

20th Anniversary Edition

When His
Secret Sin
Breaks Your
Heart

LETTERS TO HURTING WIVES



Kathy Gallagher

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WHEN HIS SECRET SIN BREAKS YOUR HEART:

Letters to Hurting Wives

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SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I have some dear friends in life, but, besides my husband, I would have to say that Carol Bourque is my best friend. I call her my “best” friend because of all that we have been through together.

I have watched her cry, struggle and agonize her way through the devastation of her marriage. She bravely worked her way through, inch by inch, the painful process of letting go of the “happily ever after” scenario she hoped and prayed for. She has faced her own failures and mistakes and fought to keep Jesus Christ at the center of everything.

Carol Bourque is the Director of Women’s Counseling for Pure Life Ministries because she has proven herself to be a faithful follower of Christ no matter what the cost. For the past ten years she has poured herself into the lives of other women. She truly exemplifies the life of love and unselfishness that I have written about in this book.

I count it a great privilege to work together with her in this vineyard to which the Lord has called us.

DEDICATION

*This book is dedicated to my beloved.
How far we have come, from ashes to beauty.
The Lord has made our crooked paths straight,
and you have become to me the love of God personified.
Thank you for loving me and being faithful to me.
Truly my beloved is mine, and I am his.*

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INTRODUCTION

It has been twenty years since I wrote the original version of *When His Secret Sin Breaks Your Heart*. A lot of hurting women have crossed my path in the intervening decades. Yet nothing I have encountered since then has led me to deviate from the ancient truths the Lord revealed to me regarding being married to someone dealing with sexual sin. As difficult as this subject is, God is still, and will always be, not just the One with the answers but is Himself the answer that we long for.

When I first penned this book, I chose to utilize a unique format for addressing the host of different issues hurting wives face—responding to questions women have asked me in the form of individual letters. In this 20th Anniversary edition, I chose to address many topics in a more traditional method, adding nine chapters of new material. As a result, I have discarded a few of the original letters, but most have been retained in the second part of this new edition.

Even as I have added new material in an attempt to handle the variety of issues hurting wives experience, please understand that I haven't touched on every issue wives may face—that would be impossible, as no two women have had the exact same experience. In fact, this is definitely not a one-size-fits-all kind of book, so you may find yourself looking for those pieces that apply to your situation.

While this book does not provide formulas for “fixing” your husband, it does address practical situations you probably deal with on a regular basis. But the main thing I wanted to emphasize throughout the book is how IMPORTANT it is that you see Jesus in your situation. Having practical answers is secondary to this.

One of the subjects woven throughout the pages of this book is true biblical love—how to respond to pain with love rather than hate; how to replace bitterness with compassion; how to intercede rather than fret, and so on. Of course the earnest believer wants to be purged of ungodly attitudes and desires nothing more than to act in a way that both honors and pleases the Lord.

Another prevalent theme you will find in these pages is the importance of suffering in the believer's life. As you come to see the precious work it is producing in you, you will begin to appreciate it—even embrace it! This is the sublime truth Paul the Apostle alluded to when he wrote, “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory.” (2 Corinthians 4:17) Paul experienced far more suffering than any of us and he knew what he was talking about!

Over the years I have run across books that express in great detail the sufferings of the woman married to a sexual addict. My concern over those books has been that they haven't offered the anguished wife anything other than shallow empathy. The overriding message spun by these authors is: “You are a victim and your husband is a perpetrator! God wants to bless you! Get rid of this loser so you can get on with your life!” It is the very kind of “me first” attitude one would expect from our fallen culture. As a woman who has been through it and lived around it for most of my adult life I can tell you that there is something far richer and more meaningful than saving your own life.

My experience has been that those who prefer the easier solutions and pat answers offered by popular psychology rather than biblical solutions usually suffer most in the end. Dealing with life's problems God's way may often seem difficult, but those who choose to do so always reap the benefits in the end. A new person emerges, not because of any self-esteem revival, but as a result of having found the presence of the Lord to be sufficient through every trial and every struggle.

