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Chapter 1

We Know Why You Read It

We want to let you in on a little secret: it's possible to be a spiritual woman and to struggle with sexual issues.

Homeschoolers (both moms *and* students), Bible study teachers, missionaries, college students, single businesswomen, married stay-at-home moms, and praying grandmothers who are actively serving the Lord have sexual struggles.

Desperate longings to be touched by a man.

Online temptation.

Disappointment in a marriage bed.

Physical loneliness.

Left with no one to talk to, a woman can end up turning sexual struggles into shameful secrets.

Having sex outside of marriage.

Conducting a secret online affair.

Becoming addicted to porn.

For so long it's been unacceptable in the Christian community for a spiritual woman to openly admit to these sexual secrets. Then along came *Fifty Shades of Grey*—a book offering a bounty of explicit, erotic sex scenes all wrapped up in a love story. Suddenly, there is a sexual outlet for the spiritual woman that seems to be perfectly acceptable. Their longings and fantasies finally have a place to be expressed in erotica,

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which promises to revive sexual passion in marriage or channel sexual desire for singles.

We want you to know you're not alone. Spiritual women *do* struggle with sexual shame. We've heard from so many of you, and your hearts are eager for some answers—answers that the church traditionally was not willing to provide because it was afraid to talk about the very things you need desperately for us to talk about.

So, along with a growing number of increasingly transparent Christian leaders, we intend to approach this topic quite differently. Why? Because Jesus did.

Jesus met a woman at a well who was never going to be satisfied drinking at the well of sexual expression to satisfy her emotional thirst (we'll share more about her in chapter 8). When He approached her, He broke racial, religious, and sexual traditions. Those customs were not as important to Him as rescuing the woman with Living Water.

We may break a few unwritten, man-made, but nonetheless "Christian rules" of the past in the pages of this book. No conversation will be taboo if it can rescue your heart and bring you to the Living Water.

We have already gone to great lengths to bring you hope, including the decision that Juli would actually read the *Fifty Shades of Grey* series. With her heart in an attitude of prayer and her psychologist's hat on, she went where neither of us really wanted to go. While doing so, she identified five unmet longings in women, based on the roller-coaster ride of emotions she personally experienced as she read the series,

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coupled with her years as a counselor.

At the same time, I identified five characteristics of successful erotica, based on interviews of those who read it and the writing guidelines given to authors in the industry (known as “sexperts”).

We came at these lists completely independent of each other. Take a look at how our lists matched up.

A WOMAN'S FIVE LONGINGS	CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL EROTICA
To escape reality.	Focuses on female fantasy.
To be cherished by a man.	Presents an <i>innocent</i> female protagonist who makes a man forget other women even exist.
To be protected by a strong man.	Presents a controlling alpha male who dominates the female.
To rescue a man.	Characterizes the female protagonist as the only one who can meet the deepest, darkest needs of a man.
To be sexually alive.	Offers detailed descriptions of sex.



We know that women aren't just drawn into books like *Fifty Shades of Grey* for the entertainment value. Erotica strategically and masterfully pulls you in by exploiting what your heart secretly longs for. What unmet needs and desires make these books appealing to you?

WOMEN LONG TO ESCAPE REALITY

Many women get pulled into erotica simply because they are bored, desperate for an escape from the drudgery of normal life. There are seasons of life that can feel very routine, in which nothing new or challenging seems to happen. This often leaves women feeling lonely and depressed. They want to have a “pulse” again, dream again, and hope again. So, what's the harm in an imaginary story that takes you away from the drudgery of your life? If you can't have a real adventure, at least you can enjoy an imaginary one—one that's guaranteed to have a happy ending.

Erotica promises to take you out of your boring world and inject some adventure—even if it's only in your mind. For a brief time, you can feel alive imagining what it would be like to fall madly in love with a gorgeous man, to be so beautiful that heads always turn your way, to ride on a private jet to an ocean getaway, or to have mind-blowing orgasms at will.

The fact is: your heart *was* designed for adventure, intrigue, romance, and suspense. These are the things that make you feel alive. God made your body to physically respond with invigorating chemicals like adrenaline, dopamine, and cortisol when life becomes exciting and semi-unpredictable.

Your longing is legitimate. We just believe there are ways to get what you are looking for without compromising God's standards.

WOMEN LONG TO BE CHERISHED BY A MAN

My dating relationship with Mike began to take a serious turn. We were standing in my parents' driveway and he was giving me a good-night kiss, holding me in his arms. He looked up to the starry Florida sky and yelled, "God, I want this one!" At that moment, a thrill ran through my body. Out of all the women in the universe, Mike wanted me!

In every romance novel, erotic or otherwise, the female character longs for that experience of being chosen and cherished by the guy. Authors haven't invented this as a major theme of romance—their stories simply reflect what every woman deeply longs for in her heart.

