

Sex, Purity,
■ and the longings of a
Girl's Heart:

DISCOVERING THE
BEAUTY AND FREEDOM
OF GOD-DEFINED
SEXUALITY

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BETHANY BEAL



BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2019 by Kristen Clark and Bethany Beal

Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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ISBN 978-0-8010-7557-5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Control Number: 2018048916

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To the GirlDefined Sisterhood around the world—
thank you for encouraging us to write *this* book.
We pray it transforms your life for God’s glory.

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Part one

Broken Sexuality

1. WE'RE ALL SEXUALLY BROKEN

This magazine was unlike anything I (Bethany) had ever seen before in my short eight years of life. I stared down at its pages flopping in the wind. The once-glossy cover was dirty and worn, as though one too many cars had run over it. But the images. *What was this?* Looking up, I saw ten-year-old Kristen walking toward me on the sidewalk. “Hey, come here,” I said to her in a half whisper. “I found something really interesting.”

Kristen hurried toward me. “What is it?” she asked.
“I don’t know,” I responded.

Once Kristen reached me, she looked down at the magazine lying at my feet. Like a natural big sister, she picked it up without hesitation. After staring at the cover for several seconds, she flipped through the crumpled pages. Looking at me with a nervous face, she quietly said, “C’mon, let’s go inside.” She rolled the magazine up in her hands and we quietly went inside the house. Once we were in one of the bedrooms with the door shut, Kristen dropped the magazine on the floor. We both stood there silently for several minutes. We weren’t sure what to do. After gaining some courage, we began to flip through the pages.

“I don’t understand what’s happening here,” I said to Kristen while pausing on one of the full-page images.

“I’m not sure either,” she said.

Kristen and I—innocent girls—were being exposed to pornographic images for the first time in our lives.

Our little hearts beat faster. Although we didn’t understand the images we were seeing, we knew something wasn’t right.

After several more minutes passed, Kristen suddenly shut the magazine and said, “We need to get rid of this.”

“Yeah, I think so too,” I said as I stood up. With sweaty palms, we checked the hallway, quickly dashed outside, and ran down the sidewalk. The fresh air and bright sunshine felt good.

“Here!” Kristen said, suddenly stopping. We were four houses down from our home. Standing near our neighbor’s large brick mailbox, she started digging in the ground with her hands.

“Help me!” she said in a whispered panic.

“What are we doing? Why are you dig—oh! You’re going to bury it!”

Jumping on the ground to help her, I ripped up that rock-infested dirt as fast as I could. I never wanted to see those strange images again. Once the hole was big enough, we folded the magazine into fourths and laid it inside. Working as a team, we piled the dirt back into the hole. With our hands slightly bleeding and our nails jammed with dirt, we stood back.

We looked at our little pile. The tiny dirt mound resembled a miniature gravesite.

We felt free. That strange magazine had made us feel weird. Wiping our dirty hands on our floral T-shirts, we headed back to the house. Our secret would remain as buried as that magazine for the next decade.

Romance Novels and Sexual Desires

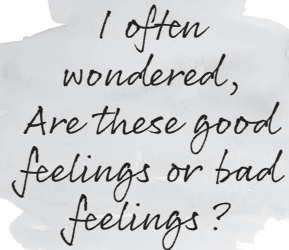
My (Bethany's) unsolicited exposure to pornographic content that day didn't launch me into a sudden life-altering addiction, but it did launch me into something else. Questions. Confusion. Curiosities. Without my even realizing what was happening, my perspective on sexuality was being subtly influenced in ways it never had been before.

As I grew a little older, I became acutely aware of the images and messages I saw around me. I saw the words *Your Best Sex Now* displayed in bold letters across the top of a magazine at the grocery store. *Sexy Dancers Every Night!* caught my eye on a nightclub sign. *Passion and Love* were displayed in red font across the top of an erotic romance novel.

I saw. I observed. My little mind was curious.

As I grew into a teenager, I noticed something else changing. My *desires*. Without warning, I began experiencing sexual desires and longings. My imagination wandered into fantasies that had been foreign to me previously. I was attracted to boys in new and exhilarating ways.

