



Words for Wives

A Wife's Perspective (The Author's Wife)

As a feeling-oriented woman, it's hard for me to put my feelings aside. In the face of this betrayal, I have to admit that a protective part of me was screaming, "Run! Give up on this marriage!"

As hard as it is not to run or give up in the face of such betrayal, we must never lose sight of the fact that the two greatest commands given by our precious Lord and Savior are to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" and to "love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:36-40.)

You might be wondering how you can love a husband who has betrayed you. It's important to remember that all marriages go through rough times. Marriage is a proving ground and perfecter of our faith. Whatever else happens, it's important to continually keep a God-focused life.

Remember that, as much as God loves you, you're just as depraved as the next human being (including your husband). We all are sinners. We all fall short in the eyes of a perfectly holy God.

A PROVEN Path for Sexual Integrity

As women, we tend to focus on the person causing us pain and lose sight of God in the process. When we focus on the sins of others, we cannot see what God is trying to show us about Himself. Therefore, we must purpose to be passionate for the Lord because to live at peace and have contentment in this world regardless of circumstances requires that we have an intimate, daily relationship with Jesus. He will enable you to love and even trust again.

Next, there is hope for restoration. God changes hearts and lives. But please know this: You cannot do it for your husband—nor are you expected to! If you try to take on too much responsibility, then you enable him to stay in the place where he is at instead of him relying on God for the strength he needs. On the other hand, if you're too hands off and see this as solely his problem, you won't be able to see what God can and wants to do in your life and in your husband's life through this struggle.

Certainly you want a man who goes after God's heart ... a PROVEN Man. But don't expect or demand a PERFECT man. God wants to restore people, but He takes them at a pace they can handle. Your privilege as a wife is to be a helpmate. Help means just that, "help." You're not to take care of it for him, nor are you to ignore or refuse any role in the healing process. This frees you up to let God work in your husband's life and in your marriage.

I know that your pain is real. But please guard against the fantasy that your marriage (or your life) should be pain-free or that this pain is worse than other trials and struggles you will have on earth. Yes, marriage is painful. Yes, marriage is hard work, but marriage also is a wonderful and purposeful institution sanctioned by God.

It's better to know the truth, as difficult as it may be to hear it. Beyond your husband's confession, there is another truth to face: There is no guarantee that—even if you do everything right—your

husband will stop. Instead, your anchor of hope must be in God and the faithfulness of God—not your husband—and not based upon the outcome to this struggle.

With all of this in mind, there are some suggestions I would like to make based on what God has shown me because of His desire for me to grow and know Him deeper.

It's a “We Problem”

As for all issues in marriage, your husband's fight for sexual integrity is a “we problem” not a “he problem.” You should be actively involved in the process. Consider reading books written by wives who have gone through the same struggles. One very practical book along those lines is *Living with your Husband's Secret Wars* by Marsha Means. Another good book, one written by a wife of a former sex addict, is *Through Deep Waters: Letters to Hurting Wives* by Kathy Gallagher. In addition, read this book and other books your husband reads as he strives for purity so that you'll grow with him (but not so you can point out his shortcomings).

Become a part of his healing process. Don't just focus on areas where he fails to live up to your expectations. But, please remember to encourage him when he succeeds. Be interested and active, but in a loving and gentle way. In addition, be patient during this process. It will take some time for the pain to subside and for full trust to be rebuilt. For instance, try not to be overly suspicious when your husband comes home a few minutes late.

Get together with other women; you're not alone, so don't isolate. If your husband balks at you telling others, ask him to read this book, including this chapter. At the same time, remember this is a matter of great shame to your husband. Be respectful and loving toward him and in your conversations with others. Generally, you should avoid telling your parents about it (at least not the full

extent of his sins) because they may not welcome or forgive him, even long after you forgive your husband and are doing better.

If you feel the need, it's okay to ask your husband to attend marriage counseling. It's important that you both are moving forward together and sometimes a coach can be helpful in the process.