One woman who has a physically disabled husband put it this way:

Reading *Fifty Shades of Grey* gave me a sense of hope in a way. I was able to feel the love the main character Christian felt and also feel the way the girl was so taken by him. I live a very harsh reality at thirty years old. I may never feel the love of my husband again, so if reading a book is a way I can vicariously live that life, then great. I am my husband's caregiver as well as taking care of two kids, not to mention all the home stuff. These books are approximately 500 +

pages each and I got through all three in the matter of four days. They kept my attention, and I honestly think there was some longing. I want that love!!!!

Maybe you too remember being some man's "one and only" in the early years of marriage. Or maybe you're still waiting to be the one a man wants. Does your heart ache and long to be cherished?

WOMEN LONG TO BE
PROTECTED BY A STRONG MAN

In a culture that constantly celebrates women's independence and freedom, do you find it strange that a book about bondage is spreading like wildfire? All of a sudden, words like "submission," "master," and "obedience" are not only acceptable but sexy. Even the most liberal women in the media are talking about the thrill of a strong man. In a conversation on *The View* about *Fifty Shades of Grey*, the fearless five—Whoopi Goldberg, Joy Behar, Elisabeth Hasselbeck, Sherri Shepherd, and Barbara Walters—were discussing *why* women loved the book so much. Barbara suggested that "when you go home, you want the guy to be in charge."¹

This seems to have come out of left field. But it hasn't really. The mantra that "you don't need a man" has created a culture of strong women and weak men. No longer is it considered romantic or chivalrous for a man to open a door for his date or even to ask a woman out in the first place. Men have been told, "Step aside—we can take care of ourselves!"

Now we secretly yearn for the very thing our independence has destroyed—strong, confident men. There is something wonderful and even erotic about trusting the strength of a man who can provide, protect, and lead. So, women are caught at the crossroads of wanting the strength of a man, but not wanting to be controlled. We ask our husbands or boyfriends, “Why won’t you lead?” Then, when they show strength, we respond with the feedback, “You can lead but not *that way!*”

Think about the movies you loved as a girl: *The Little Mermaid*. *The Princess Bride*. *Cinderella*. The more modern version found in *Ever After*. Think of Buttercup awaiting rescue from her simple farm boy in *The Princess Bride*: “My Westley will always come for me.” And so, he did. And our hearts swoon, but we’d never say we want that in real life. Why? Because that might display weakness—something that’s *not* in vogue for the modern woman!

In *Captivating*, author Stasi Eldredge broke down the conflict between wanting a strong man and being a woman molded by modern feminism. She wrote: “I simply loved feeling wanted and fought for. This desire is set deep in the heart of every little girl—and every woman. Yet most of us are ashamed of it. We downplay it. We pretend it is less than it is. We are women of the twenty-first century after all—strong, independent, and capable, thank you very much. Uh-huh . . . and who is buying all those romance novels?”²

Over 70 million women. That’s who.

WOMEN LONG TO RESCUE A MAN

We are all familiar with relationships where the good girl believed she could tame the bad boy. Some women are consumed by the desire to rescue the man they love. In a strange way, they are more attracted to a troubled man who needs help than to a normal, uncomplicated “nice guy.” They tolerate rude and even abusive behavior with the hope that “someday my love will change him.”

The Fifty Shades series and many other erotica story lines play on this longing, making it a primary part of the plot. Christian, the main character in the novels, has everything. He’s handsome, young, rich, talented, and successful. If the description of him stopped there, frankly he wouldn’t be that interesting. The charm of his two-dimensional appeal would wear off like a Hollywood heartthrob on the cover of a magazine. But Christian becomes more appealing and intriguing because he’s also very messed up. He has dark, mysterious wounds from his childhood that no psychologist can heal. He is deathly afraid of true intimacy, so he substitutes it with kinky sex. In short, he needs a woman to save him from himself. His internal imperfection adds the irresistible element to his outward perfection. He must be saved. Ana’s heart is broken, thinking of Christian as a traumatized, abused little boy who has never known true love. Although she is at times concerned about her safety, how could she leave him alone? Ana goes beyond wanting to help him—she becomes his savior.

All of us have a deep, imbedded desire to make a pro-

found difference in the life of a man. The desire to help the man you love is a worthy aspiration. In fact, it's biblical. God created you to be a completer or "helper" for the man you marry. How wonderful that God also gave you the innate longing to do just that. Like every healthy desire, this one also can be twisted and skewed, which is what led Kim into an abusive relationship:

My senior year in college, a mutual friend introduced me to Dan. Dan was several years older than me, a committed Christian, and headed toward seminary to become a worship pastor. The attraction was immediate, and I thought I had found a man I could marry. But as our dating relationship progressed, Dan became controlling, jealous, and paranoid about my past relationships. He constantly questioned me about what I was thinking or why I was late, and often accused me of being unfaithful to him. The arguments and accusations escalated to screaming in my face, calling me names, and eventually grabbing me.

Looking back, I wonder why I didn't just call it quits. I'm a strong-willed person, the last you would expect to find in an abusive relationship. But Dan had a troubled past: an abusive father and a history of drug abuse. I wanted to prove that I was trustworthy and that my unconditional love was strong enough to endure. I'm not a quitter. I wanted to see

the best in him and believed that with God's help he could change. Sadly, he did not.

