

Redeeming Sexuality

EXPLORING GOD'S DESIGN
FOR SEX AND SEXUALITY

by Chrystie Cole

Grace Church Publishing
Greenville, SC

Redeeming Sexuality

Exploring God's design for sex and sexuality

© 2013 Chrystie Cole

All rights reserved

Scripture references marked NLT are from The Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004. Tyndale House, Publishers Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Scripture references marked ESV are from the ESV Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version), copyright © 2001, 2008 by Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois 60187. All rights reserved.

Cover Design: Matt New Design, Inc.

Interior Design: Turner Vaughn

Editor: Abby Moore

ISBN 978-0-9898208-1-3

Printed in the United States of America

Grace Church Publishing
Grace Church
2801 Pelham Road
Greenville, SC 29615 USA
www.gracechurchsc.org

1 REDEEMING SEXUALITY



I grew up in a Christian home with a father and mother who loved the Lord and did their best to teach me the truth of Scripture and foster in me a love of Christ. My first exposure to sex and sexuality was at a family member's home. Stacks of Playboy and Hustler magazines were strategically placed in the bathroom for easy access. I was probably nine or ten years old at the time. I lost my virginity at fifteen. I didn't even know the guy really. I was more curious than anything. For the next fifteen years, I experienced one sexual encounter after another—some I chose, some I didn't. Each one compounded the sense of shame and worthlessness I felt. By the time I decided to follow Jesus, I could barely stand myself. But at the same time, I felt like, for the first time, I might have found what I'd been looking for all along. It's been fifteen years since I started following Jesus. I hardly recognize my life now. I am not who I was. Jesus took all my shame, all my guilt, all my suffering, and I am free. He even uses my story of sin and brokenness to bring others hope and encouragement. I still have the scars from my past choices, but they don't define me anymore. I am a new creation.

God created us as sexual beings. He created sex and our desires for sexual connection. These things are inherently good. But sin twists and corrupts God's creation. The problem is not the desire. The problem comes either in our indulging the desire in ways God has forbidden, or in our condemning something that God created and blessed.

Sex is everywhere. It's on almost every magazine cover. "*30 Ways to Have More Sex.*" "*Bored with your Sex Life?*" "*Getting The Sex You Deserve.*" Titles such as these surround us in every grocery store checkout line across America. With all the sexual messages in movies, television shows, books, and commercials it is obvious to see that we live in a sex-saturated society. Who knew a hamburger could be so sexy?

The messages that influence our beliefs and understanding about sex make it a hard topic to navigate. The world says sex is ultimate. Sex is idolized. It is great and powerful, and you should be free to pursue and experience it, unhindered by religious rules and old-fashioned belief systems. In our sex-saturated society, virginity is an oddity; it is something to be lost, not cherished. But at the same time, the world says sex is not special. It is not seen as something to be reserved or preserved or protected. Sex is a commodity; it has been devalued and removed from the context that actually makes it special. It can be had anywhere, at anytime, and with anyone you please. Sexual partners are a dime a dozen. Sex is cheap, fun entertainment. No commitment required. No strings attached.

But reality paints a much different picture. One in four women are victims of sexual abuse, including rape, date/spousal rape, and molestation.¹ Eighty percent of these women are assaulted not by a stranger, but by someone they know.² Twenty-seven million adults and thirteen million children worldwide are victims of human trafficking, and eighty percent of that is for the purpose of sex. There are ten thousand girls between the ages of six and fourteen currently in brothels in Sri Lanka. And, according to UNICEF, over the past thirty years, thirty million children have been sexually exploited through human trafficking.³

In 2006, ninety-seven billion dollars was spent worldwide on pornography; the United States was the fourth largest consumer. There are forty-six million babies aborted every year worldwide; over one hundred thousand aborted per day.⁴ Sixty-five percent of American teens have sex before they graduate high school. Seventy-five percent of American women have sex before they get married.⁵ The Centers for Disease Control state that there are twenty million new cases of sexually transmitted diseases every year, and half of those are young people ages fifteen to twenty-four. These cases cost the United States

approximately sixteen billion dollars every year in health costs.⁶ The infidelity rate is reported to be anywhere between ten to twenty-three percent. These numbers are rising among women to the point that it almost equals that of men. The marriage rate is decreasing, even though the population is increasing, and the divorce rate seems to be holding steady at around one divorce for every two marriages.

