over your husband's breaking of your marriage vows. You need to be honest about the disappointment you have experienced because of your husband's sexual brokenness. If your husband is not willing to seek healing it is crucial to express your grief that your marriage might become a casualty due to his unrepentance.

Acknowledge who you are: You and your husband are not the same people you were before you started dealing with his sexual brokenness. You are aware of how your pasts have affected both of you. Hopefully you are beginning to see that both of you are broken, wounded people in need of the healing, restorative grace of Jesus. Your marriage has been affected by what you brought into the marriage and, perhaps to a greater extent, by your husband's sexual brokenness and actions. Your marriage is hurt and broken; no longer one in which false illusions exist. This is a painful reality, but describes in part, the truth about you and your marriage. It is important to become known at that level by God and a few trusted others. Even though God knows who you are and the state of your marriage you need to be honest with Him about the truth of who you and your husband are. It is also important to be known at that deep level of the heart by one or two other people. A pastor, a counselor, or a trusted prayer partner needs to be let in at the level of the truth of your heart. Being known brings freedom and the understanding you desire.

Once you have acknowledged who you are and the pain, anger and grief that has been in your heart you can begin to have your trust in God and your spouse restored.

Restoring Trust in God:

In truth, God has done nothing to break trust with you. It is through the sin and choices of your husband that you have been hurt and your trust was broken. But God understands that the sin of your spouse upon your heart has damaged your ability to trust in Him. In learning to trust again, you need to seek the truth about trusting God.

In prayer acknowledge that God hears your prayers and that He will answer your prayers.

Hear my prayer, O lord;

Listen to my cry for mercy.

In the day of my trouble I will call to you,

For you will answer me.

Psalm 86: 6-7

In prayer acknowledge your need to listen for His voice knowing He will answer the cries of your heart.

“Now choose life, so that you and your children may

live and that you may love the Lord your God,

listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.

for the Lord is your life, and he will give you

many years in the land...”

Deuteronomy 30: 19b-20a

In prayer acknowledge God’s sovereignty even, in the midst of disappointments and confusion and hardship.

“In this world you will have trouble.

But take heart.

I have overcome the world.”

John 16:33b

In prayer acknowledge that in God we are all new and are able to be reconciled one to another. This is the true intent God has for you in your marriage, freeing you from the effect your husband's brokenness upon you and your marriage. Even if your marriage ends you need to be reconciled to Christ, freed from the betrayal of your husband.

*"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;
the old has gone, the new has come!*

*All this is from God, who reconciled himself through
Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:
that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,
not counting men's sins against them."*

2 Corinthians 5:17-19a

Trusting your spouse again

Trusting your spouse again is more difficult than with God. As you understand that God is trustworthy you realign your past understanding to the truth of God's character. But your spouse has broken trust with you in your marriage. He has broken the promises of fidelity and faithfulness. You can only begin to trust your husband if he understands he has to participate in the restoration process. The process of forgiving and releasing your husband to God is done before God. But the restoration of trust, after the acknowledgement before God that it has been broken, must involve your husband. Until you see signs of true repentance and pursuing healing you need to be cautious about placing too much trust in your husband.

Key factors in reestablishing trust:

Willingness: Your husband must be willing to hear what you need from him in order to reestablish trust. He needs to understand that even if some of what you need

from him seems unreasonable he needs to cooperate as best he can. If your husband is a sexual addict and has used the internet to access pornography in your home, you might need him to have no access to the computer at all, for a period of time, even though there are now safeguards against accessing pornography on the computer. If your husband has acted out in other relationships and spent unaccounted periods of time away from the family in the past, you might need to be able to reach him whenever you want for your own peace of mind. If he has had problems with fantasy and masturbation, you might need to know from his accountability partner that your husband is confessing and praying with him about his fantasy life. If your husband is unable to agree with what you need from him in terms of behavior, a neutral third party needs to be brought in to negotiate what is reasonable for both of you.

Consistency: As much as he is able, your husband must be willing to be consistent with what he agrees to do to help you trust him again. If he agrees to be home at 6:00 every night he needs to understand, not coming home, but calling to tell you he will be late, is probably not going to help you trust him again. If he agrees to pray with you once a week about your marriage, he needs to initiate the prayer time consistently on the agreed upon time. He needs to understand that you cannot see the inner workings of his heart and one way in which you will be able to believe he is receiving healing is to see consistency in areas where he has previously been inconsistent.

