

» IS SOMETHING WRONG WITH ME? I'M NOT WHO EVERYONE THINKS I AM. DO OTHER WOMEN FEEL LIKE THIS? (AM I CRAZY?) MAYBE **IT'S** JUST ME. I THINK I NEED HELP— **NOT** THAT I COULD TELL ANYONE! I CAN'T **JUST** STOP. I ALWAYS TELL MYSELF, "GIRL, **YOU** ARE OUT OF CONTROL." HOW DID IT GET THIS FAR? I CAN'T KEEP THIS UP! I WONDER, IS THERE ANY HOPE FOR ME? **ASHLEY CHESNUT**

"Ashley has written this book with biblical precision, personal compassion, and practical application—and I commend it with confidence that you will be served, encouraged, comforted, equipped, helped, and cared for in ways you don't even realize you need." —DAVID PLATT

IT'S

NOT

JUST

YOU

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Freeing Women to Talk about Sexual Sin and Fight It Well

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For my small group girls past and present.
It has been a privilege to journey alongside you and
grow together as followers of Jesus. This book is one
of the many ways God has used you in my life—and now
in the lives of others, and His work isn't finished.
To Him be the glory.

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Introduction

“DO YOU REMEMBER A COUPLE OF WEEKS AGO WHEN I MENTIONED not feeling close to God?”

The college student sitting in front of me—we’ll call her Phoebe—took a deep breath before continuing, “I know we talked through several reasons for why this could be, but unconfessed and unrepentant sin—that’s it. *That’s* why I haven’t felt close to God.”

Then she looked around to make sure others couldn’t hear, and her voice dropped to a whisper as she revealed, “I struggle with masturbation!”

I vaguely remember her sinking back into the booth, relieved to finally get the words out, but she also nervously gazed at me, waiting on my response. Internally, I begged God to answer my James 1 prayer for wisdom because I had no idea what to say or do next.

As you can imagine, I did not anticipate our conversation taking *that* particular turn, but it was a huge moment for both of us. For her, it marked a point in her spiritual growth of confessing sin and pursuing holiness in *all* areas of her life. For me, that conversation launched me into the deep end of the pool of discipleship, and little did I know that the next month would plunge me deeper still.

The next conversation happened a couple of days later in the same college food court but with a different girl—we'll call her "Whitney." She quickly jumped right in with her confession, ready to free herself of a secret. It turns out that Phoebe had shared her struggle with masturbation with one of her friends—Whitney—only to learn that Whitney shared the same struggle!

Over the next couple of weeks, I discovered that many of the young ladies I disciplined were dealing with sexual sin, some to an addiction level. By the end of the semester, I felt like I'd experienced spiritual whiplash from all the confessions of sexual sin. I had no idea that masturbation was such a common struggle among women. Furthermore, most of the gals I disciplined attended a Christian university, and they came across as good church girls. The more conversations I had, though, the more I discovered that these "good church girls"—along with many of their friends, sorority sisters, and family members—were entrenched in sexual sin, particularly masturbation.

For the next three years, these women and I embarked on a journey of learning how to battle against sexual sin and how to deal with sin's shrapnel. When they graduated, I thought I would get a reprieve from such a grueling season. God had done mighty things in their lives, for which I was incredibly grateful. But I was exhausted.

At the end of that summer, I began a new college small group, and I naively thought we'd begin with basic topics such as how to study the Bible and how to share the gospel. But within one week, I had five young women from our church seek me out to confess their sexual sin and to ask for help. Some of them had full-blown addictions, and I felt like I'd yet again been tossed into the trenches.

The first go-round three years earlier, I didn't know what to expect when discipling women who struggle with sexual sin, but this time, I knew more of what I was signing up for. But knowing what's coming doesn't spare us from the very real

weight, difficulty, and exhaustion of actually going through that thing when it comes. Eventually my body felt the stress of this second go-round, and within a month, I contracted shingles.

Fast-forward to the present day where I serve as the associate director of my local church's young adult ministry. God continues to bring women with all sorts of sexual struggles into my life, and through the past decade of ministry experience, I've learned some things. For instance, many women don't know *why* sexual sin—such as masturbation—is sin. Did you know that some women continue engaging in sexual sin because they're afraid of the pain they'll face if they stop and examine why they do it in the first place? I also regularly encounter women who struggle with sexual sin and have checked all the boxes of things that should help them resist temptation (i.e., reading their Bible, praying, memorizing Scripture, having accountability, etc.), but they still find themselves giving into the same sin over and over. They don't know why or how to stop, and their situation feels hopeless.

Through my years of working with women, I've observed that sexual sin isn't just a male struggle, nor is it specifically a college girl struggle, teenage struggle, singles' struggle, or middle-age struggle. This is a struggle for *women of all ages and life stages*, but more often than not, it remains a secret struggle. Such secrecy breeds shame and isolation, leading women to battle sexual sin alone and to believe the lie that "it's just me."