Given all that, it may not surprise you to know that there are even legitimate businesses devoted to helping those who are married have an affair. One such company boasts over 15 million users in 25 different countries and even advertised during the 2008 Super Bowl. The company's founder was quoted as saying, "Our mission was to say that if you're thinking about having an affair, you're not alone. It's part of the human condition. We'll help you meet someone and not get caught. If you want to be clandestine, we're an intelligent choice."⁷

The likelihood is that we have all either experienced the brokenness of sex and sexuality in this world, or we are close to someone who has. The church has long attempted to be a source of truth around the topic of sex and sexuality, calling those who are single to live with sexual purity and to reserve sex for marriage, and calling those who are married to honor the covenant of marriage and to be faithful to one another. In spite of the church's attempt to counteract the messages of society, members of the church not only struggle with sexual sin, but also with confusion and frustration over what sexual purity looks like, as well as what constitutes a healthy marital sex life.

The confusion is compounded through the messages taught by fundamentalist churches. Messages such as "sex is for procreation only" and "good girls don't" create a sense of shame, guilt, and despair in those who have sexual desires. Many young Christian women have come to believe that sex is dirty, that it is unspiritual, and that it is something they should avoid. This is true not only of those who are single, but also of those who are married. Women who were raised with this teaching struggle to give themselves freely to their husbands, sometimes even feeling impure and ashamed. They find it hard to make the switch from "off limits" to "partake and enjoy," feeling a sense of guilt and shame for enjoying sex with their husbands. Author and Pastor, Joshua Harris, reveals the danger of this type of message in his book, *Sex Is Not The Problem (Lust Is)*:

“Misplaced shame can be dangerous because it saps our strength for fighting our real enemy. A person who is wrongly ashamed of being a sexual creature with sexual desires will quickly feel overwhelmed and helpless because he’s trying to overcome more than just lust—he’s trying to stop being human.”⁸

No matter whom you talk with, the topic of sex is typically met with a variety of responses. Many married women commiserate over their husband’s frequent sexual advances, while many single women wish they had a sex life to complain about. Some women battle deep pain, shame, and worthlessness over abuse they suffered at the hands of another, while others have found significant healing from what was done to them. Some wonder if there is any hope of freedom from the shame of their past choices, while others have experienced God’s forgiveness and redemption in the darkest of situations. Some women enjoy a healthy sex life with their husbands, while some could be satisfied never having sex again. Even the healthiest women, at times, have to navigate the challenges and confusion surrounding sexual intimacy.

Questions for Reflection

1. In your experience, what messages have you encountered regarding sex and sexuality? What messages have you believed?
2. When it comes to sexual pleasure, do you see it as more of a good thing or a bad thing?

Sex Is Not Just A Man's Issue

For many years, sex has been perceived predominantly as a man's issue, especially within the church. Men are often challenged about issues of fidelity, lust, pornography, and the like—while women have long flown underneath the radar, being challenged mostly by the church on the issue of modesty. Even in the entertainment industry, men have often been portrayed as sexual aggressors, perverts . . . the ones who can't withstand temptation, though that trend is changing. As a result, many women have a faulty theology of sex and sexuality. This is important because, “the way we talk about sex reflects and forms the way we think about, and ultimately the way we practice, sex.”⁹

Essential to a theology of feminine sexuality is the truth that every woman is a sexual being. You cannot deny it or repress it. To do so would be to deny the person God made you to be. While that may look different according to each woman, sexuality is part of who you are and who you were created to be. You were created as a woman. You are genetically coded as a female. Neuropsychiatrist Louann Brizendine stated in her book, *The Female Brain*, that while ninety-nine percent of male and female genetic coding is



Every woman is a sexual being. You cannot deny it or repress it. To do so would be to deny the person God made you to be.



exactly the same, the one percent variation between the sexes influences every single cell in your body. It influences everything from the nerves that register pleasure and pain to the neurons that transmit perception, thoughts, feelings, and emotions.¹⁰ That means you think, feel, understand, and process as a woman. Whether you are more athletic or more academic—more likely to design a skyscraper, a dress, or a weekly schedule for your family—you are inherently, distinctly feminine.

Your sexuality encompasses your genetic makeup and distinctiveness as a woman, as well as how you portray yourself as a woman. It is both who you are naturally, and how you function in the world around you. Men have long born the burden of responsibility for sex and sexuality, but sexuality is not just a man's issue; it is not just a man's responsibility. Sex and sexual sin

are not issues that apply only to your husband or to your son. Women have responsibility in this area as well. Feminine sexuality is powerful. It has the potential to bring life and strength to others; it also has the power to manipulate, control, and destroy. As such, it is important that we gain an awareness of who we are as sexual beings and that we learn how to steward our sexuality in a way that honors God and serves others in love.

