

## IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT

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# It's Not Your Fault

By Linda J. MacDonald, M.S.

In the movie *Ghost Town*, Gwen—a recently widowed woman—discovers that her late husband had been involved in an affair before his death. The revelation plunges her into a second kind of grief, layered atop the first. She is suddenly catapulted from grieving widow to traumatized, self-doubting wife.

His death was not personal. It did not feel shaming.  
But learning of his unfaithfulness did.

What she experienced is something I see again and again in my work with betrayed spouses. Infidelity doesn't just break trust—it strikes at identity. Gwen's pain crystallizes into three haunting questions:

- *What was wrong with me?*
- *Why didn't he love me?*
- *Why wasn't I enough?*

These are the same questions spouses ask every day when they learn their partner has been unfaithful.

Unlike death—which is devastating but usually not personal—romantic betrayal feels like a direct indictment of our worth. It tears at the very fabric of self-esteem. We don't just grieve the loss of what was; we question who we are. *What flaw in me drove my spouse to seek intimacy elsewhere?* The impact lands like a slap to the soul, reverberating through every corner of our being.

When a partner violates the sacred, exclusive space of a marriage, it is almost impossible not to take it personally. It feels as though our spouse has marked our value with a bold, black **X**—as if to say: *You were not worth my loyalty. You did not deserve my faithfulness. Someone—or something—else mattered more than you.*

In the wake of betrayal, spouses are thrust into multiple crises at once: a crisis of identity, a crisis of worth, and a crisis of attachment to the person they believed was their safest place. The world no longer feels secure. The future feels fragile. And the fear of losing everything—and everyone—dear to you can be overwhelming.

In the desperate attempt to make sense of infidelity, many betrayed spouses turn inward and place the blame on themselves. After all, we are the only person we can control. So

instead of holding the unfaithful partner accountable for their choices, we shoulder responsibility that does not belong to us. We replay endless *if onlys*: *If I had been more attentive... more attractive... less needy... more patient...*

*Then they wouldn't have strayed.*

But that simply isn't true.

This kind of thinking is demoralizing, damaging—and inaccurate. The reasons your partner was unfaithful say far more about **them** than about **you**.

Yes, you are imperfect. Every spouse is. Every marriage is. We enter marriage as flawed but (hopefully) loving human beings. But I don't care if you were a messy housekeeper or chronically late or emotionally distant—you did not *deserve* betrayal.

The choice to be unfaithful lives within the one who strayed.

The factors that often pave the way for infidelity lie beneath the surface: unresolved childhood wounds, early exposure to pornography, critical or abusive parenting, unprocessed grief, entitlement, poor boundaries, or unhealthy family modeling—many of which existed long before your marriage ever began.

Even present-day stressors—career struggles, job loss, children leaving home, marital conflict, the death of a parent, or deep dissatisfaction with life—may increase vulnerability. But choosing to cope with distress through the secrecy and exhilaration of an affair still reveals far more about the strayer than about the spouse left behind. It exposes inadequate coping skills, distorted beliefs, depleted inner resources, and sometimes altered brain chemistry.

If you find yourself obsessing over the *why* of your partner's betrayal, stop looking within yourself. The answers are not there. There is no good excuse for intimate betrayal—only sad and troubling precursors within the one who chose it, combined with opportunity.

This does not mean you are entitled to cruelty or retaliation. Nor does it mean you have no personal growth left to do. We all do. But taking responsibility for another person's destructive choices is not part of healing—it is part of harm.

When I was drowning in confusion over my own husband's justifications for his affair and subsequent divorce, I wrote to author Welby O'Brien, pouring out my tangled reasoning. After reading my letter, she responded with a single sentence that stopped me cold:

**“Stop trying to make sense of the insanity of sin.”**

She was right.

While there may have been many factors that set the stage for his choices, his explanations were ultimately unfair and irrational. I did not need to compound the damage by adding my own self-blame to his misplaced blame. I was not powerful enough to force him into an affair. I didn't hold a gun to his head. I didn't cause his self-destruction.

And neither did you.

If you are relentlessly berating yourself—searching for ways you might have *caused* your partner to stray—stop. That path leads only to deeper shame.

Healing begins when you lay down blame that does not belong to you and begin tending to your own restoration. Your task now is not self-punishment, but recovery. Not explanation, but compassion—for yourself.

Next month, I'll explore how infidelity evolves over time and how it can change a person into someone you no longer recognize. Until then, please hear this clearly:

**It was not your fault.**

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**Bio:**

**Linda J. MacDonald** knows both the heartbreak of betrayal and the hope of redemption. A top-selling author and therapist with 33 years of experience and her own story of betrayal and redemption, she comes alongside betrayed spouses with faith, wisdom, and compassion. Her most recent book, [\*Redeeming the Post-Affair Divorce: Heal Your Life, Restore Your Faith After Infidelity Breaks Up Your Marriage\*](#), received the 2025 Gold Award for the Global Book Awards' category for Christian Books and Bibles. Website: <https://www.lindajmacdonald.com>