Commitment: You must know that your husband is completely committed to the restoration of your marriage. He must be willing to seek healing not just for his wounds and areas of brokenness but release you to seek the healing you need. He must also be willing to seek healing with you for your marriage. It is not enough for him to be in counseling, a Living Waters group, etc. you need your own support for healing. Your ability to trust in him again will be strengthened as you see him committed to you and your healing even if it stretches him in areas where he is not comfortable.

A heart willing to be stretched

Just as your husband needs to be willing, consistent and committed to restoring trust, you must be willing to take new chances in areas where your trust has been broken. If your husband was consistently late for home and he has agreed to always be home at 6:00, as you see him being consistent, you need to free him from such constraint. It might start out as simple as he can be home between 6:00-6:30 one night a week without calling you, with the goal being you that one day you will trust home to be home every night at a reasonable time unless he lets you know ahead of time. If he has had problems with the computer and pornography, but needs to use it at home for work you need to be willing, given the proper safeguards in place, to let him have access to the computer at home with the goal being that he will have access to the computer (again always with safeguards in place) as he needs it, when he needs it.

It might not be easy, but just as your husband needs to be stretched in new areas, you will need to be willing to trust him in areas where he has broken trust in the past.

Some husbands are unwilling to seek healing at this point. While you will not be able to “work” on restoring trust in your husband, you are able to work on restoring trust in your relationship with the Lord. Commit to pray about those areas, due to your husband’s violations of your marriage, where your trust in God has been damaged. In order to move forward in all or your relationships (family, friends, church body) you need to be willing to trust again, but that trust must first come in relationship to Jesus.

God is the cornerstone of your marriage. The ability to trust your husband is dependent upon both of you receiving healing and restoration. The trust you put in the Lord is sure and constant.

*“So this is what the Sovereign Lord says:
See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation;
the one who trusts will never be dismayed.”
Isaiah 28:16*

Questions:

- 1) What are the specific areas that your trust in your husband has been broken?
- 2) Has your trust in God been affected by your husband's sexual brokenness? If so, in what areas are you having trouble trusting God?
- 3) Are you willing to allow the truth of scripture about God's trustworthiness change your perceptions about God letting you in regards to your marriage?
- 4) Have you gone through the steps of acknowledging the effect of broken trust upon your heart?
- 5) Is your husband willing to demonstrate his commitment to rebuilding your trust?
- 6) Do you want to trust your husband again?
- 7) What things can your husband do to help you start trusting him again?
- 8) Are you willing to be stretched in areas where your trust has been broken as your husband is able to demonstrate he is becoming trustworthy?
- 9) Do you believe God is truly able to make you and your husband new creatures and that He is committed to the restoration of your marriage?

Chapter Seven

Supporting your husband

Being married to a sexually broken man with areas of weaknesses and struggles brings unique circumstances to your marriage. You want to see him receive healing but probably are unsure of how to support him in that process. You probably have many questions, but not many people to go to with those questions. Not all women can answer the questions such as “What should I do if my husband looks at pornography again?” or “What happens when he confesses the desire to call his ex-homosexual lover?” Even your prayer partner, while being committed to supporting you in this process may not have experience in answering these questions. It is often hard to find others to ask for counsel. Even more difficult is what one wife may find easy to do or accept is very difficult for another wife. Given the uniqueness of each of you, your histories, current state of our marriage, and your maturity as a Christian there are few absolutes to follow. It is my hope that the following will help you learn how best for you to support your husband in his own healing. The key word for you is grace, grace and more grace as you try and support your husband to the best of your ability.

Your husband's heart

One of the most important factors in being able to support your husband is his own attitude of heart.

Change

Does he want to change? Does he want to change for you, the kids or because of social pressure? The most important factor in your husband's ability to receive healing is if he is doing it first and foremost for his relationship with the Lord. He needs to truly believe that his areas of sexual brokenness are sinful. He also needs to want to be healed

so that he can love the Lord with all of His heart not a heart full of sexual idolatry. While you, your marriage, and your family are important, that alone is never enough of a reason to change.

Action

What course of action he is taking to get help? Is he trying to do this on his own with no outside help besides you knowing of his sin and struggles? Is he seeking counsel from people who uphold the Biblical truth of sexuality and power to change? If he has homosexual struggles is he seeking counsel from those who believe homosexuals can't or shouldn't have to change? Is he willing to become known and accountable to others? Is he willing to seeking counseling or participate in a healing program such as Living Waters or *salt*? Very rare are the testimonies of instantaneous healing or those who have been healed through personal prayer only. A key element of receiving healing is becoming known to others in areas of brokenness and struggle. It is too much for you alone to assume to the burden of knowing and supporting your husband in his areas of struggle.