INTRODUCTION

Ultimately, we are all on a journey and while this trial might seem like a huge detour to you, I want to assure you that it is the Lord's desire to use all of this to bring forth an inner joy that transcends outward circumstances. I want to encourage you to let the Master Architect of the freeway system you find yourself on guide you safely through to the end.



THE HURTING WIFE

*“O Lord, teach me how to handle this
terrible pain in a godly way.”*

“When he admitted the affair, the first thing I said to him was, ‘But you were my best friend, and you promised you would never hurt me.’”

— *Cynthia*

“My worst fears were coming true. My husband was leaving me and I was going to be alone. I instantly fell apart. I couldn’t get out of bed, couldn’t eat and couldn’t sleep. I lost about 20 pounds in 3 weeks and my hair began falling out. I wanted to die.”

— *Phyllis*

“One day, my husband confessed to me that he had been involved homosexually with a young man. I will never forget that night or the weeks that followed. I had dealt with a lot of conflicting emotions over the past 6½ years of our marriage, but this hurt went to depths I had never experienced before.”

— *Karla*

“In a voice filled with anguish and despair, he confessed to me his addiction to pornography. At that moment the pain I felt inside seemed more overwhelming than all that I had previously experienced. It seemed as though I were drowning—being pulled underwater by fear, repulsion, rejection and unrelenting pain. All I knew to do was to cry out to God!”

— *Millie*

“On October 14th, 2002, my life as I knew it changed forever. Prompted by the Holy Spirit to check the history on his computer, I stared in open-mouthed shock at the filthy and disgusting images of men with men. My first reaction was complete denial: ‘This can’t be. These are men!’

“Feeling used and manipulated, I vacillated between depression and anger. I suffered from chronic insomnia and some days could hardly muster enough strength to pray. The overwhelming emotions of it all nearly drove me to insanity. I was nothing more than a trophy wife: there to cover the stench of his secret sin!”

— *Bonnie*

“Early one Saturday morning, he finally confessed to me that he had had an affair with a married woman. I was outraged. I suddenly got up and began to punch him with all of my might.

“The next month was like a nightmare that I couldn’t awaken from. More confessions and horror stories: an affair with a 55-year-old woman, masturbation, topless bars, table dances and so on. The blood would run cold through my veins with each story. The left side of my face would go numb. I went from 129 pounds to 113 pounds. My hair began to fall out. I had diarrhea daily,

and at times thought that I would surely die. I could not believe that he would be unfaithful to me again. I kept trying to convince myself it was untrue, but there it was, staring me in the face.”

— *Kathy*

These stories and hundreds just like them have been my life for the past thirty-two years. They are also a fair representation of what I experienced in my own marriage decades ago. And, I suppose it would be a reasonable assumption that you are reading this book because this is your experience as well.

What could be more shocking than the sudden and unexpected discovery that your husband has a secret obsession with other women—or even men? Perhaps you happened to notice a porn site on the history of your husband’s computer or worse, walked in while he was actually viewing one. It’s possible you ran across unfamiliar email addresses or phone numbers. Maybe you accidentally found text messages that revealed the awful truth. Or perhaps your husband suddenly made a big confession to you. No matter how you happened upon this crushing discovery, your wound is deep and fresh, the hole in your heart still gaping open like some terrible gash.

You might be one of those women who learned of your husband’s unfaithful spirit years ago. The initial shock was eventually replaced with a terrible callousness of despair. Or perhaps the horrific discovery only occurred recently.

When a wife first unearths the appalling truth about her husband’s secret life, she feels as though she has been run over by a Mack truck. The pain is overwhelming. Her thoughts swirl around in her mind as if in a blender. It is a mass of painful confusion. One moment she is in a rage toward her husband; the next moment she is engulfed in fear and hopelessness. Sometimes she seems to vividly experience every excruciating sensation while at other times she feels completely numb.

Sorting through these vacillating feelings is very difficult while in the middle of this raging storm.

