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CHAPTER ONE

Sexual Redemption?

*Give me to view a discovered sinfulness.
To know that though my sins are crucified
they are never wholly mortified.¹*



How did sex become such a problem for so many?

My ministry is with people struggling with issues related to sexuality. Although many of them find me because they are in crisis, their challenges, desires, hopes, and experiences are much like yours and mine. It is not easy to satisfy our desires. Just when our dreams are satisfied, we often wake up in a nightmare, or the perception that something is still missing.

I want you to meet a couple in trouble because of sex. Their story illustrates that these are not the best of times in the sexual arena. We desperately need sexual redemption.

My introduction to Carrie and Jim (not their actual names) came via a telephone call to my office in Colorado on a sparkling fall afternoon. Carrie was articulate and thoughtful, but obviously crushed as she haltingly, with tearful sniffs, explained why she was contacting me. Her story resembled many others I've heard. "Dr. Schaumburg," she began, "I got your name from Focus on the Family—can you help us?"

Like many wives today, Carrie was concerned about the lack of passion and intimacy in her marriage. Suspicious, she had checked Jim's laptop and found many recent visits to pornographic websites.

"Please understand," Carrie continued, "we're both Christians! My husband

is loved and admired by our children and everyone who knows him. He is a good man!"

She paused, her voice choking. "What is going on here? I've awakened to a nightmare, Dr. Schaumburg. This is not the man I married! I don't know what to do, but I can't live like this. Can you help?"

Before answering her question, I asked Carrie to fill in some details on herself and Jim. They had met over thirty years ago at college, fallen in love, married, and borne three children—two boys and a girl. Active in their church, they were coleaders of a couples group that met for Bible study and fellowship. Invariably, at least one couple in the group was struggling in their marriage and Carrie and Jim provided counsel.

When a wife like Carrie discovers unfaithfulness, either heart adultery or physical adultery, meaningful solutions seem impossible. I continued our conversation. "Carrie, this may be the darkest moment of your life. Jim has betrayed you at a level that seems to tear away every good moment and memory you have of your relationship. The enormity of his sin must be faced head-on. Believe me, in all this mess, God is at work. Yes, the problem is very serious, and I know this sounds impossible right now, but there is hope."

"Dr. Schaumburg, that sounds good, but I don't know what to think now."

I offered my sympathy to Carrie and briefly explained how couples come to our counseling workshop for about a week of intensive education and counseling. "Do you think that Jim would come with you for intensive counseling?" I asked.

"Jim is such a private and proud man! I don't even know how to confront him about all this so we can get the help we need! He has never been willing to go to any counseling—I've begged him!"

Carrie went on and told me of the confusing contradiction between Jim's involvement with Internet pornography and his Christian reputation. "I just don't get it. He's a good father and we're leaders in our church. I feel like I don't know who this man is anymore!"

"I know your trust has been shattered, but let your heart speak gently and softly," I replied. "He is your husband, the father of your children. He needs you now more than ever. Don't run from the pain. All attempts to kill the pain will only lead to greater and greater pain."

Carrie didn't speak. All I heard was her sniffling on the other end.

"When Jim comes home tonight," I went on, "pour out your heart to him, both the hurt you feel and the concern you have for him and your marriage. Invite him to come with you to our intensive counseling program. If he has any questions, have him call me."

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“Okay, Dr. Schaumburg. I’ll try.” As Carrie and I said good-bye, I encouraged her to call me soon and let me know what happened.

Carrie did call back several days later. There were no tears this time, just hard anger.

“Dr. Schaumburg, I kicked him out of the house! I did what you said. When he couldn’t deny the evidence, he confessed, but there was no brokenness! He blamed me for not having interest in sex. He said it was all my fault! When he said that, I blew up and we started shouting. It was terrible! I slept on the couch. The next morning he was different and admitted he’d had a problem with pornography and masturbation since he was eleven. This is unbelievable!”

“I’m sorry this is so hard,” I said.

“He has lied to me, and I still don’t know if there is more he hasn’t told me. I can’t stand to be around him. My married daughter is furious and says I should divorce him. I don’t know if I did the right thing when I asked him to get out. What am I going to do?”

“Is there any chance the two of you can come for help?”

“Oh, Dr. Schaumburg, I forgot to tell you that! He did say he would consider coming to your workshop. When could we come for your intensive counseling?”

I told her we had no openings for two months. She was disappointed but agreed that the wait would be worthwhile. Little did we know there was more pain to come.

As this book progresses, I will relate Jim and Carrie’s story and the process of healing that eventually occurred for them as individuals, as well as in their marriage.

Obviously, the personalities, particular issues, and experience of every person differ. The spiritual maturity of the individuals, and their receptivity to biblical truth and to any wisdom I might offer, are never exactly the same. However, I have found in over two decades of counseling with more than three thousand people that the sexual redemption that Carrie and Jim eventually experienced is available to anyone—any person—who allows God’s beautiful restoration process to unfold.



