

## How Can He Love Me and Do What He Has Done?

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If you live in black-and-white thinking, there is absolutely no way to make sense of sexual betrayal and words that confess, “Even though I’m looking at pornography or I’ve had an affair, I have always loved you.” The problem is that most of the world does live in an all-or-nothing mindset. You are either good or bad, right or wrong, truthful or untruthful, faithful or unfaithful. There is one-right way and there is one-right answer with no room for complexity. Black-and-white thinking is a confining way to live and it leads to judgments about people and situations that simply are not true.

Living in the both/and—or ‘ampersand truth’—allows us to accept the paradox of several truths that appear to be contradictory. The Bible is full of ampersand situations: Nehemiah was sad and scared AND with the support of King Artaxerxes, courageously traveled to his homeland; the woman at the well lived a promiscuous life AND was chosen to deliver the first declaration of Jesus’ presence; the Jewish people sought the Promise Land with great gratitude AND were frustrated and angry with struggles of their new life; Jesus himself was both divine AND human. The both/and theology permeates the lives of Biblical characters as it does our lives.

It is in embracing the ampersand that it is possible to accept the truth that your husband has betrayed you AND he has loved you, too. This was a most difficult concept for me to embrace in the early days of discovery of my husband’s betrayal. I simply could not make sense of this concept. I did not have the capacity to compartmentalize these two diametrically opposed behaviors.

With greater education about trauma and addiction, I learned how the brain can literally ‘dissociate’ and close off certain memories or behaviors while others take over. I learned that pain, fear, and anger can distract one temporarily from healthy behaviors to choose behaviors to comfort and survive. I slowly began to believe that a life of betrayal is complicated—not black-and-white. When my worldview expanded to include other possibilities to my simple and legalistic thinking of the past, I could take in the both/and truths of Mark’s behaviors: he did love me AND he was medicating some extraordinary pain with some very unhealthy, sinful behaviors.

I don’t believe we have the capacity to change our thinking patterns by ourselves. Too often I counsel women who want to figure out all of this pain and lead better lives by reading numerous books, studying Scripture and praying alone, or finding one best friend to talk to. I don’t see much change in their lives. What I do observe is that women who find safe women on similar journeys and commit to professional help slowly begin to broaden their worldview of black-and-white thinking. They explore other possibilities and practice talking about their conflicting thoughts and emotions. They experience the acceptance of others even when they share their confusion.

I also know that embracing ampersand thinking was what that led me to stay with my husband. What I knew was that I was in tremendous pain from Mark's infidelity AND I truly loved him. Speaking up about that pain and getting support allowed me to hold the tension of both truths—and to choose to stay and work toward a new life of faithfulness with Mark. I pray for any of you who are living in the tension of two truths that you will find safe people who will help you explore the both/and. Choose the opportunity to grow in deeper faith and relationship with others by living an 'ampersand' life!