Focus on your own Spiritual Growth

It's important that you use this time as an opportunity for reflection and spiritual growth. Ask the Lord what He is trying to teach you. Even if you feel like you are a victim to your husband's issues, you have issues too.

Begin by focusing on your own shortcomings and sins. For instance, have you been angry, bossy, bitter, or nit picky? These things affect you and your husband spiritually. They should be acknowledged and confessed as sin. The natural tendency is to focus on the sins of your husband, i.e., if he were not selfish I would not have to complain. Make it your goal to restore your relationship with both Jesus and your husband, and don't let anger, bitterness or anything else stand in the way.

Always keep going to Jesus seeking His mercy, grace and strength to carry on. Get involved in a Bible believing church where you are loved unconditionally. Attend a women's Bible study if it is available. Constantly strive for a closer relationship with Jesus Christ. In fact, make it your number one priority.

Two Tough Topics

Now here are two difficult recommendations. First, don't withhold sex. Part of your husband's sex addiction involves a conditioning of his mind and body to need sex. It will make the process harder for him if he has to fight the physical withdrawal together with shame and other consequences of his sinful behaviors.

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(Of course, if your husband has had an affair, you don't need to have any type of sexual contact that would put you at risk of a disease. Wait until after he gets tested.)

Second, don't threaten to leave. You may be tempted to tell your husband that if he looks at pornography one more time you will file for divorce. All this does is tell your husband that it is better for him to keep secrets and that you aren't willing to hear the truth or work through difficulties. Wouldn't you rather be a safe woman for your husband and value honesty? You've already discovered what secrets can do to you personally. God is honest with us no matter how painful the truth can be. The truth can be dealt with. But lies never allow for healing and restoration.

It's better to know the difficult truth that your husband has trained his mind to lust and is in need of help in correcting his backward thinking. It won't just happen overnight and he will occasionally slip back into old ways. If you allow him to be open and honest with you about the struggle—including any setbacks or miscues—you will be able to work openly with him in moving forward down the healing path. This also helps build trust. The alternative is to have him believe the lie of Satan that it is better to keep a secret life from you and only tell you of victories. Therefore, plan on staying the course. Give the Lord time to usher in healing and change.

I am not saying that there is never a time or good reason for separation. Before you do, be sure to get guidance from your pastor and Godly women. In addition, don't expect that he will never have a setback. This process takes time. A life of repentance is the key, not a life of perfection. Fight to keep an eternal perspective. For instance, focus upon the hope of a restored marriage, even knowing that it will require much effort, and fight against the desire to give up that occurs when you focus on how difficult and painful the process is.

Additional Remarks

Be mindful of avoiding things that may undermine his recovery. For instance, don't schedule events on nights he has a support group meeting. You can also assist in his recovery in many ways, such as monitoring together what TV shows you watch. Most shows contain sexually suggestive content. If he wants to give up TV for a season, be willing to sacrifice and play games or engage in other activities. Similarly, be aware of what magazines you leave around the house.

One more suggestion. If either you or your husband have had sexual abuse issues, I urge you to read together one of the following books: *Rid of My Disgrace* by Justin and Lindsey Holcomb (Crossway) or *The Wounded Heart* by Dr. Dan Allender (NavPress). If these issues are a hindrance to your marriage, I also urge you to seek Christian counseling.

And finally, I want to remind you that you are not alone. There is hope. My marriage is better today than when we first got married. It was hard to forgive and trust my husband again, but it was worth every tear and all of the effort. Besides, the Lord promises to use all our pain and struggles for His glory. Just as we hope our husbands will become needy, dependent servants of the Lord, we too must turn to and trust in the Lord during our darkest moments and strive to live out the same six elements of a Proven life necessary for a healthy marriage. Be patient and an active participant of the process. Keep praying for your husband and looking for ways to build him up.

A Note for Single Women

Because single women have not made wedding vows, which have longer lasting repercussions to their lives, they have a different decision to make. What they need to wrestle with is whether they can deal with this particular life challenge. They still need to bear

in mind that all men (and all women) will have some major issue in life. The question is whether they can live with this particular stronghold. It's better to know prior to marriage whether you can view this as a "we problem" and not a "he problem."

