

FAITHFUL TRUE

Do Not Suffer Alone

By Debbie Laaser, MA, LMFT
Author of *Shattered Vows*

Women who have been betrayed often suffer alone. They do not know who to talk to or even if they have the right to talk. Sometimes their husbands demand that they not share anything of his sexual sin with anyone. These wives are held hostage to the pain and suffering in their marriage and often live isolated and desperate lives. Are you one of those women?

I know that I was very careful about talking in the early days of my husband's sexual discovery. I did not want to make matters any worse than they already were—which was already quite public and devastating. I also loved Mark despite the new information I had heard about his secret life. I didn't want to create more humiliation and shame in his life by talking about his behaviors to others. And so, I waited in silence with my broken heart. I busied myself with children's needs and work which distracted me from my need to share the thoughts and feelings of betrayal. But isolation and the passing of time did not make my hurt go away, nor did it lead to any healing.

One day a very good friend of Mark's was visiting us and he noticed that I had been secretly carrying the story of our 'crash and burn'. He reminded me that this story was mine as well—that I had lived the many consequences of Mark's behaviors. He was the first non-professional that encouraged me to 'own' my betrayal story and seek safe people with whom to share.

Sometimes we share with the 'wrong' people. We may choose family members because they are the most involved in our lives. Or we pick a best friend, even though she may not know anything about betrayal. We may tell our older children in hopes of getting their support or colleagues at work because they are convenient. If you do not feel heard and understood and cannot claim that you feel better after sharing your story than you did before, you probably didn't find a *safe* person. Sometimes the closest people in your life are too invested in keeping you out of pain and their advice or personal judgments about your situation are simply not accurate for *you*.

Safe people are those who will listen well without trying to tell you what to do. They are not judgmental; they do not try to talk you out of your feelings. They do not take sides and talk negatively about your spouse. They have emotional strength to endure your despair. They have wisdom and share common values. They do not spiritualize your situation. They hold confidences and are trustworthy. They do not gossip.

Do you have safe people in your life? These are essential people who will help you walk a journey of healing and growth. Your therapist and/or spiritual counselor is hopefully one. If you are to get well, you will need to find a community of women with whom you can be totally honest. It is the same recommendation we advise for men who are struggling with sexual sin. Silence and isolation are the greatest enemies to healing. If either of you are stuck in silence, you will not experience the freedom and relief that comes from authentic community. Don't let anyone convince you that you need to manage betrayal privately.

Jesus reminds us that our burdens are lightened when we share: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt 11:28-29, NIV). Safe people can also offer rest for your soul and support for your decisions; they can be 'Jesus with skin on' so that you will not be buried by your burdens of betrayal.