Your heart

Your attitudes towards your husband and your marriage are also very important

Are you able to admit that your husband's sexual brokenness has affected your marriage? Are you willing to admit that your marriage needs help? Do you feel that all of the problems in your marriage are a result of your husband's sexual brokenness? Do you see areas in your own life that need healing? Do you feel that while your husband's sexual brokenness is perhaps a greater factor, do you see ways in which you have also contributed to the problems out of areas of personal brokenness? Both of you have contributed to the successful areas of your marriage as well as the areas where you have problems. It is important for your to see that you have areas of brokenness and need to seek healing.

Do you believe that your husband wants to change? Do you believe that God can heal?

Action

Just as your husband needs to seek healing are you willing to do the same? Are you willing to be known by a counselor, some trusted friends or find a support group? Many wives do not want to have anyone know about their husband's struggles or the affect of them upon their marriage. Many wives also struggle with the shame of admitting that they need support and help in their marriage. Are you willing to humble yourself and become known as one who is broken and needs healing both personally and in her marriage?

Your Husband's Temptations and Struggles

Realistic Expectations

It is unrealistic to think that your husband will not to tempted or to have sexual struggles. These do not negate the healing that he is receiving. His ability to withstand temptations and struggles as he receives healing will strengthen. The frequency and intensity of his temptations and struggles will diminish over time and through the depth of healing in his life. Most men continue to have occasional periods of struggles, but through healing, accountability and maturity deal with them uprightly before the Lord with minimal or no affect upon their marriages.

Struggles and temptations are very different from acting out sexually. If your husband continues acting out sexually you will need help from a therapist or a pastor setting boundaries that protect you in your marriage. If in the process of healing, after periods of freedom from sexual sin, your husband does act out sexually I would urge you to seek support and counsel from a counselor or pastor on how to proceed from that point.

No matter what areas we need healing in, it is not an overnight process. You must be willing to except the ups and downs inherent in the process of healing and restoration.

Self-awareness and disclosure

If you are aware of your own areas of brokenness, his brokenness might not seem so foreign to you. If you experience Christ's healing in your own life, you will have hope for his healing and the restoration of your marriage.

If you are able to share with your husband areas of your own brokenness it feels less like he is the "patient" and you are the "healthy" one. Even if his brokenness is greater than yours, you are both still in need of the Lord, and are equal sinners seeking grace and mercy.

His awareness and openness

It is essential that your husband have an open, honest attitude towards his struggles. He needs to be accountable to others about his struggles. If he is ashamed or depressed that he has struggles, he needs to seek freedom from the shame and depression that keeps current struggles hidden. Both of you need to accept sexual struggles and temptations as part of the healing process. While he needs more than just you supporting him as he seeks healing, he also shouldn't want to shut you out of that area of his life. You will never fully be able to trust him if he isn't able to be honest with you in areas of brokenness and struggle.

As you see him seek understanding and healing in the areas of his sexual brokenness you will be more likely to want to support him in the process of healing.

A Place to Begin

- Talk about how each of you feel about his sharing with you his struggles and temptations
- Let him know what you want to know about his past (areas of temptations, sexual acting out, etc) and what you are comfortable knowing in the present. If what you want to know differs from what he wants to tell you, seek counsel if you are not able to compromise.
- Find out if he wants to share with you. Whether he wants to share with you, he must have others he is accountable to. If possible, it is helpful if you trust those

people to whom he is sharing. If you do not know his accountability support group, it is important that you know his sharing is confidential

- If neither of you are comfortable with his sharing his struggles and temptations with you are you still free to share with him your concerns about him and your marriage?
- You also need accountability partners to work through forgiveness, releasing your marriage to God, and your feelings about his sexual brokenness. It is preferable for you husband to know who those one or two friends are and feel comfortable with them knowing what is happening in your marriage, but not essential.

The following is a very simple formula to follow as you begin to support him in the process of his healing and the struggles and temptations he faces.

The Five W's of His Sharing

Who – who else is he telling these struggles or temptations to?