Not only has God continued to bring struggling women my way, He also provided the opportunity to go back to school for biblical counseling training in order to be more equipped as a disciple-maker. When that first round of confessions occurred, I searched for every resource I could find on the topics of sexuality, sexual sin, and sex addiction, and I became discouraged at the lack of resources specifically addressing sexual sin *and women*.

Much of what I did find, particularly about masturbation, was directed to men. I can remember giving one such book to a girl who read it and returned it to me, voicing her frustration that the author hadn't acknowledged that women struggle with this too. She told me that this only added to the shame she felt for being a female struggling with what this Bible teacher presented as a "male" sin.

Since I encountered a lack of resources specifically for women, I sought the counsel of mature believers. I studied my Bible like I'd never studied it before, and oh, how I was driven to my knees in prayer for these women and for myself! Over and over again, God was faithful, and His Spirit was at work in me and in the women I've labored with and ministered to over the years.

There's so much I didn't know then that I know now. What I didn't expect in all of this was how God would grow *me* as I journeyed with the women He'd placed in my life. My former pastor David Platt commonly remarks how God "has this thing rigged." We think we're discipling and helping others only to realize how He is using them—the very people we're "helping"—to grow, develop, and sanctify *us*.

God has used these years of ministry—these women—to teach me some important things, including how to distinguish between symptoms of sin and their root. I also learned humility and dependence on the Lord as I realized my inadequacy and how my own sin struggles make me just as broken and in need of God's grace. I learned how sanctification truly is a life-long process that happens one day and one choice at a time, and I've seen how God truly can change lives, redeem brokenness, and empower us to live in freedom and holiness.

I won't lie—there are days where the trenches of fighting sin are a hard place to be. Days where you're tired of the struggle. Days where the dailyness of the battle is wearisome. Days where you feel so dirty because you see the grotesqueness of

your sin and how pervasive it is in your life. Days where it's all you can do to put one foot in front of the other. Days where you see the pain you and those around you are experiencing and you just want to weep over the carnage of sin in this world. Days where you wonder if the war will ever end and if you'll survive it with your faith intact.

But since that first confession in that college food court so many years ago, I have seen the beauty of the gospel and the sufficiency of my Savior. I have seen God's design for His church and how we as believers need each other and are not meant to live the Christian life alone. I have experienced God's grace in the trenches and am continuously reminded that we as Christians fight against sin from a position of victory because of Christ.

I don't know what led you to pick up this book. Maybe you struggle with sexual sin. Or maybe you're like I was with my first college small group—feeling unequipped and unprepared to help the people God has placed in your life. The book you're holding is what I wish I'd had all those years ago, and I pray it equips you in your journey. More than anything, I pray it points you to Christ and the hope we have in Him.

To give you a sense of what's ahead, Part 1 explains *why* we sin, particularly in the area of sexuality. Part 2 clarifies *what* God's design for sex is, so you can grasp why sexual sin is sin. And once you understand *why* you're broken and *what* God's design for sex is, Part 3 helps you know *how* to respond, giving you practical tools for fighting sexual sin in your life. (Appendices in the back of the book also explore the issues of sex addiction, sexual abuse, and trauma.)

Whatever form sexual struggles take in your life—whether you're in the trenches yourself or walking with a struggler—I pray this book opens your eyes to the truth that *it's not just you*. You're not the only one battling your particular brand of sin. You're not the only female, and you're not the only

Christian. You're also not alone as you battle, for you have a Savior who is always with you and who doesn't tire of you or get annoyed with you. He compassionately cares for His children, and through His Word, God teaches us what "healthy and whole" was always supposed to look like and how we can help each other love and follow Him.

To God be the glory.

»» CHAPTER I ««

Our Sexual Brokenness

I KNEW WE NEEDED TO TALK ABOUT IT.

Conviction wasn't my problem. My problem was that I didn't know what to say or how to say it. When you're three or four months out from a speaking engagement, that's an okay problem to have. But as the mental block continued and as the countdown for the event dropped from months to weeks to days, my anxiety (and prayer life) dramatically increased.

What did the ladies in our church's Singles 20s/30s Ministry need to hear on the topic of sexuality? I knew some of the girls' stories, but I didn't know them all. What sexual sins were the most prevalent? What misconceptions did they have?

My working assumption was not *if* our ladies struggled with sexual sin but *how many*. I felt like teaching on this topic was akin to opening a can of worms; however, it's a can of worms that the church needs to open.