All of these emotions will be addressed in this book, but for now I want to zero in on four of the most common feelings hurting wives experience.

THE SENSE OF BETRAYAL

One of the first things a wife feels when she discovers her husband's problem is that he has broken the bond of intimacy and trust a husband and wife share.

There really is no easy way to describe the deep sense of betrayal a woman feels. This disloyalty leaves the wife feeling like her husband has abandoned her. The following are some definitions and synonyms of the word abandon: to cast off, discard, drop, scrap, reject, run out on or turn one's back on. Of course, the husband would deny that he is doing this to his wife, but his denials do not change the way she feels.

The truth is that a man cannot cut any deeper into a woman's heart than to take what is so personal and special and give it away to someone else. Sexual intimacy between a husband and wife is the greatest expression of their love for and devotion to each other. Even if the marriage wasn't necessarily great, still, a wife never expects this level of false-heartedness from the one who vowed his love and life to her.

I can remember so well the intense pain I experienced dealing with Steve's unfaithfulness. To me our intimacy was sacred. Saying "I do" at the altar made it exclusive and therefore off-limits to others. He was mine and I was his. What we had together in private was ours, and I was the only one who should know him in that way. Marital sex is the tie that physically binds two individuals together, and its sanctity is due to the spiritual union that is created.

When I found out that Steve was being unfaithful, I was crushed. He was spiritually becoming "one flesh" with anything

with a skirt, giving away what was MINE! Our circle of unity had been broken—our marriage bed defiled. We no longer had that special oneness which belonged only to us. Our sexual intimacy had been cheapened—actually nullified—because it was shared with many others. It had little or no value to him because he preferred a cheap thrill to the real thing: me, his wife. The pleasure he wanted from our union could be found or purchased on any street corner or in any massage parlor.

As far as I was concerned there was now nothing left that was ours as a married couple. We were just two people living together, sharing space. It killed me. Day after day the pain of the reality that our marriage was gone swept over me like sea billows. While it was unbearable to me at times, he seemed to be completely impervious to the devastation and misery he was causing.

THE SENSE OF MISTRUST

Tied closely to the feeling of being betrayed is that of being deceived. Like a punch in the gut comes the ugly realization that her husband is two people. She married the man she loved and respected. In her mind she saw the two holding hands (as it were), facing an exciting future together. Now a completely different person has emerged. It is very difficult to reconcile these two distinctly different individuals.

"Who is this man?" she asks herself over and over. "How could he look me in the eye and just blatantly lie to me?"

She must now face the horrible reality that he is utterly duplicitous. The man to whom she has committed her life has a completely different life he maintains apart from her. There are other people, places and atmospheres he is involved in that do not correlate with the world they have built together.

She begins to come to grips with the fact that while her husband seems to be living a normal, Christian life, the reality is that he is continually conniving to find a way to sneak back to

his beloved sin. The poor wife must now deal with a constant, nagging suspicion about what is really going on inside him.

Another painful fact she must face is that he has been an utter hypocrite. To all of their friends, co-workers, family members and fellow church members he has presented himself as a man who loves his wife and children. His ability to present himself as a respectable, responsible, caring person seemed so effortless. In fact, even she believed him to be a sincere and upright Christian man.

Now she must face the reality that it has all been an act. Perhaps she begins to consider his Christianity in light of the biblical term *hypocrisy*. Jesus could have been speaking of her husband when He said, “You outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” (Matthew 23:28)

One of the most awful discoveries I have witnessed was what Cindy experienced. She had met Sam in a Bible study and was instantly attracted to him. While he personified manliness, he also ardently promoted his Christianity. She hadn’t known him for long when she agreed to marry him, but Christians they knew in common had all vouched for him.

Cindy suspected something wasn’t right almost from the beginning. She couldn’t put her finger on what was bothering her because it was mostly small unconnected things. For instance, while he acted as though he loved their church, he always seemed to have some critical comment about its leadership. Another thing that surprised her was when he asked her how often she thought they should be intimate. “Why do I have to explain this to him?” she wondered.

