

# Recovery

## FOR WOMEN

### A GENTLE PATH FORWARD AFTER SEXUAL BETRAYAL

*Finding Your Way with Truth,  
Grace, and the Hope of Christ*

BY KYLIE ARSTEIN



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There is no single way to recover after discovering sexual betrayal in a relationship. Every woman's story is different, and every path forward unfolds in its own time. What follows is not the way to heal, but one way—offered with honesty, care, and the steady assurance that God meets His people in places of real pain.

This guide speaks most directly to women whose partners have used pornography, but much of it also applies to infidelity more broadly. Take what is helpful. Move slowly. You are not failing because this hurts. And you are not alone.

Before going further, it is important to name something clearly: **God is not surprised by what you feel.** Scripture tells us that the Lord is near to the brokenhearted—not after the healing is finished, but in the middle of the fracture (Psalm 34:18). The gospel does not ask you to minimize betrayal or rush toward resolution. It meets you in truth, names sin for what it is, and then speaks mercy where shame would otherwise take over.

## The Discovery

Discovery has a way of rearranging everything.

For many women, learning of a partner's sexual betrayal feels shocking, disorienting, even surreal. It can feel as though the ground has given way beneath you. You may be flooded with emotion, or you may feel strangely numb. Some women experience grief or anger immediately; others feel very little at first and wonder what that means.

There is no correct response.

Your reaction is your heart and body responding to a rupture of trust.

Be gentle with yourself here.

### ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT YOU FEEL

Sexual betrayal often brings a wide range of emotions: sadness, grief, anger, fear, confusion, shame, or self-doubt. Many women also experience a deep sense of loss, often naming the loss of safety, of trust, or of the relationship they believed they had.

These emotions can feel overwhelming. It is natural to want to push them away, distract yourself, or numb the pain through constant activity, work, screens, or substances. While understandable, avoidance often delays healing.

The gospel gives you permission to tell the truth about what you feel. God does not ask you to clean up your emotions before bringing them to Him. The Psalms remind us that lament is an act of faith, not failure.

You might begin by:

- Speaking with one safe, trusted person
- Writing honestly, without correcting or censoring yourself
- Sitting quietly and allowing emotions to surface

You do not need to analyze everything. Acknowledging what you feel is enough for now.

### ACKNOWLEDGE THE IMPACT

Sexual betrayal cuts deeply because it touches intimacy, trust, and identity. Many women describe feeling shaken at their core—not only by what their partner did, but by how it changes the way they see themselves.

When a partner turns elsewhere for sexual gratification, shame often follows. You may find yourself comparing, questioning your worth, or feeling as though something sacred has been violated.

Here the gospel speaks clearly: **your identity was never secured by your partner's faithfulness, nor is it undone by their failure.** Your worth is anchored in Christ, who names you His own.

This does not erase the pain. But it does mean betrayal does not get the final word about who you are.

## Your Response

### TAKE STOCK OF YOUR INNER WORLD

Your emotional responses may shift from day to day, or even moment to moment. You may feel anger toward your partner one day and anger toward yourself the next. You may feel clarity one morning and be undone by grief the following evening.

This back-and-forth is not a lack of faith. It is grief doing its work.

There is no timeline you must follow. Healing is rarely linear. And the gospel does not measure faithfulness by emotional progress. God is not grading how well you are handling this. Grace allows you to heal at the pace of truth rather than the pace of pressure.

### MAKE SPACE FOR YOURSELF

Before deciding what comes next, it is wise to slow down. Intense emotions make clarity difficult, and clarity, not urgency, is what you need most. Self-care here is not indulgence; it is stewardship of a wounded heart.

You might ask:

- What helps my body settle?
- What helps me think clearly?
- What reminds me that I am more than this moment?

For some women, it takes a long time to feel emotionally steady again—especially if they remain in the relationship. If you feel overwhelmed or stuck, seeking help from a counselor can be an important step. They can especially guide you away from behaviours or coping mechanisms that promise relief, but only delay healing or even amplify the hurt long-term.

A faithful counselor will not pressure you toward a particular outcome. Their role is to help you discern your values, needs, and next steps—not to replace your conscience or your prayerful judgment.