One summer during my mid-teen years, I started working at a Christian bookstore. It wasn't long before I discovered the romance novel section. Yep, I was immediately hooked. Despite the fact that these books were only mild "Christian" romance novels, they had me fantasizing about romance and sexual experiences just the same. These novels appealed to something deep within me. Longings. Curiosities. I often wondered, *Are these good feelings or bad feelings? Am I normal or weird?* I wasn't sure what to do with my newly awakened desires, so I just kept them to myself.



I often wondered, Are these good feelings or bad feelings?

Near the end of the summer, another book at the bookstore caught my eye—a Christian book on the topic of purity. For the first time, I caught a glimpse of God’s bigger picture for my heart and my inner sexual desires. Although the book helped me understand a little bit more about God’s design for my sexuality, it didn’t make my longings go away. I still wrestled with lustful thoughts. Toggling somewhere between lust and purity, I wanted to do the right thing. I wanted to honor God but wasn’t sure just how to do that yet.

Drooling over a Hot Tamale

My (Kristen’s) experiences growing up were similar to Bethany’s, but I had some unique twists and turns. My exposure to that magazine left images stamped on my mind. I couldn’t get them out. They flashed before my eyes at the most unsuspecting moments. I felt too embarrassed to ask my parents about what I had seen, but I desperately wanted to know more. I had questions. A lot of them. I was the kid who always asked *why* about everything. Well, everything except sex. That topic seemed scary for some reason, but I still wanted answers. My little mind was pondering big things—things I never told anyone about.

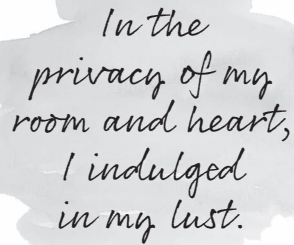
I soon discovered my own palette of sexual desires and longings. Even before I hit puberty, I discovered masturbation. As an eleven-year-old girl, I had no idea what I was doing. But it seemed good. It felt natural (more on that in the chapters to come).

My little imagination was bombarded with sexualized thoughts too.

During my teen years, my thoughts turned from imaginary situations to scenarios with real guys. I remember meeting this one guy and thinking he was the hottest tamale on the

planet. His glances in my direction communicated that he felt the same way about me. We ended up chatting for a few minutes. My inner self was drooling. After parting ways, I did what any good trying-to-play-it-cool girl would do—I stalked him on social media. As I scrolled through his past albums (gotta scout the archives), I discovered this guy was an even hotter tamale online! I wouldn't have called it lust back then, but that's exactly what was happening in my heart. I drooled over his shirtless photos.

My eyes lingered on his chiseled muscles. My mind wandered into sexual places. In the privacy of my room and heart, I indulged in my lust. I felt bad but wasn't sure what to do. Deep inside, I knew my thoughts didn't honor God; but since I wasn't physically acting on them, I brushed it off as no big deal.



*In the
privacy of my
room and heart,
I indulged
in my lust.*

I convinced myself that being pure was more about what I looked like on the outside than what I was feeling on the inside.

Gold-Star Christian Girls

Even though the two of us grew up in a great Christian home, we wrestled with sexual sin and temptation just like anybody else. Our secret desires were often warped and self-centered. Our thoughts were sometimes full of lust. As regular church and Sunday school attendees, we heard multiple talks on purity. We read numerous books on God's design for love and purity. We studied our Bibles and saw that God called us to "flee from sexual immorality" (1 Cor. 6:18), but we still struggled. We didn't understand God's bigger purpose for our sexuality.

As we entered our later teen years, we both embraced the idea of saving sex for marriage, but we didn't fully understand *why* doing so was important. We were on board with pursuing purity but thought it was more about avoiding consequences than striving to honor God. We sincerely wanted to be devoted Christians, but our focus was more on good works than humbly relying on God's grace and strength to change us.

Even though we wrestled with temptation and lust, we still saw ourselves as really good Christian girls. Since we had never committed any of the "big bad Church sins," we assumed we were fairly righteous. Without ever saying it out loud, we both viewed ourselves as gold-star Christian girls.