While we live in a sexually explicit society, in counseling I find many who are uninformed about sex, struggle with sexual dissatisfaction,² and are sexually dysfunctional.³ I concluded long ago that the complexity of our

sexual functioning is beyond our comprehension. First, we must marvel at God's design and second, with gratitude, be amazed at the Father's heart for sex. God has placed more nerve endings in the penis and clitoris than any other part of the body except the tongue. Clearly, God wants us to enjoy the pleasure of good food and holy sex.

There's a wide range of issues surrounding sexual intimacy, which are revealed by comments like these that I've heard countless times:

Woman: "We have no intimacy in our marriage. Neither did my parents, but I refuse to live like this."

Man: "Throughout my married life I've been very selfish. My wife has never had my heart, and in our sexual relationship, she often feels like an object. Given such a poor relational history, there's so little for my wife to look back to as a basis upon which to rebuild our marriage."

Woman: "I want to be looked at and to feel good about myself. I just like looking hot when I go out. It makes me feel powerful around men."

Man: "I have attended some popular seminars on sexual addiction and read some books, but little has changed."

Woman: "Men are such losers—it's all about sex. So just forget it! Besides, Jesus is my lover."

Man: "She tells me I'm stupid and can't do anything right. I feel like a child; I get no respect."

Woman: "My grandson is twelve and looking at pornography on the Internet. It just breaks my heart. Where will this end?"

Man: "I've not been supportive as we have begun to struggle through this mess. At times I've dragged my heels about going for counseling and asking for help."

Woman: "When the affair started, it wasn't about sex. We were just good friends—I need that given the distance in my marriage. We started kissing and one thing led to another. Now I can't imagine losing him."

Man: "Last night we agreed that I should move out. This morning, for some reason, she's agreed to try again."

Woman: "If it was another woman, I could deal with this. But a *man*? What do I tell the children?"

Man: "I continued to lie to her and denied there was a problem. I tried in my foolishness to get her to see that it is her problem,

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because looking at some porn was not that big a deal and she just needed to get over it.”

Woman: “If only he would take some responsibility in this family. How can I respect him? I feel like his mother.”

Behind each of these statements there is a real man or woman expressing themselves sexually and spiritually.

I know in my own experience, and from hearing story after story in my counseling office, that there is sexual brokenness and sin in each of us. But this reality often is not apparent.

For example, consider a good-looking couple named John and Kathy who had been sexually active in previous dating relationships, but when they met were determined to maintain some semblance of purity until their wedding night. For their honeymoon they booked via the Internet a secluded cabin in the mountains of Colorado. Full of anticipation and love, at 1 a.m. on their wedding night, they arrived at the cabin and found it rat infested. Exhausted, and faced with a five-hour drive to the nearest hotel, they decided to stay but spent a sleepless night with little sexual interest. The next day they drove to a four-star hotel with clean sheets, but Kathy had developed a yeast infection that made sexual intimacy painful. John, clean from what many would consider harmless masturbation⁴ since he'd met Kathy, in frustration immediately returned to his old self-comfort and withdrew from his bride.

Six months passed and John and Kathy still looked like the perfect couple, but inside their sexually dysfunctional relationship, they were desperate for help. Their circumstances differed, but like Jim and Carrie, they needed sexual redemption.

After nearly three decades of helping individuals and couples, and based on a continual study of the Bible, I've reached this conclusion: *To be spiritually mature, you must be sexually mature; to be sexually mature, you must be spiritually mature.* That in brief is the message of this book and the essence of sexual redemption.

Sexual redemption involves more than resolution of sexual problems and challenges. For example, most Christian couples know that God designed fulfilling sex for marriage but many fail to experience it. Trying “seven tips to enhance your love life” may bring some excitement but there's more to sexuality than romantic techniques. Sexual redemption is larger than a fulfilling sex life in marriage.

And how might sexual redemption relate to childhood sexual abuse? I

started my counseling career working with incestuous families and since then have counseled hundreds of men and women sexually abused as children. The violation of another person sexually is very harmful. Forgiving your abuser is an important first step, but there is more to understanding our fragile sexuality than that.

Sexual redemption takes us beyond the healing of past wounds and calls us to glorify God spiritually and sexually.

Sexual redemption also addresses any clinging shame related to pre-marital sex. Of those three thousand social histories I mentioned, 40 percent were in full-time Christian work. Yet I estimate conservatively that less than 20 percent were virgins when they married.

Remaining a virgin until marriage, a practice all but lost within the church, is still God's standard. But being a virgin or a "technical virgin" on your wedding night isn't all that God intends. Sexual redemption is living spiritually and sexually for a purpose other than a self-seeking agenda.

Pastor and author John Piper makes two crucial points on sexuality:

The first is that sexuality is designed by God as a way to know God in Christ more fully. And the second is that knowing God in Christ more fully is designed as a way of guarding and guiding our sexuality. Now to state the two points again, this time negatively, in the first place all misuses of our sexuality distort the true knowledge of Christ. And, in the second place, all misuses of our sexuality derive from not having the true knowledge of Christ.⁵

The way we handle our sexuality and spirituality is meant to show the supremacy of Christ. We know—or we should know—that this is true, but do we really understand it and own it in our hearts? Every person is a sexual being, created in the image of God. Now that sounds inviting, but the truth is we also are all fallen sinners. If we separate our sexuality and spirituality into different compartments, we not only diminish our sexual beauty, our sexual purity, and our sexual meaning but also our very soul. Our soul and our sexuality are profoundly connected, and yet we have lost this correlation between knowing Christ and sexual wholeness.