High School/College-Aged Women

High school and college-aged young women are coming of age in a culture of unparalleled sexual confusion. While sexual immorality and confusion is nothing new and can be traced back even to the early church days (1 Corinthians 6:9-20), never before have people had the idea that they get to choose their gender. Society is obsessed with sexuality, and it is at the center of many heated debates in the public sphere.

As these young women begin to grapple with the onslaught of hormones and natural desires, they are caught in the crosshairs of the messages of society and the church. Television, movies, advertising, and music are increasingly sexualized and tantalizing, making it hard for young women to manage these new desires. In an attempt to protect women from the devastation of sexual sin, the church speaks messages such as, “guard your heart,” and “true love waits.” While these messages are well intended, many young people express confusion over how to live these things out in their day-to-day lives.

Are these messages of action from the church enough to help young women understand and navigate sexual sin and the effects of it on themselves and those around them? How are young women supposed to express their sexuality without stepping outside of the God given boundaries for sex? How are young women supposed to think and talk about sex? How do they handle their desires for intimacy and connection with another? How are they to interact with the opposite sex? How do young women live out their sexuality in a way that brings life and strength to those around them, rather than carrying shame and baggage that affects them and future generations?

Single Women

Single women of all types—whether never married, single again, or widowed—wonder how they are supposed to express their sexuality while not engaging in sexual activity. They feel they cannot express a very real part of who they are as a woman. The longer the season of singleness, the harder it becomes to manage these legitimate desires for intimacy and sexual expression. Denial and repression of these desires is often burdensome and frustrating. Culture continues to awaken and stir these desires, playing on physical urges and desires for emotional intimacy. This can bring a sense of shame for feeling these desires or despair that they can never be fully expressed.

Sexual choices made as a young adult shape this season of a woman's life. Can there be healing from the devastation caused by a woman's choices in young adulthood? Can there be healing from wounds caused by others? How can a single woman “manage” legitimate desires for intimacy and sexual expression? How can she express her sexuality in ways that bring life to others, in ways that glorify God? How can she be content, even satisfied, in a season of singleness she might not choose for herself?

Married Women

The marital sexual relationship is a gift from God. It is both an expression of intimacy and a pathway to intimacy. But marital sex is not without its challenges. Sex can be a point of conflict and deep hurt within a marriage. Some women are frustrated by their husbands' desires for sex. They feel like an object and outlet for his sexual desires. Others wish their husbands pursued them more. They feel unattractive, undesired, and confused.

For some, the challenge may be more seasonal, like wrangling young children and managing the home or coping with the hormonal havoc brought on by menopause. For some, it may be a matter of priority, and sex is way down on the list. Maybe it is your post-pregnancy body that makes you avoid intimacy. Maybe it's a career that leaves you exhausted at the end of every day. Regardless of the challenge, the marital sexual relationship—and the way you think and talk about it—has huge implications on your life and the lives of those around you.

How do you sustain a healthy sex life through every season of married life? How do you express your sexuality outside of your marriage in a way that brings life to others and glory to God? How do married women talk about sex with their husbands? How do they talk about sex with their friends, married or unmarried? Should a woman always say yes when her husband desires to have sex? How do you navigate questions of frequency or the challenge presented when one spouse's desire for sex is greater than the other's? What is permissible in the bedroom, and what is off limits?

The Battle Rages . . .

It is impossible to be neutral on this topic. We are either part of the problem, or we are part of the solution. We are either engaging in healthy dialog with our spouse, with our children, and with others, or we aren't. You may be healthy, but you have friends, neighbors, and children who aren't. The sexualization of our culture is so overwhelming that we cannot assume we are unaffected by it. Or, we are blissfully unaware and need to be educated. Either way we cannot disengage.

A quote often attributed to Martin Luther says,

“If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Wherever the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that one point.”¹¹

As you survey the landscape surrounding us, it is clear that sex and sexuality are an area where the battle rages.

However, none of this should come as a surprise. The Apostle Paul forewarned of it in his letter to the young pastor Timothy:

You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly.