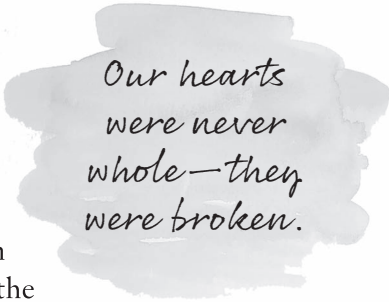
We're All Sexually Broken

As "good" as the two of us thought we were at one point, God didn't leave us in that prideful state. Being the gracious Father that He is, He helped us realize our wrong perspective. That realization wasn't an overnight thing though. It was a process. And it still is. Over the next few years, God graciously helped us see our own tarnishes. We weren't as shiny as we had thought. We weren't as good as we had thought. The sexual sin in our hearts was just as wrong as any outward sexual sin. We began to see that, in God's eyes, even the smallest distortion of righteousness is still a distortion. It misses the mark of true holiness. Our problem wasn't an isolated sin issue that popped up here and there; it was a sinful *condition* that permeated our entire being. We were born with an indwelling sin nature that impacted every area of our lives and ultimately separated us from a holy and righteous God (see Rom. 7:18; John 14:6).

Now, as women in our thirties, we have a completely different perspective. Our eyes have been opened to the reality and

depth of our sin and we've discovered something profound. We were never actually *good*. Not even close. Our hearts were never whole—they were broken. Our desires were never perfect because they were always distorted by our sinful condition.

We've now realized, more than ever, that we desperately need Jesus. We need God's forgiveness in our lives just as much as "the world" does. We need His righteousness to cover our sin. Thankfully, Jesus died on the cross and rose again to conquer the power of sin and to provide a way for us to have a relationship with God. He took the punishment that we rightly deserved in order to satisfy the just wrath of God (Rom. 5:9; 1 John 4:12). By accepting Jesus's payment on our behalf, we can stand forgiven before God (more on this in chapter 5). As Jesus changes our hearts from the inside out, He transforms our desires from impure ones to righteous ones. Instead of strutting around in self-righteousness, we are now learning to walk in humble reliance on Him. We need His grace and strength every single day.



*Our hearts
were never
whole—they
were broken.*

Our friend Dr. Juli Slattery, who is a respected expert on topics regarding biblical sexuality, made the statement that "we are all sexually broken."¹ As we've grown in our understanding of God's design for our sexuality, we've realized she's right. People aren't either sexually "whole" or sexually "broken." The reality is, we're *all* sexually broken. Every one of us. And as we've talked to other Christians (new and seasoned), they've said the same thing about themselves.

We've all experienced some form of sexual struggle or distortion due to sin. None of us are completely whole. None of us are completely pure. None of us experience God's perfect

design for our sexuality as He originally intended. Regardless of our background, upbringing, race, or age, sexual brokenness is something we all face. Sure, it will look different for each of us. But it's something we all have to deal with. Whether we struggle with a secret sin, occasional lust, sexual promiscuity, homosexual desires, pornography addiction, masturbation, or something else, one thing is clear: we, as women, are sexually broken.

Over the past few years, we've received thousands of emails from women like you who have shared their stories of sexual brokenness. In preparing to write this book, we did a survey through GirlDefined.com and asked 450 Christian women specific questions regarding their sexual struggles. Here are what a few of them had to say (to protect their privacy, the names have been omitted):

"I have been struggling with porn for a while now, and I don't know what to do. I'm ashamed and scared of letting my secret out. I need help, but I can't get it because I'm too ashamed to tell others."

"I was a victim of several sexually abusive situations as a young girl. I've had a lot of issues as a result and have spent most of my adult life fighting addiction and depression."

"I struggle with same-sex attraction to women. This has been an issue in my life for as long as I can remember. If it's so wrong, why doesn't God take my desires away?!"

"My mind is a war zone. Lust is almost constantly invading my thoughts."

These are real Christian women. Struggling. Hurting. Each one of them is experiencing some form of sexual brokenness.

Whether she is committing a sin or a sin is being committed against her, each woman is suffering.

If you had to add your own struggles to the bottom of that list, what would you say? As you think about your past and present, how has your own sexuality been marred by sin?

Sometimes it's easy for us to think we're the only ones struggling, but we're not. Each one of us is carrying our own burdens. Each one of us is wrestling with our own sexual brokenness. Each one of us is in desperate need of sexual *restoration*.