## PROCESS AND EVALUATE

As the shock begins to settle, deeper questions often surface:

- What do I believe about faithfulness, trust, and intimacy?
- What do I need in order to feel safe?
- What boundaries are necessary for my well-being?

You might ask yourself:

- Is this behavior something I can accept?
- What part of the betrayal hurt the most?
- What would repentance and repair actually look like?

In Christian spaces, women are sometimes pressured to confuse grace with tolerance. But the gospel never asks you to absorb sin silently or to call harm “love.” Jesus names sin clearly while still extending mercy. Following Him does not mean ignoring what has wounded you.

Writing down your values and boundaries can bring clarity. Writing them down allows you to see how they track over time. What you feel today might not be what you feel next week. But if themes or words continue to resurface, that can be a good indicator for clarity. Many find *Boundaries* by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend helpful in this process.

## CLARIFY BEFORE SPEAKING

Before having difficult conversations with your partner, it helps to spend time organizing your thoughts—not to deliver a perfect speech, but to understand your own experience clearly.

This might include journaling, speaking with a trusted friend, pastor, or counselor, or writing down key points you want to communicate. Clarity does not mean certainty. It means knowing what is true for you.

# The Conversation

These conversations are often tense and emotionally charged. Feeling anxious or overwhelmed beforehand is normal. And yet, speaking honestly can be an important step in reclaiming your voice.

As you enter these conversations, remember this: you are not relying on perfect words to carry you. Christ is already present holding truth and mercy

together when you cannot. You are responsible for honesty and wisdom, not for controlling the outcome..

### **SPEAKING FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE**

While the hurt may be entirely caused by your partner, communicating from your own experience often leads to more productive dialogue. Using “I” statements helps keep the focus on how the betrayal has affected you rather than turning the conversation into a cycle of accusation and defense.

This does not minimize the betrayal. It simply keeps the conversation grounded.

### **LISTEN FOR UNDERSTANDING**

If you choose to hear your partner’s perspective, listening does not mean excusing sin. It means seeking clarity.

James 1:19 reminds us to be quick to listen and slow to speak. Understanding does not require agreement, but it does help you make informed decisions about what comes next.

### **KNOW WHEN TO PAUSE**

If emotions become overwhelming, it is wise to pause. Saying, “I need to stop for now,” is not avoidance—it is discernment.

Ask yourself:

- Am I able to speak clearly?
- Is this conversation helping right now?

### **KEEP THE PURPOSE IN MIND**

Before and during the conversation, remind yourself why you are engaging. Is it clarity? Boundaries? Discernment about the future? Holding that purpose can help anchor you when emotions surge.

## **After the Conversation**

This conversation is often only the beginning. Healing unfolds over time, and rarely in straight lines.

### **SEEK SUPPORT**

If communication remains painful or stuck, involving a counselor or pastor can provide structure and safety. Wise guidance can help keep truth and grace present when emotions run high.

### **REFLECT HONESTLY**

Afterward, take time to reflect:

- Did I feel heard?
- What do I need next?
- What is becoming clearer?

Your answers matter.

## **FORGIVENESS AND GRACE**

You may hear voices—well-intentioned or not—urging you toward forgiveness as though it were a quick decision or a spiritual shortcut. Forgiveness is not “forget about it” or “I’m fine.” Forgiveness does not mean welcoming that person back or not having boundaries. Forgiveness is acknowledging sin has been done and choosing not to take vengeance. This is a fine line, and should be done in consult with your pastor.

## **PRAY FOR WISDOM**

The hope of the gospel is not that everything will be resolved quickly or neatly. It is that nothing—not even betrayal—lies outside the redeeming work of Christ.

Jesus does not wait for you on the other side of your pain. He meets you in it, bears it with you, and promises that suffering will not have the final word.

Even now, grace is at work—often quietly, often slowly—but faithfully.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kylie Arstein is a trained mental health counselor based in Wisconsin and has worked with women who have experienced sexual betrayal through pornography. She is passionate about warning Christians about the dangers of pornography, and helping them find Jesus' grace in the wreckage.

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