

Books for Recovering from Infidelity and/or Unwanted Divorce:

Linda MacDonald's Picks & Personal Reviews

Christian Resources:

- ***Shattered Vows: Hope and Healing for Women Who Have Been Sexually Betrayed***, (2008) by Debra Laaser

A wonderful guide for recovering from sexual betrayal for the faithful spouse. Debra is a Christian and speaks from both firsthand experience as well as having helped many women along the way. Her well-known, now deceased husband, Mark Laaser, chose the hard path of recovery alongside her for the past 20 years. The strength of the book is her personal experience and the numerous vignettes of true stories of other women who've intimate betrayal. In my opinion, her book is most suited for women who are still in their marriages, but it is still a valuable resource for any betrayed spouse.

- ***Redemptive Divorce*** (2008) Mark W. Gaither

A unique twist on the "tough love" approach for hurt spouses to help develop a strategy to "wake up" a straying partner. Useful for Christian spouses who have a hard time not being co-dependent while their spouse is involved in vow-breaking behaviors. This book offers a rationale that can empower the faithful spouse and help him/her draw a clear line in the sand. It offers one way for saving marriages, or not prolonging the inevitable.

- ***When He Leaves*** (1998) by Kari West and Noelle Quinn.

General book on an unwanted divorce for Christian women. Not specific enough about infidelity for my tastes, but a very good resource for any female seeking to recover from an unwanted divorce.

- ***Live, Laugh, Love Again: A Christian Woman's Survival Guide to Divorce*** (2006) by Michelle Borquez, Connie Wetzell, Rosalind Spinks-Seay, and Carla Sue Nelson.

Personal journeys of four women who went through a divorce. Three of the divorces were preceded by a partner's infidelity, and one was not. Again, weak on the unique sorrows and complications of divorce after infidelity, but very good advice on recovering from divorce from Christian women who've "been there."

- ***Formerly a Wife*** by Welby A. O'Brien

Excellent, personal story for Christian women who have experienced the tragic loss of a spouse through infidelity. Welby takes you through her journey from heartbreak and the struggles of being a divorcee in the church to finding a new purpose for living. "Feel, Deal, Heal" is her theme. I recommend it highly. Welby is the one who advised me, "Stop trying to make sense of the insanity of sin."

- ***When "I Do" Becomes "I Don't"*** (2008) by Laura Petherbridge (DivorceCare Expert)

This has become one of my favorite books for Christians of either gender experiencing an unwanted separation or divorce. She presents sound material from an obvious wealth of experience helping people find hope and healing during a marital break-up and beyond. Laura does a terrific job answering most of the typical questions Christians ask when experiencing this unwelcomed trauma in their lives. Very practical.

- ***Better Than OKAY*** (2023) by Brandi Wilson (former pastor's wife of a mega church). She chronicles her experience of loving and being left by her beloved husband of nearly 20 years. While she shares her sorrows, she doesn't discuss his affair (s) in the book, only mentions them on broadcasts. She is upbeat about what she learned and how she rebuilt her life. Offers hope. Includes great advice on helping your kids through an unwanted divorce.

- ***(Un)Faithful: Finding Healing After Your Husband's Affair (Whether Your Marriage Survives Or Not.*** (2022) by Ruth Erickson.

Written by a betrayed and abandoned Christian spouse. Ruth is a worship leader and mother and went through an unwanted, heart-wrenching divorce. She tells her story of her grief and recovery with honesty and much grace.

- ***A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss*** (1996) by Jerry Sittser.

If your marriage didn't make it after infidelity or sex addiction, this book on grief is one of the best. He's a Christian professor at Whitworth in Spokane, who lost his mother, wife and a young daughter in a tragic car accident. Easy to apply to any kind of intimate, catastrophic loss.

- ***Your Sexually Addicted Spouse: How Partners Can Cope and Heal*** (2009) by Barbara Steffens and Marsha Means.

An in-depth look at the traumas suffered by spouses of sex addicts as a result of their partner's behaviors. The authors discuss both the benefits and limitations of the classic 12-step recovery-from-co-dependency model for helping offended spouses in their own recovery process. They introduce what they call the "trauma model" for interpreting and treating a spouse's reactions to their partner's addiction. A bit clinical in places, but a refreshing, alternative perspective that brings balance for those who've felt invalidated or blamed in their road to recovery.