What – what information is he to share with you? Do you want specific information (“I almost went to an adult bookstore today on the way home from work”) or do you want to know only the general details (“I wanted to look at pornography today”).

When – when do you want him to share with you? Do you want him to tell you immediately and without warning or do you want him to let you know he needs to talk with you at some point within the next day or two?

Where – where do you want to talk with him? Some women are uncomfortable with sharing his sexual struggles in their bedroom or even the house. For some of you it is easier to go on a walk, go get coffee, etc. There is no right or wrong place; whatever feels the most comfortable for both of you.

Why – does he have any insight to what might be triggering his struggles or temptations?
If so, what can he do to avoid the same triggers in the future?

The Five W's for Your Response

Who – who can help you understand his struggles and support you in your reactions to what he is sharing with you

What – what kind of response is he expecting from you. Does he need you just to listen and not react or does he want to hear your immediate reaction? What is generally your first emotional response he what he shares with you? Are you angry? Sad? Insecure? What can you do with your feelings if he is not able to hear your immediate reactions?

When – determine if it is easier for you to respond immediately or take some time to process your feelings before you respond. Some wives find that their immediate response is not the true response of their heart. If they respond immediately often they are angry. After a short time they realize that the anger was masking, their truer feelings of insecurity. If they respond immediately they feel unable to later communicate that though they really are glad their husband shared with them, the struggles make them feel insecure in their marriage. Many wives find it easier to listen to their husband's, thank them for their willingness to share their struggles and then make a time later that day or the next day to respond to their husbands. If this is easier for you then sharing your immediate reactions, try not to wait more than 24 hours to respond. It is important to be as immediate as possible.

Where – Some women feel too anxious and insecure to hear their husband's struggles, yet they want to know what he is experiencing. If this is true for you, it might be easier to make a set time (weekly or every other week) with a counselor, pastor or agreed upon couple for you and your husband to share the struggles and temptations. Most women,

no matter how comfortable they feel in hearing his struggles and temptations, like some prior notice that their husband wants to talk with them. Some women find any “advance warning” unnerving and ask that their husband initiate sharing only when they can both sit down and talk. It is up to you to let your husband know what is easiest for you.

Why – Is it helpful for you to know more of why he is struggling? Is it helpful to understand some of the triggers that increase his temptations? After he has shared with you and you have responded to him, is there anything that you both can learn from that experience that will be helpful in the future?

As you learn to hear each other from the deep parts of your heart other areas of communication will be enhanced. As you practice these simple steps, they will become easier and an ongoing of your aspect of maintaining healthy boundaries in your marriage.

Questions:

1. Do you feel as if your husband is actively pursuing healing? If so, do you desire to be an active part of his support system?
2. Has your husband always brought you into areas of struggle for him (sexual and non-sexual)? Is it difficult for him to share with you from an emotional level?
3. Do you truly believe that your husband wants to pursue healing, or is he seeking change to please you or others?
4. Do you believe that God can heal? Are you in a church setting that believes in the healing power of the Lord for today?
5. Do you have a support system in place to help you with your own healing and stand with you as you support your husband's pursuit of healing?
6. Do you understand that your husband will still have times of sexual struggles and temptations?
7. Do you want your husband to let you know when he has struggles? If not, do you feel comfortable with others knowing and not you?
8. Do you and your husband feel closer emotionally as you both learn to support one another in the process of your marriage being restored?

Chapter 8

Setting Limits: Separation and Divorce

It is God's desire to see all marriages restored. But, marriages are composed of two fallible humans not always able to carry out the Lord's will for their union. There are deep wounds to a marriage when the husband confesses his sexual sin. Many times the acting out has occurred over long periods of time or with many partners. In those marriages, it does take a tremendous amount of grace and willingness to work in deep areas of brokenness for restoration to occur. It also takes the desire and willingness of both partners, not just a concerned wife. Some of you will reach the point where you need to consider if a separation is necessary. This should only be considered if your husband is refusing to seek healing, or if his efforts are marked by habitual periods of acting out. It is also important to seek the advice of wise counsel, and if at possible, the covering of your pastor.

It is important to realize though, that separation does not mean that the issues you face in your marriage still to do not need to be dealt with. Even though this booklet is mainly written for those wives whose husbands are committed to moving forward it is necessary to work through your wounding no matter the outcome of your marriage.