That was by far the most difficult talk I've ever had to prepare, and I agonized about it for weeks. As part of that teaching series, those who came completed an anonymous sexual survey. Seventy-four single women in their twenties and thirties completed this survey and reported:

- 23% had engaged in premarital or extra-marital sex
- 11% had sexted in the last two years
- 14% had engaged in oral sex in the last two years
- 14% had struggled with same-sex attraction at some point in their life with two women reporting that they currently struggle with it
- 19% disclosed that they'd been raped or sexually abused
- 31% had intentionally sought out porn at some point in their life
- 19% had intentionally viewed porn in the last six months with one woman saying she views it at least once a week
- 70% had masturbated at some point in their life
- 51% admitted that masturbation is currently a struggle (frequency varied widely with 20% masturbating at least once a month and 9% masturbating at least once a week)

The War We're Not Winning and How Our Silence Is Costing Us the Battle

While there are many takeaways from a survey like this, it demonstrates the prevalence of sexual brokenness. (And if you're wondering why I refer to these things as "brokenness," stick with me. We'll get there.) On one hand, I was surprised by the results; on the other hand, I wasn't surprised at all. In fact, some of the numbers were lower than I anticipated. But here's what did shock me—their responses when I asked what topics *they had not heard biblical teaching on*.

- Thirty percent had not heard biblical teaching on pornography. That's nearly one of every three women who were surveyed!
- Fifty-five percent had not heard biblical teaching on masturbation, which is roughly one in two women. (I was actually surprised by how many *had* heard teaching on this subject!)
- Seventy-seven percent had not heard biblical teaching on oral sex. That's seven out of ten women.
- Forty-five percent (a little less than half the women) had not heard biblical teaching on cohabitation. (So more had heard teaching on porn than on living together before marriage.)
- Twenty-two percent had not heard biblical teaching on homosexuality or same-sex attraction. That's two out of ten women.

These numbers surprised me. What do these numbers say about us as a church—both my local church and the “capital c” Church? Our singles ministry is a revolving door of people. Only a few of our folks actually grew up in our city, so these statistics represent what a plethora of churches, youth groups, and college ministries have and have not taught. While some of these ladies did not grow up in church, the majority did—and in the Bible Belt!

The church's silence surprised me. If we're not bringing light to the darkness, then we're contributing to it, and often, it's our silence that allows the darkness to continue. If we're not talking about sexual sin, then we're allowing it to grow unchecked in our people. Our silence is our complicity.

Sure, it's not comfortable to talk about sexual sin. Do you think I *enjoy* talking with women about masturbation? But it's essential to provide biblical teaching if we want to equip our people to follow Christ in their daily lives, especially in an age of sexual atheism in the church where self-proclaimed Christians disregard the authority of God in the areas of their sexual identity and sexual choices.

What We All Have in Common

For men and women alike, sin touches *every* area of our lives, including our sexuality. This means sexual sin has affected *you* in some way, just like it has me. Maybe you're the victim of someone's unwanted sexual attention. Maybe you gave your consent. Maybe you slept with someone last night. Or maybe you haven't ever kissed anyone but have had lustful thoughts about someone, watched a sex scene on TV, listened to raunchy music lyrics, dressed for attention, or laughed at a perverted joke. Whatever its form, sexual sin affects us all.

Now, hear me out. I'm not saying these things to condemn you. I'm saying these things because starting here creates a sense of humility and helps us approach the topic of sexual sin as fellow strugglers. We all struggle in different ways and to different degrees, but we're all sinners. We're all broken, and we're all *sexually* broken. *It's not just you.*

In 1 Corinthians 10:13, Paul writes: "No temptation has come upon you except what is common to humanity." While the sin may vary, the temptation itself is *common*. The craving to cope and to satisfy ourselves is something we all experience, even if we do that in different ways. Your battle may look different from those around you, but we're all fighting the same enemy in the same war, which we are insufficient to do on our own. Thankfully, we hope in the same Savior who has already defeated sin and who promises to help us in our fight.

What Is Broken Was Once Whole

The very fact that we would say something is broken requires that, at one time, it was whole. While you have been a sinner since conception (Ps. 51:5), the human race did exist once without sin, and Genesis 3 tells the story of how humanity willingly chose to move from God's good design into brokenness. But before looking at why we're broken, it's helpful to examine how we were made and how restoration is coming because of Christ.

Growing up in church, I heard all the Bible stories you'd expect: Noah and the Flood, Jonah and the whale, David and Goliath, etc. But it wasn't until my early twenties that I realized all these seemingly random Bible stories aren't so random after all. They're all contributing to an overarching storyline. It's like how *Captain America*, *Thor*, *Black Panther*, and the other Marvel movies each tell separate stories, but these separate movies are all connected to tell one bigger story.

The Bible tells one bigger story, and it happens in four acts, sort of like a play. A snapshot of this big storyline can be summed up in four words: creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.

