

# Discovering Pornography or Infidelity

*Regardless of where you might be at this moment, if you are willing, you can begin moving forward, step by step.*

**by Joann Condie, RN, MS, LPC**

## **Discovering infidelity<sup>1</sup>**

Let's begin by stating the obvious: Anything with this title is extremely difficult to pick up and read if you have been hurt by a spouse's sexual betrayal. Your emotions can leave you feeling shipwrecked or lost at sea, with wave after wave of tears drowning your soul. Or, you may be without tears, one minute strangely numb and the next filled with indescribable rage.

Either way, it may seem as if you are going crazy. You're not. You may feel completely abandoned. You're not. You may feel as if God himself has left and no one could possibly understand or help. Again, this is not the case.

Your profound sense of betrayal and excruciating pain is normal and natural, considering a grenade has been thrown into the most precious relationship in your life. You will be able to regain your balance and start moving forward; eventually you will be able to hold your head high and look forward to another new day.

The purpose of this article is to provide specific suggestions and guidelines, and to offer hope and help to get through this day and the days to come. You may wonder how anyone could offer hope at a time like this. You may also wonder why you should consider my suggestions. Let me reveal a little about myself.

I am not a woman who has lived a victorious Christian life, floating above the clouds. I am your fellow sister who has also been wounded. I have been wounded by my own sins and by the sins of others. Truly, all sin is damaging, regardless of the source.

In fact, all of us might be considered "walking-wounded" in one aspect or another. Some of us have scars that are visible and obvious, while others have wounds that have been kept hidden, wounds that have not yet begun to heal. However, we can do more than be healed; we can become "wounded healers" for others. Many years ago, I offered a personal prayer: "God, don't waste my pain." In this, and in so many other ways, He has proven faithful.

Although I do not know the specific details of your story, I have counseled many men and women over the years that have walked in your shoes. Regardless of where you might be at this moment, if you are willing, you can begin moving forward, step by step. We can take this walk together. I suggest we ask God to join us, because no one is more qualified or more capable to bring healing than the One who created you, your spouse, and your marriage.

## Preparing for the journey

Surviving infidelity or sex addiction can seem like trying to maneuver a convoluted path up a steep mountain in the middle of the night. If that isn't treacherous enough, numerous land mines lie hidden just beneath the topsoil. It is a frightening experience; it's difficult to know where to put down your next foot. However, using a trusted road map and a trusted guide reduces your chance of greater harm to yourself and your family.

Knowing how to manage your immediate crisis will be easier if you analyze your life map and recollect your past relationship responses. For example, when past relationships hit a difficult snag did you tend to retreat into self-blame or were you more likely to lash out and criticize others? Were you able to assertively address conflict or did you choose to fight unfairly? Has it been easier for you to remain wounded and end a friendship than resolve the differences? Were you able to objectively assess what was occurring in your past relationships (or current marriage) or did you miss the red flags?

Understanding your past behavior will provide keys to how you are responding to your marital crisis today. Recalling your actions might be relatively easy for you or it may require considerable concentration, but the task is worth the effort. Here are four examples of how some spouses respond to infidelity:

### 1. Curious Bystander

If you are a Curious Bystander, you have had many anxious days and nights. You can't understand why the knot in your stomach doesn't go away even after hearing your spouse's words (which were meant to reassure you, but didn't). For example, your husband may have chided you for mentioning the numerous porn sights you keep finding on the computer. Perhaps, when confronted, your wife minimized evidence of a chat room romance.

Confronted with the incriminating data, your spouse might have given multiple explanations. These excuses may have seemed reasonable, but did not convince your heart that all was well. Your gnawing questions never seemed to be fully answered by you or your spouse. Eventually, you wore down emotionally and entered a downward spiral of self doubt. Sadly, through this process, you began ignoring your God-given discernment.

Curious Bystanders have great difficulty assertively confronting others. They generally waver, convinced that nice people don't stir up trouble (they want peace at any price), and they fully believe "it will all go away if it's ignored."

### 2. Previous Victim

Victimization occurs in the form of sexual, emotional, physical, or spiritual (a) abuse and/or (b) neglect. Some people have been treated as objects to be used. This might have occurred in childhood with sexual molestation or in adulthood

through sexual harassment or rape. Sexual abuse creates horrendous life-long damage to victims, especially if they have not received adequate counseling to heal the wounds. From my experience with treating adult survivors, I find that young boys can be more seriously injured psychologically than their female counterparts. And, unfortunately, men are less likely than women to get the help they need.

Others have been treated as objects to be ignored. Perhaps, because you were female, your brothers received more attention or privilege, or your male coworkers automatically received promotions and bonuses you didn't get. Consequently, you don't trust men in general. Or you might be a male with a father who was never available to play catch, shoot hoops, or watch your little league game, and your mom was smothering and over-involved in your life. You may not fully trust members of the opposite sex.

Victims of abuse or neglect receive a "double whammy" when their spouses cheat on them. If the original damage in their lives is not addressed, they will be ill-equipped for developing healthy relationships; after discovering their spouse's infidelity, they are ill-equipped for dealing with the fallout.

### **3. Love-blind Survivor**

Do affirmation, love, and respect seem to escape you? Do you have a past history of rocky relationships with unhappy endings, only to find yourself now in a rocky marriage tainted by infidelity? If this is the case, you may be able to identify with the people who were treated as objects to be used or ignored.

You may, however, be saying just the opposite. "I had a perfect childhood with a loving caring family." You might admit, however, that your life seems performance-driven, with a high priority placed on a polished image. Your marriage may have been described as "perfect," leaving you completely shocked at what you discovered. Yet, infidelity revealed an intimacy disorder not much different from those with the visibly troubled marriage. How can that be true?

In both cases, the skills for developing an authentic, intimate relationship with your spouse were lacking. The desperate desire to fill the God-shaped void within you cannot be satisfied with people or performance. (This topic is addressed more fully in the article *Intimacy and Basic Trust*.)

### **4. Spiritual Barometer**

You may be a person with a history full of faith, or of no faith at all. Either way, I would guess that you are experiencing some form of spiritual distress right now. For example, if you have never considered yourself a Christian, you may be recognizing for the first time how much you actually need God in your life. Or, as a Christian already, the devastation of infidelity may have caused you to reassess

what you truly believe about God. Since the betrayal came from the person you loved and trusted the most, your pain can lead you to wonder if God also betrayed you. You may have asked (audibly or within the secret recesses of the heart): “What kind of God would allow such a terrible thing to happen?”

If you are wondering about your relationship with God or about God’s relationship with you, don’t feel alone; many others in your situation have felt this way. I highly recommend reading Dr. James Dobson’s book, *When God Doesn’t Make Sense*. This comprehensive book addresses the tough questions asked for centuries, including some asked by King David, who wondered why the wicked could mock God and get away with it.<sup>2</sup> Let Dr. Dobson’s book point you back to an accurate view of God and provide encouragement and comfort to your soul.

If you have gained some insight and understanding about your past response patterns, we are ready to go to the next stage of recovery.

Continue with [The Journey Toward Healing](#).

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### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this article, infidelity is defined as any sexual violation of the wedding vows. This could include pornography use, affairs, sexual chat room discussions, and other similar betrayals. We recognize that among Christians there is dispute about what is considered infidelity for the purposes of granting a biblical divorce. The author’s intention is not to settle that theological dispute, but to address any circumstance in which a spouse feels sexually betrayed. Apart from the theological implications, the pain, confusion, and anger are similar for all these situations. This article only intends to help a spouse move forward in a healthy, biblical manner.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 10.