There are many reasons to seek healing from the wounding you have received. Some of the important reasons are:

If you have children, the relationship continues no matter what. The end of a marriage does not mean the end of relating to spouse as the father of your children. Holidays, graduations, marriages, grand parenting, all of these aspects of your relationship with your husband continue. It is necessary to be able to face future interactions with him, freed from wounding and his sin against you. If you don't, the pain will be too great for you to fully enter into the good aspects of your union together-- your children.

The pain and wounding you experienced stays with you no matter what. Your heart has been wounded. Time will not heal the pain you feel without giving these things to the Lord and seeking His healing.

Any areas of pain and wounding not healed through the Lord become a kind of emotional baggage that you carry into all of your relationships. You will be more prone to distrust, insecurity, anxiety in your relationships. Only a healed heart is able to move into new life-giving relationships.

Some women tend to isolate relationally as a result of the wounding they have received in their marriages. Rather than serving as a healthy boundary the heart tends to become walled off, not protected. Bitterness, depression and resentment are common emotions for women who choose to shy away from relationships due to the wounding they have received in their marriage. This is particularly damaging for their children. Since parents form so much of a child's view of marriage, mothers have a responsibility to be a good of a role model as possible even if their own marriage was troublesome. A mother who is embittered from her own marriage is truly not able to encourage her son or daughter in their own relationships.

It is important to take seriously your need for healing from your marriage, not matter what choices your husband makes. Also, each of you brings into your marriage your own brokenness that has probably deepened as a result of the wounding you have received in your marriage. God desires to heal you, not just so you can be a "good wife" but because it is His hope for you to find happiness and contentment, in Him, no matter what course your life may take.

"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength"

Philippians 4:12b-13

Deciding to separate

In the initial days and weeks of learning about your husband's sexual struggles and acting out, it is important to not make major life decisions. You need time to truly sort out your feelings. You also need to give your husband time to seek out

accountability and help. Whether it is in counseling, healing programs or other avenues of healing, your husband needs to show a willingness to become known as a sexually broken man and receive the type healing and support best suited to how his brokenness affects him and your marriage. Hopefully you will also begin to seek healing, not only for the ways in which you have been wounded by your husband but also for some of the historical wounding that you brought into the marriage.

But as time goes by (usually a period of several months) you can begin to assess if you, your husband or your marriage is being restored. If there is little or no growth in those relationships it might be necessary to consider a planned, accountable separation. Some reasons why you might need to seek separation include...

...*For yourself* – Some of you have been so wounded by your husband that it is not possible to find the in depth healing you need while living in the same house with your husband. This is especially true for those wives who husbands confess to years, even decades of sexual acting out or confess to a long-standing affair with another, especially if the adultery was committed with a friend to the family.

...*For your husband* – Some of you have cyclical patterns of you feeling frustrated in your marriage, your husband “behaving” for a while and then old patterns remerge. In order for your husband to take seriously your desire for real healing and change in your marriage you might need to take a strong stand. A temporary, planned, accountable separation would allow your husband to see that you are not willing to stay in the relationship until he seriously pursues healing and accountability. This is not to be used as a threat, but a true statement of intent on your part for your marriage to be truly restored.

...*For your marriage*— Some of you have marriages that are very damaged and even simple day-to-day relating is painful. Even though your husband’s sin might have injured the marriage more than your brokenness, the patterns of relating between both of you are severely out of order (especially if you have been a strong “caretaker” for reasons due to your own wounding). Both of you might have a high level of distrust and dislike for the other. Time away from the strains of the marriage, if you are both actively seeking healing, might provide the boundaried place you both need to move forward. As

your own hearts are healed both you and your husband will be better able to begin work on restoring your marriage.

Any decision to separate must be considered from all sides. There will be benefits from a separation and there will be downsides. It is important to consider both if you are considering a separation.

Some benefits to a separation:

- Emotional protection: If your heart is badly damaged you might need some time away from the person you see has having wounded you so badly - your husband. Not having to face him on a daily basis, for a period of time, might allow your heart and head some breathing room to gain strength for the road ahead to restoration.
- A boundary for change: Separation will allow both you and your husband to take seriously the need for change and healing in your marriage. If you decide to ask your husband for a separation, it might be the first time he realizes how solemnly you view the brokenness of his life, your life and your marriage.
- Learning your own heart: It is very easy to become so wrapped up in your husband's struggles and your own desire for his healing, your own heart is neglected. A separation will give you the time to look inward at your heart and where it needs healing without the constant tug to be looking outward to your husband's heart.
- Greater ability to let others in: Many of you would choose to remain isolated as you work on the restoring of your marriage. It can be done in secret, but in truth you need the support of a few trusted others during the process of healing. Where you have looked to your husband for support (which he probably can't give you anyway) you would now be freer to let in those one or two close girlfriends or couples to help support you in the healing of your marriage.