There is nothing romantic about enabling an abusive man. It is yet another example of a beautiful longing twisted by evil. Yet the *Fifty Shades* series tiptoes right up to the line of proclaiming that a woman's love can save a man from his demons.

WOMEN LONG TO BE SEXUALLY ALIVE

And then there's the sex. Let's put it out there . . . many, if not most, women long to have the kind of sex promised in the movies and on the cover of *Cosmo*. Maybe you aren't married yet but your sexual appetite is alive and well—and frustrated. Or perhaps you are married and have a husband whose sexual desire isn't quite as strong as yours. It could be that your sexuality represents deep wounds of childhood abuse. Being with a man feels very unsafe but you still long to be touched and loved.

No matter the sexual hardship you're facing, women are drawn to the promise of sexual fulfillment and the ability to fully surrender to it. You long to experience the deep pleasure and release that you've heard is supposed to be part of sex. But your normal, everyday life doesn't provide that. Enter erotica. No man needed, no risks of heartbreak involved, you don't even have to put on makeup . . . just start reading and you can have your body and mind awakened any time you want.

Sexually charged books seem a lot less harmful than having a bunch of “hookups,” cheating on your husband, or looking at pornographic images on the Internet. Maybe you consider them to be an acceptable outlet for you as a single woman. Or maybe, as many women claim, books like the Fifty Shades books can wake up your libido, helping you to become the lover you want to be to your husband.

We want to be very clear: your sexual desire is not wrong. God created you to be sexual. Your body and your mind are wired to long for sexual pleasure and intimacy. Unfortunately, many religious messages separate being a sexual woman from being a spiritual woman. Instead of encouraging you to seek God’s plan for your sexuality, you’re left with only worldly outlets to fulfill your longings.

Whether you are single or married, sexually dead or frustrated, we will address your desire to be a sexual *and* spiritual woman in this book. You don’t have to turn off your desire to know God in order to turn on your desire to be sexual.

A SECRET LONGING

There is no shame in these longings.

In fact, we cannot ignore them, keeping them tucked away in the darkest corners of our hearts. Satan has power in secrets and in darkness, but his power dissipates when we bring our desires and struggles into the light to talk about them and yield them to God.

My single friend Rita makes no bones about the fact that she’d like someone to cuddle, have dinner with, laugh with,

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and to carry the burden of financial decisions. At fifty years old, she talks openly about hoping to have sex one day. And yet, she's really happy. I asked her one day how she could want a husband so much and yet be one of the most joyful and content women that I know. She says the key is being fully aware of her longings and to do the hard work of finding safe places to talk about them and examine them in the light of what Jesus says.

Sadly, many women don't feel safe to admit that they are lonely, bored, or sexually frustrated. Thinking that "Christian women should have this under control," they bury these longings, and that's where the danger arises. Things like erotica, porn, and affairs call to us when we ignore our longings. That's what happened to Susie.

Susie is a spiritual woman. She and her husband are both church and community leaders and have chosen to home-school their children. About the time *Fifty Shades of Grey* was released, she was experiencing a frustration with the reality of waking up to the hard work of schooling every day. She was bored with her life and began to seek excitement through sexual temptation. Due to her leadership positions, she didn't feel she could tell anyone what she was struggling with, and instead found a solution in reading erotica. She wrote this to us:

I cannot tell you how much I love my children. I have always wanted to be a wife and mother—more than any career life could offer. But I began to feel like my life was boring and mundane. I was struggling and

thought I needed something exciting. To be blunt, *my husband doesn't have a sexual appetite that matches mine*. Don't get me wrong—I am very satisfied by my husband when we do have sex—but he doesn't need touch and could go a week probably without even thinking of kissing me. I get sad and lonely.

I read *Fifty Shades* three times . . . this opened the window of curiosity to many other books like these. I spent hours in the evenings reading those books. As soon as I could, I would escape to my reading spot. I told myself that I needed an *escape from reality*.

I became unsatisfied with everything in life. I became more unsatisfied in our marriage. I was not satisfied by [my husband] sexually during that time period. It was horrible. He couldn't satisfy me—and it was my fault.

I had thoughts of packing my bags and living a different life.

Susie didn't get what she was longing for when she turned to erotica. *Fifty Shades* tapped into her desire to escape her ordinary life and to feel sexually alive. Instead of finding herself sexually alive and escaping her reality, she was less sexually satisfied and almost left the good and treasured reality of being a wife and a mom. She was deceived.

We know you have longings—we have them too! This book is not just about helping you understand why you read the *Fifty Shades* series (or may want to read it). We want to

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point you to healthy ways of addressing and meeting your longings. Too many women like Susie have been tricked into believing that an erotic book or online relationship can fulfill their deep needs. It's time to expose that trap and reveal a way that leads to life.

Pull Back the Shades

It's time to let the light shine into the room of your heart that contains your deepest longings. Using the list of the five longings on page 17, determine which of these are unmet in your life and may be leaving you open to acting out with erotica, porn, or in other ways. You might even write a letter to God expressing your frustration for the unmet longings in your life. It's good to get it out!