My Perspective as A Husband and Group Leader

As a group leader for many years, I am constantly aware that everyone has one issue in their life that they cannot win on their own. I believe God does this for our own good so that we don't try to live independently from Him. For some wives, it is also sexual sins, and for others it may be worry or gossip. Don't get me wrong. I am not saying that all forms of sin are as painful as betrayal in the form of sexual sin. But my point is that humans are prone to sin and setbacks.

When I first began leading purity support groups ten years ago, I wished that every man in my groups would immediately stop looking at pornography or masturbating. But it didn't work out that way. In fact, even many of the small group leaders that I handpicked and trained after they went through the *12-week Study* had at least one setback while leading a group. I spent a lot of time trying to figure out if I was a poor trainer or if my *Study* was not effective. What I have concluded is that none of us will remain sinless, but we can daily strive to be Proven Men. I am convinced that the Lord is very pleased by our striving to turn to and rely on Him even though it includes setbacks. God loves a needy, dependent servant who sometimes has a setback; just read the life of David in the Bible.

I love leading weekly support groups. What excites me most is seeing spiritual growth. I am constantly amazed as I hear story-after-story of men share what they have learned and how they have

grown spiritually after a setback. I certainly don't glorify setbacks, but I have tears of joy whenever I listen to a man describe the way he has experienced the Lord in new or deeper ways after he has repented and experienced forgiveness. I love listening to them share what they have learned from the Lord. Perhaps I view it as the harder the struggle, the sweeter the victory.

Men grow closer to the Lord through these trials than they do when they have had an easy week. I imagine that it brings God more glory for those hopeless and helpless without Him who scrap and scrape through toil each moment of each day to fight for purity but have some setbacks along the way, than for God to simply take away every lustful thought or deed. I love watching men grow in the Lord over 12 weeks of the support group. I constantly remind men that the 12 weeks is just the beginning of the process. This is just a time of learning the basic fundamentals, and that it will take a lifetime of effort to keep growing in their faith and the sanctification process on earth.

I privately tell men that I am glad that I had a sin I couldn't defeat on my own. What I really mean is that I am glad that God didn't just take away the sin. I am glad that it was the hardest battle of my life. I am glad I couldn't just give it up with one prayer or one meeting with another man. If God had simply taken it away, I would not have learned to rely on Him. I would never have gotten to know God as a daily Lord and Savior. I would have kept relying on myself. I would never have learned to hug another man. I would never have experienced the freedom to raise my hands in praise to God. I would never have wanted to talk about my feelings or see the need to be open and honest in discussions with my wife. I would never have known a real marriage. In the end, I would be the same proud and selfish man, without one particular sin I found disgusting.

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The reality is that most men going through Proven Men support groups stumble. I don't use shame or guilt to try to get them to step in line because that is not how Jesus works. He uses unconditional love to draw us to Him. Thus, I have learned to tell men that victory is not absence of sin, but how they respond to it. Let me repeat that. The mark of a Proven Man is not whether he sins, but how he responds to a setback. In fact, a setback is an opportunity to learn from and lean upon God. I would rather have a man who repents than one who pretends he is setback free, and I am sure you do too.

As a former sex addict who sinned and deeply wounded his wife, but now leads support groups, I encourage all the wives reading this chapter to emulate Christ, who values openness, offers unconditional love, and is committed to being a helper.

Encourage your man to keep striving to be a Proven Man, knowing there is no perfect husband or wife. Both sexual healing and marriage are lifelong commitments. Be patient, courageous, and willing to join your husband as a partner fighting against the spiritual forces at work to defeat your husband and your marriage.

This Article is a reprint from an Appendix to our book, *Proven Men: A Proven Path to Sexual Integrity; Help with Pornography, Masturbation or Sex Addiction from a Biblical Perspective*. If you found it helpful, plan to pass it on to someone else and refer him to our website at: www.ProvenMen.org