- **Room for healing for the children:** Some of your children might also be wounded by your husband's brokenness. Especially he had kept hidden his sexually acting out for a period of time, it probably had negative effects on the family. If your husband was angry, absent emotionally, or depressed your children would have been effected by his behavior. Depending on their ages, it might not be appropriate for them to be told of his struggles and sinful behavior. A simple explanation that he is dealing with emotional pain and difficulties and that the whole family needs some breathing room should suffice. It would be important for some helpers (the children's pastor, trusted family friend, a counselor) to be in place to provide the children with some tools to understand their wounded hearts in relationship to you and your husband. It is important for you to try and understand how they have been wounded not just by your husband's brokenness but perhaps by choices you have both made in your marriage.

Some negative aspects of separation:

- **Financial Strain:** If your husband leaves for a period of time it might involve a lot of extra financial expenses. It is not unusual, especially for husband's dealing with sexual addiction, for a family's finances to be in disarray due to neglect or a lot of money spent on the addiction. Also, many of you are now facing extra expenses (counseling, healing programs, etc). For some wives the financial strain of a separation can be as costly emotionally as their husband's staying in the family. It is important to consider what is more difficult: the financial cost of your husband leaving or the emotional cost of him staying.
- **Loneliness:** Some of you have looked to your husband's for many of your relational needs. Even though you might be seeking to change this and reach out to others, you still miss his company. For some of you, the issues you have to face are harder without him in the home then with him present.

- **Social Shame:** Many wives feel a great deal of shame about their marriage, their own brokenness and their husband's sin and struggles. While some of you are willing to let a few close friends in to support both of you during this time of restoration the idea of a lot of people knowing feels emotionally overwhelming. In truth, some of you might be in communities or families that have no understanding of what you are facing in your marriage. Some of you might find it easier to not have to try and explain your marital problems in the greater context that a separation might necessitate.
- **Divorce:** Some of you might be terrified that if you and your husband separate he will seek a divorce. For many reasons, that might be totally unacceptable to you. Some of you might be just as afraid that the "freedom" you find in a separation will take away any desire you have for restoration and that you will want a divorce because it seems easier than truly seeking healing. It might be easier for you to face the brokenness in your marriage face-to-face with the constant reminder of your marital covenant before you.

A structured separation

There are many aspects of a separation to consider both negative and positive. If after careful prayer and consideration you feel a period of separation would be beneficial to you, your children and the restoration of your marriage, it is important to plan the separation. It is important to structure the separation with wise counsel, hopefully from your pastor or elders in your church. If that is not possible it would be best to work with a marriage counselor to work out the plan of separation.

There are many questions that need to be answered. Both practical (where will he live, when will he see the children, etc.) and emotional (we need to talk, but it is so painful, how do we begin to communicate, etc.) issues need to be decided. There are far too many aspects of a separation to be addressed in this booklet; the need for outside help is crucial. Please be willing to seek out the support you need to work out a plan that will allow both of you to put healthy boundaries in place that will facilitate greater restoration to your marriage. You will also need outside counsel to help determine what changes

you need to see in your husband's life if the separation is due to his unwillingness to seek personal healing.

In planning a separation the steps towards reconciliation are equally important. A pre-determined length of the separation and then agreed upon steps in coming back together are crucial. Again, this aspect of the separation needs to be mapped out with third party mediation.

The Question of Divorce

For many, divorce is the automatic answer for marital problems. One of the dangers of separation is that life can seem easier with out having to face the source of your wounding. An open-ended, unstructured separation is often the first step towards divorce. Many wives, so hurt by their husband's betrayal do not have the strength or the belief that their marriage can be restored. But most of you (or you wouldn't be reading this booklet) desire for restoration of your marriage. You have taken seriously the vows that you and your husband said before God during your wedding. God is also committed to the restoration of your marriage. But God did make allowances for divorce, due to the hardness of one's heart (marital infidelity being the only reason scripture gives as a basis for divorce). Some of you, after a period of separation might be facing the reality that your husband is unwilling to seek change and restoration of your marriage. Study the scriptures (Matthew 5:31-32, Matthew 9: 1-11, Mark 10:1-12, 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 speak of God's heart towards marriage and divorce), pray alone and with your prayer partners. If after prayerful consideration, you feel a divorce is necessary for you, outside counsel is crucial to mediate all the aspects divorce entails, but legally and spiritually.