The Journey That Shaped You

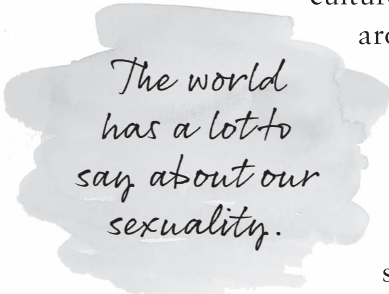
From the time you were born until now, you've been on a journey. As you've traveled through the days, weeks, months, and years of your life, you've learned things. You've experienced things. You've been exposed to things. You've chosen things. And whether or not you realize it, you've formed your worldview of sexuality as a result of these things.

In addition to your personal experiences, you've also been shaped by the society around you. And sadly, since the loudest voice that defines sexuality is a society's culture, your perspective about sex has most likely been influenced by it.

In her book *Rethinking Sexuality*, Dr. Slattery writes, "One day it dawned on me. We have been sexually disciplined by the world. What I mean is that we have been taught to see sexuality from the world's narrative. I find that most Christians are more familiar with how to view sexuality through a cultural lens than with a biblical perspective."²

The world has a lot to say about our sexuality. It has a loud voice too. From popular movies to music to books to

billboards to magazines to the internet—sexual discipline is happening everywhere. And the messages of pop culture are bold: Be free. Have sex. Mess around. Follow your heart. Do what feels good. Do it now.



The world has a lot to say about our sexuality.

As you think back on your personal journey, what connections can you make regarding pop culture's influence on your understanding of sexuality—whether negative or positive? What has shaped your beliefs about sex? What has been most influential in your life?

So much of the confusion surrounding our sexuality is a result of being disciplined by the world. The only way to redeem our sexuality is to turn back to the One who created us. Instead of continuing to listen to the world and our sinful hearts, we need to be disciplined by the One who designed us. The One who loves us and created us. The One who understands our sexuality and has a good and beautiful plan for it.

The two of us don't know your personal journey or struggles. We don't know the confusion and pain in your life. But God does. He knows and He cares deeply. He sees you and He loves you. He knows that everything you've experienced, done, seen, heard, and learned has brought you to this point today. And you know what? He wants to forgive your past (see 1 John 1:9). He wants to redeem your future (see Isa. 61:3). He wants to renew your heart and mind (see Rom. 12:2). He wants to free you from habitual sin (see Ps. 51:10). He wants to reclaim your understanding of sexuality (see 2 Tim. 2:21). He wants to transform your brokenness into beauty for His glory.

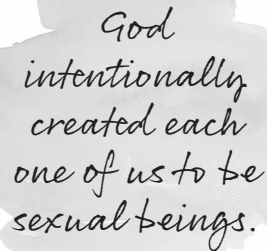
Why We Wrote This Book

God intentionally created each one of us to be sexual beings. From the beginning of time, He made us with sexual desires. He designed us this way on purpose and for a purpose. He's not a killjoy in the sky who wants to squash our sexual feelings. He's a loving Creator who wants to steer our affections in the right direction. Out of love, He's given us beautiful parameters for how to embrace our sexuality in the right ways. He created us as sexual beings to teach us spiritual truths about Himself. He created us with an ache for intimacy to draw us into an authentic relationship with Him. He created us to be relational because He is relational. He created us to be ultimately and completely satisfied in Him.

The more we chase after God's good design, the more the confusion will clear up. The more we chase after our Savior, the more He will satisfy us in ways nothing on this earth ever could.

As you begin a new phase of your journey through the pages of this book, here's what you'll discover:

- A biblical understanding of your sexuality
- God's good design for love, passion, and sex
- Why your longings for intimacy are actually a good thing
- How to conquer lust in your life
- What God's Word teaches about porn, masturbation, and erotica
- How to deal with secret sexual struggles



God intentionally created each one of us to be sexual beings.

- Practical help for embracing a heart of purity
- How to find ultimate satisfaction in Jesus
- Much more

Regardless of where you've been or what you're facing today, the two of us are excited you're reading this book. We pray that the truths of God's Word transform your life the way they have ours.

Instead of settling for a counterfeit version of sexuality, it's time to pursue the truth. Instead of falling prey to cheap thrills and fleeting pleasures, it's time to fight for what lasts. Instead of staying stuck in secret sin and darkness, it's time to be free.

It's time to embrace your sexuality as the Creator intended. With passion, purpose, and purity. *All for His glory.*