One day, while looking for something on his computer, she happened to run across a number of shocking emails he had exchanged with other men. The one that was the most painful to read had been written just prior to their wedding: “I’ll be off-line for a few days since I’m getting married.” In a more

LETTERS TO HURTING WIVES

THE ENCOURAGING WIFE

 Dear Ann. 

I appreciate so much your sincere desire to be a blessing to your husband. Life's a lot easier when you have a husband who is really trying to do what's right. The key to his living victoriously is faithfulness and endurance, staying humble before the Lord and staying in a heart of repentance. If he remains diligent and chooses to do those things God has shown him, he will make it!

Your role is to be his cheerleader, not just when he scores a touchdown, but even after he fumbles the ball! Don't ever hold his mistakes against him. As best as you can, create an atmosphere of grace for him.* Let him know that you are totally committed to him. No matter what kind of day he's had, show him that you are in his corner. His sincere desire to walk in victory will enable you to be completely supportive.


I'm glad to hear you are also being responsive to him during intimate times. Many wives punish their husbands in the bedroom by rejecting their advances.† However, what these women don't realize is that this often exacerbates the problem. Generally speaking, the more satisfied a husband is at home, the less inclined he is to search elsewhere! In First Corinthians 7:5 Paul warns married couples: "Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

Please continue to encourage your husband to have his daily time with the Lord. As you know, it is essential that you express support without nagging him. Perhaps you could even suggest that the two of you spend some time together in the Bible every evening.

* There is a fine line between allowing a husband to remain in sin and "creating an atmosphere of grace." This husband's attitude allows for this.

† Again, there is another side to this. There are times when abstinence is the best policy, e.g. when there is a legitimate possibility of the husband transmitting an STD.

As your husband matures in his walk with the Lord, one day he will cross a defining line—sexual sin will be completely behind him. I suspect that when that day comes he will gladly have this to say about his wife:

“Her children rise up and bless her; her husband also, he praises her, saying: ‘Many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all.’ Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.”
(Proverbs 31:28-30) 

LETTERS TO HURTING WIVES

I FEEL LIKE I'M LOSING MY MIND!

 *Dear Anna.* 

You have beautifully articulated the agony of countless women: “Is my husband a liar, or am I just imagining all of this? I don’t know what to believe anymore. I feel like I’m losing my mind!”

From what you expressed in your letter, it is obvious that your husband is manipulating you. You mentioned that every time you attempt to discuss his problems with him, he somehow twists the whole conversation around and makes you the focal point of the discussion, rather than him. You also said that when you confront him with undeniable evidence about his unfaithfulness, he manages to get everything so confused that you “don’t know up from down.”

Let me tell you: I’ve been there and done that! I experienced the same thing with Steve. Whenever I tried to talk to him about his sexual sin or the way he was treating me, he would cleverly commandeer the conversation and somehow get the focus on me. To this day, I don’t know exactly how he did it. Each time, at the end of our discussion, I felt like I had made a big deal about nothing or that I was only imagining things. So masterful was he at manipulating me that I would actually end up being the one to repent!

One of the reasons he got away with this was because I desperately wanted to believe the best about my husband. He used his strong, domineering personality to emotionally bully me into submission.

As it turned out, my suspicions were right on target. Eventually I came to the realization that trying to convince Steve to do the right thing was a hopeless cause. It was then I decided to leave him. I simply couldn’t continue to accept his lies, his manipulation and his sleeping around. I knew that he would never change as long as he was allowed to stay in control of the situation. I hoped my leaving would cause him to see things right, but there were no guarantees.

Anna, you must be strong and take a firm stand in your dealings with Tony in the future. It's obvious from what you shared in your letter that he is being unfaithful to you. Since he isn't sincerely responding to your discussions, you may need to consider a separation. It could be the very jolt he needs! Just be careful not to get into your own form of manipulation. Ask the Lord to give you the wisdom to do what is right and the strength to follow through with whatever He lays on your heart. 