2 Timothy 3:2-5 (NLT)

They will be boastful and proud. They will consider nothing sacred. They will have no self-control. They will hate what is good. They will love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but reject the power that could make them godly—or as the ESV Study Bible states, “they will have the appearance of godliness but not its essence.”¹² Paul warned Timothy that the times would be difficult and marked by godlessness; people would be *self-indulgent* and *self-righteous*. And that is the hard truth for us today. We can be just as godless in self-righteousness as we are in self-indulgence.

As we prepare to engage this topic, the challenge for all of us is to identify where we are on the continuum. Do you identify more with the self-indulgent, pleasure seeker, or do you identify more with the moral and self-righteous? Maybe you’ve been on both ends—indulgent in your youth and self-righteous in your marriage, or even vice versa? Wherever you find yourself on the continuum, both ends exhibit autonomy, a form of *moral independence*. On one end, we have holy autonomy—a striving for morality and righteousness apart from the cross. On the other end, we have autonomy as well, deeming God as impertinent to the conversation about sex. There is no governing authority; I determine what is best for me. The answer for both the self-righteous and the self-indulgent is the same: the hope of the Gospel.

... The War Is Won!

Sex has been hijacked and used as recreation, as a weapon, and as a way to turn a profit. Our own sin has hijacked sex. We use sex as a way to gain value,

power, relationships, and to fill an aching void within us. Without the Gospel, without the deep and abiding truth of Scripture, without the power of the Holy Spirit, there is no hope for change. **We need a vision of redeemed sex and sexuality.** The truth of Scripture is that *sex was God's idea*. He created it, and as such, it is good. As a part of His good creation, He is at work even now redeeming and restoring what we have broken. He is busy healing the hurt and pain you suffered at the hands of another. He desires to free you from the bondage of sexual sin. He longs to reveal His goodness and faithfulness to you in your season of singleness. He delights when you take pleasure in His good gift of sex with your husband. He is ready to speak His truth into this broken, distorted area of our lives.

The hope and encouragement of the Gospel is this: regardless of who you are, what you have done, whether you identify with the self-righteous or the self-indulgent, God made a provision for your sin through Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus, though fully God, humbled himself by taking on human flesh, becoming fully man. He faced every temptation common to man, and yet He did not sin. Because He was fully man, He was able to offer himself as a perfect, living, and holy sacrifice on our behalf. On the cross, Jesus took on all of our sin, and in its place God gave us Jesus' righteous standing. Then God raised Jesus from the dead



Regardless of who you are, what you have done, God made a provision for your sin through Jesus' death on the cross.



as proof that Jesus had conquered sin and death. God then sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in and among us as proof of our adoption into the family of God. His Spirit is at work in us even now, conforming us into the image and likeness of Christ. He will continue this good work in us until Jesus returns and ushers in His new kingdom, at which time sin, death, and suffering will be conquered once and for all. Everything broken will be made new. There will be no more crying, no more suffering, no more temptation, and no more pain. And we will dwell with Him forever and ever.

What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us

everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God’s right hand, pleading for us.

Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, “For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.”) No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:31-39 (NLT)

So, while the battle may be raging, the war has been won. This is the foundation of our hope. There is no life He cannot redeem. There is no pain He can’t heal. There is no soul He can’t comfort. The Lord can do miraculous work in a life surrendered to Him. God is for you. While you may still struggle with sin, temptation, suffering, and pain here, there is hope for significant healing, freedom, and life change. And one day, He will bring you finally and fully into His eternal joy, perfect and complete.

Homework

The truth of God’s word brings light into dark places. There is perhaps, no place darker than the shame, suffering, and pain of sexual sin—whether sin we committed or sin committed against us. The purpose of this study is to

Redeeming Sexuality

equip you with a biblical and practical understanding of sex and sexuality. The reading is broken into seven chapters. Some chapters are long, but are broken into subsections to make reading a few pages each day possible. There are questions for reflection throughout each chapter. I encourage you to set aside time each day to read and answer the questions. Doing so will create an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to meet with you personally and shed light on the areas in which you need His truth, His comfort, His conviction, and His healing.

I pray that over the next seven weeks, “God will fill you with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may live worthily of the Lord and please him in all respects—bearing fruit in every good deed, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for the display of all patience and steadfastness, joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the saints’ inheritance in the light” Colossians 1:9b-12 (NLT).

Questions for Reflection

1. In your season of life, what specific challenges do you face when it comes to sex and sexuality?
2. Do you think of sexuality as a compartmentalized part of yourself or as something woven throughout your whole self? Why?
3. In what ways does your own sexuality need to be redeemed?

Redeeming Sexuality