Questions:

- 1) Do you feel your husband is making choices towards personal healing and restoration of your marriage? If no, are you considering separation?

- 2) What are the reasons you would like to separate?

- 3) How would you (and your children) benefit from a separation?

- 4) What would you like to see happen in your husband's life if you separate?

- 5) What are the downsides to a separation?

- 6) Are you willing to submit to outside counsel if you are considering separation?
Do you understand the need for the separation to be thought out and structured?

- 7) What are your feelings towards divorce? Would you ever seek divorce in your marriage?

The road you are on in seeking the restoration of your marriage can lead to many different endings. Few, if any, chose the circumstances that put you on this journey towards healing. But your willingness to commit, with God's help, to look at your own life and your marriage, is a commendable and admirable quality. Many women would simply choose not to stay in a marriage where the husband has confessed sexual sin and failures. God will honor your efforts to seek healing and restoration.

The journey you are choosing is not an easy one, and the outcome of a healthy restored marriage is not guaranteed. It takes the willingness of both husband and wife to press into the healing necessary for a whole marriage. But I urge to move forward with your own healing, regardless of the choices of your husband. It is also crucial to remember God's pledge to your marriage. God is the cornerstone of your marriage, regardless of the depth of betrayal and the brokenness of your husband it is His desire to see your marriage restored. Take seriously His commitment to your marriage, "*So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate*" Matthew 19:6.

Even with God's commitment the road ahead is difficult. You probably feel a great deal of loss in your marriage. What you thought was true about your marriage and spouse was shaken by the confession of your husband's sexual brokenness. Perhaps even areas of personal brokenness were revealed as you considered your marriage and your role in some of the patterns of dysfunction in your marriage. You might feel as almost every area of your life is undergoing a process of re-evaluation and change. Even your relationship with Christ might not seem enough to sustain you during this challenging season. But it is important to remember Christ is not unfamiliar with our sufferings. Remember the word of the writer of Hebrews:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we possess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has

been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews 4:14-16

Take hold of the mercy and grace of the Lord for you, your husband, and marriage. He is not far off, but a near source of constant strength and comfort – *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles...” 2 Corinthians 1:3-4a.*

Also, take hold of the good of Christian community. You are in need of the fellowship of believers. God’s grace will be ministered to you in fellowship not isolation. Dietrich Bonhoffer, a Lutheran pastor who was martyred during Hitler’s reign in Germany knew of the blessing of community:

“It is easily forgotten that the fellowship of Christian brethren is a gift of grace...Therefore, let him who until now has had the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God’s grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare: It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren.”

Though God does not delight in your troubles, you provide comfort for you through relationship with His Son. The road you are in may lead, through God’s grace, to a whole, restored marriage. The road you are on may keep you on a long, bumpy journey as you and your husband persevere to receive healing and restore your marriage though there are many stumbles and failures along the way. The road you are on may also lead to a parting with your husband, either temporarily in a separation or permanently through divorce. Little might seem known now, but what is certain is the faithfulness of God through all circumstances.

*“Be joyful always; pray continually; **give thanks in all circumstances**, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus...May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through*

*and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.***

2 Thessalonians 5:16-18,23-24

Helpful resources

Books:

Pursuing Sexual Wholeness by Andrew Comiskey

Desert Stream Press

(particularly helpful for those husband's with homosexual struggles)

Falling Forward by Craig Lockwood

(helpful for those husband's who struggle with sexual addiction)

Strength in Weakness: Healing Sexual and Relational Brokenness by Andrew Comiskey

(helpful for both of you, individually and for your marriage)

Those above resources and others are available through Desert Stream Press at
www.desertstream.org

Torn Asunder: Recovering From Extramarital Affairs by Dave Carder
Moody Press

Avenue: Unintended Journey Wives Study Journal by
Available through www.avenueresource.com

Healing Programs:

Desert Stream Ministries: For information on Living Waters, Salt and other Christ-centered healing groups in churches in your area contact Desert Stream at www.desertstream.org

Exodus International: For referral information for ministries proclaiming healing from homosexuality through Jesus Christ contact Exodus at www.exodus.to