Knowing Christ is to govern *all* of our sexuality and *all* of our spirituality in a way that expresses the image of God and demonstrates that we are walking worthy of our calling. The loss of holy spirituality and holy sexu-

ality brings into question our sexual redemption and whether we know God as we should.

This book is about a full sexuality and a full spirituality that can only be found by finding satisfaction in God and God alone. This book is also about dedicating your sexuality, your spirituality, your life—all for His highest. Sexual redemption begins at the cross, is rooted in a change of heart, and is lived out in a relationship before and after two sinners say “I do.”

One question you may have at this point is, “But if my spouse and I can’t come to Colorado for an intensive counseling experience, is there any hope for us?”

Yes, most definitely! We have had significant success with couples coming for intensive counseling, but there is no magic in that experience, either. What ultimately “works” is a combination of learning the truth and a commitment to walk through the process of repentance, forgiveness, and sexual redemption that God orchestrates. You can do this no matter where you live and what you have been through. The answers are in God’s Word and in His desire to heal the brokenhearted and reclaim lost and hopeless sinners, which quite frankly are all of us.

This book outlines the same process that individuals and couples go through who participate in our intensive counseling program.⁶ More than anything, what needs to happen is for each participant to understand the truth about their sexuality. This book in significant ways parallels the truth encounter that occurs during Biblical Intensive Counseling, which for many people is a fresh way of looking at life and their situation. I do not spend countless hours counseling. What I do is guide a process, which the individuals accomplish for the most part without me—one-on-one with God and their spouse.

I say this to defuse the idea that the only way the principles in this book will work is to spend a week in a remote location working with a “high-powered therapist.” That’s not it—believe me, I know! I have no magic potion. I do have God’s Word and His willing and powerful involvement in the healing process. Besides, much of the important work in experiencing sexual redemption continues *after* a couple leaves the intensive program.

There’s no shortcut through the process of acknowledging sin and experiencing redemption. But there’s also no need to think that the process will take years before true change begins! No follower of Christ ever has to say about any problem, “I guess I will always be an addict or trapped in bondage to sin.” No, no, no, no! That is not the message of the gospel.

Let God work. Regardless of how you got to where you are, don’t limit

God now because of your fears. Your marriage may be hanging by a thread. I know you may be thinking, *We've tried everything and nothing has worked. Why should this be any different? Nothing is going to change!* All I ask is that you not limit God. He cares and I can tell you that I have seen incredibly real, lasting change in many, many couples.

Take Lisa and Steve, for example. Their story is unusual but demonstrates so clearly what God can accomplish. Unknown to Lisa, Steve had struggled with homosexuality for years. They married but never—not once—had sexual intercourse. Eventually Steve's issue was exposed when he initiated a sexual relationship with an underage young man. He was convicted and sent to prison. Steve lost almost everything in the process, but Lisa stuck with him during his nearly five-year incarceration.

Before Steve's release from prison, Lisa contacted our office and arranged for the two of them to attend one of our sessions. By the time Lisa and Steve arrived, they had been married for fifteen years. I know this may seem hard to believe, but during all those years they'd still never had sex.

Their intensive counseling time went well. God intervened in their life and marriage, and while they were still participating in the program, the two finally consummated their marriage by having sex for the first time. The day after this momentous event, when they arrived in my office for a visit, I don't think I've ever seen two people who were both so startled and happy at the same time! We praised God together. What we did not know then is that during this first time of intimacy, Lisa had conceived their first child. You now know why I need no convincing that with God "all things are possible"!

And here's the icing on the cake: Every year I still get a Christmas card from this family, and their growing daughter is a reminder of the unique sexual redemption this couple experienced through God's grace.

If in a week God can change the course of that kind of personal and relational history, what might He have in store for you?

A fundamental principle of this book is that in all the evil that sexual sin brings into a life or a marriage, we must never doubt God's love and His purifying discipline. What was true long ago for Joseph in the wake of his horrible betrayal by his brothers is true in all cases of unfaithfulness: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20).

I often run into couples several years after their experience of BIC. Frequently, the wife takes me aside to whisper in my ear, "Dr. Schaumburg. He really is a different man!"

Please hear me clearly on this: There is hope. It is hope based in truth and the power of God. You too can experience sexual redemption.

The Path to Sexual Redemption

- ① What similarities, if any, do you find between Jim and Carrie's story and your own?
 - ② Is there sexual dissatisfaction or sexual dysfunction in your marriage? If so, do you have the courage to face the problem with your spouse? If not, why?
 - ③ Do you agree or disagree with the statement, *To be spiritually mature, you must be sexually mature; to be sexually mature, you must be spiritually mature*? Why do you agree or disagree?
 - ④ What sexual redemption would you like to see in your life and marriage?