Creation: Genesis 1–2 presents a world that God created without sin. He made people in His image, meaning they reflect Him and represent Him in the world, and at this time, all of creation was at peace with God and with each other, flourishing in His good design.

Fall: Brokenness occurred with the Fall in Genesis 3 as Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command and rebelled against His authority. This choice resulted in physical and spiritual death for all of humanity, introducing sin to the world (Rom. 5:12). While people are still image-bearers of God, sin mars the image, and while many Bible stories (especially in the Old Testament) seem like bizarre scenes from reality TV, Scripture

demonstrates over and over the devastating effects of sin on creation and on our relationship with God and one another.

Redemption: All of humanity stands separated from God because of sin, and we can do nothing on our own power to resolve the situation. We can't be good enough because we're compromised on the inside, meaning we *can't* be perfect. We would have to satisfy *every* demand of God's law and keep *every* command in order to be righteous (Gal. 3:10–14). Therefore, any attempt to earn God's favor and salvation is insufficient to please the just, holy, and righteous God of the universe.

God knew Adam and Eve would sin, and in His infinite wisdom, though they betrayed Him, He made a way for humanity to be reconciled to Himself. He did this by sending His Son Jesus Christ to be born as a man, to live a sinless life on this earth, to die on a cross, and to rise from the dead. He had to be a man in order to be eligible to be our substitute just as a relief pitcher in baseball must be an actual pitcher in order to be an effective substitute (Heb. 2:17). He had to be sinless because only *perfect* sacrifices are acceptable to God (Heb. 9:11–10:18). He had to die because "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), and He had to rise from the dead in order to defeat sin and death and to enable us to rise from the dead and have eternal life with Him (1 Cor. 15:12–58; John 11:25–26).

Though we've been running up a tab of sin, if we turn from our sin and trust in Christ as our Lord and Savior, God applies Jesus' perfection and death to our tab. Even though we are guilty of sin, God the Judge declares that we are not guilty and that, instead, we are righteous. God pardons us from our offenses because Christ took our punishment and guilt, and He can call us righteous because He looks at us through the blood of His Son. This is how God can accept us while we remain sinners, enabling us to go from God's enemies to members of His family.

Consummation: In the timeline of salvation history, we currently live between redemption and consummation. God is moving all of creation toward restoration. What is broken will one day be made whole. This restoration will occur when Christ returns, and at this time, He will usher in the new heaven and the new earth, which will be void of sin and all of its effects (Rev. 20:7–21:8). Because of Christ’s death and resurrection, those who trust in Him for salvation are made new (2 Cor. 5:17), but in the consummation era of salvation history, *all of creation* will be made new.

For those who are Christians, we already experience Christ’s transformation of our lives, adoption into His family, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but we are not yet experiencing all the benefits that await us at the consummation. While God sees us as righteous, we still experience the effects of sin’s presence in the world. This is what it means to live as Christians in the tension of the “already-not yet” timeline of history. While we as Christians have been redeemed by Christ, we wait for the day when God will renew all of creation, restoring the universe to the peace and sinlessness that was experienced back in the garden. This good news of what’s to come offers us hope as we live in the brokenness of daily life here on earth.

Creation, Fall, redemption, and consummation—that’s it. That’s the storyline of the Bible, and it provides a whole lot of answers and insight into the problem of our sexual brokenness, as you’ll see in chapter 2.

THERE'S NO WAY
OTHER WOMEN ARE
STRUGGLING SEX-
UALLY LIKE I AM.
WHO COULD I EVEN
TALK TO ABOUT
THIS? ISN'T THIS
A GUY'S ISSUE? >>



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The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama. She has a Master of Divinity from Beeson Divinity School and a Certificate of Biblical Counseling from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. While Ashley has a passion for discipling young women, she also loves her city and has written a children's book about it called *Down in the Ham: A Child's Guide to Downtown Birmingham*. When she's not at the church or meeting with girls, you can probably find her at the farmer's market or trying some new local restaurant.

For too long, Christian women have assumed they're outliers in their sexual struggles. This assumption (along with shame) often keeps them silent, leaving them to face the battle all by themselves. But if any of this sounds familiar, you're not the only one. No matter the form your struggle takes—*it's not just you*. These temptations are common not only for men in the church, but many women, too.

So how do we fight against sexual sin as women? What do we do when there's a disconnect between what the Bible says and how we live and feel? Or, if we lead a woman struggling in this way, how do we aid her in the battle? Written from the trenches of ministering to young women, young adult minister Ashley Chesnut explores why sexual sin is "sin" in the first place and how Scripture speaks into topics like masturbation, oral sex, and sex robots—even when those words aren't found in the Bible.

God has already won the war against sin, and as you examine His Word along with Ashley, you'll be equipped to battle against sexual sin and to aid other sisters in the fight.

No, it's not just you. And yes, you can take steps toward victory. Right now.

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