- ***Intimate Deception: Healing the Wounds of Sexual Betrayal*** (2018) by Dr. Sheri Keffer
One of the most complete books on betrayal trauma. She uses helpful illustrations to understand its impact on the brain. Helps the traumatized spouse not feel so alone or crazy.

Secular Resources:

- ***NOT "Just Friends": Rebuilding Trust and Recovering Your Sanity After Infidelity*** (2003) by Shirley Glass (Best material is on repairing as a couple)

This is my **favorite general, all-around** book on infidelity recovery—especially for the hurt spouse. Dr. Glass's research and insights are amazing. She is firmer than all other authors on the stance of "no secrets allowed" if trust is to be rebuilt. She debunks many of the rationalizations about various kinds of infidelity and includes emotional infidelity as a violation of the marital bond. She does the best job of anyone in reducing the shame and blame of the betrayed spouse, demonstrating by her research that not everyone who chooses to be unfaithful does so because they are unhappy with the marriage. Although helpful for abandoned spouses, the focus of her book is on repairing the marriage.

- ***The Betrayal Bond: Breaking Free of Exploitive Relationships***, (1997) by Patrick J. Carnes
I included this with the books on infidelity because it is so helpful for traumatized spouses who are having a hard time letting go of their abusive partners. I believe infidelity is a form of emotional abuse and *may* be an indicator of more profound and more hidden abusive dynamics that preceded the affair. Patrick Carnes, best known for his writings on sexual addiction and twelve-step treatment programs, knows how to help the recipients of abusive behavior. He likens trauma victims to unhealthily attached to their betrayers, much like hostages who bond with their captors (like Stockholm Syndrome).

- ***The Journey from Abandonment to Healing: Turn the End of a Relationship into the Beginning of a New Life*, (2000) by Susan Anderson**

Probably the most helpful book of all that I read in the aftermath my own crisis and heartbreak. Susan Anderson is a specialist in what she calls “Abandonment Grief.” She validates the depth of the pain that follows intimate betrayal and rejection and helps the grieving person understand why it feels so devastatingly personal. She uses a few of her own catchy terms that have a New Age flavor, but she claims to not be into the movement herself. I always give my Christian clients that little caveat about her terminology before I recommend the book. However, for the abandoned, it deserves five stars!

- ***Forgiving the Unforgivable* (1994) by Beverly Flanigan**

Although Beverly does not claim to be a Christian, she is an expert on the subject of forgiveness. I liked this book because it honors the pain of the wounded in a way that I seldom see in the “forgiveness” literature. My copy is highlighted on nearly every page. Highly recommended for those left by a non-repentant spouse and/or who still feel stuck in the mire of pain. No clichés or trite solutions offered.

- ***Transcending Post-Infidelity Stress Disorder* (2009) by Dennis Ortman.**

Very good book with a generic spiritual bent. Helpful and validating for anyone suffering the heartbreak of a partner’s unfaithfulness. Contains useful exercises and thoughts that would go well with journaling on your healing journey.

- ***Runaway Husbands: The Abandoned Wife’s Guide to Recovery and Renewal* (2010) by Vikki Stark.**

Excellent resource for women whose husbands had an unexpected change of heart and decided to leave the marriage. Often due to a midlife crisis of some sort. Vikki is a psychotherapist with close to 40 years’ experience who has experienced the devastating loss of a formerly loving spouse. She identifies “Wife Abandonment Syndrome” in her surveys and offers real tools to help women recover. She is a Buddhist in practice and faith.

- ***The Betrayal Bind: How to Heal When the Person You Love the Most Hurts You the Worst*, (2023) by Michelle Mays.**

Excellent book for understanding the breach of attachment involved when a spouse sexually betrays a partner, especially due to a sex addiction. Michelle has much experience with helping both people in a broken relationship, but this book is meant for the betrayed. I can’t say enough about the insights in this book and how it will help you overcome your shame as an injured spouse. My only caveat is that some people struggle with what she says on page 269 about “having sex with yourself.” Learning about your body, its responses, and reclaiming your sense of sexual safety has its merits. Yet, her phrasing may be a trigger for people who were married to a sex addict, since part of an addict’s dysfunction is avoidance of true intimacy and choosing to have sex (masturbate) by oneself rather than making it a shared experience with their legitimate partner.

****Bonus—Authors of Good Books on Divorce for Christians:** Anything by David Instone-Brewer, Gretchen Baskerville, and Cindy Burrell (2nd edition).