

Praise for  
*Every Woman's Battle*

“This book sheds light on the often unspoken sensitivities and issues that women wrestle with. Not only is it well written, it is liberating and refreshing with sound principles for overcoming the things that threaten to keep us from experiencing the fullness of joy that is part of God’s big-picture plan for our lives.”

—MICHELLE MCKINNEY HAMMOND, author of *Get Over It and On With It*

“In today’s permissive culture, it is dangerously easy for even the most principled of women to reason away unhealthy thoughts, attitudes, and flirtations with men who aren’t our husbands. In *Every Woman’s Battle*, Shannon Ethridge bravely and respectfully draws a line in the sand for all of us. A must-read for every woman who desires true intimacy and sexual integrity.”

—CONSTANCE RHODES, author of *Life Inside the “Thin” Cage*

“There is a common, almost Victorian, myth that women don’t really struggle with sexual sin. That myth causes many women to feel a double-shame. The shame of struggling sexually is compounded by the assumption that few, if any, women share the same battle. Shannon Ethridge artfully and boldly unveils the war and offers women a way to enter the battle with courage, hope, and grace. *Every Woman’s Battle* will help both men and women comprehend the glorious beauty and sensuality of holiness. This is a desperately needed book.”

—DR. DAN B. ALLENDER, president of Mars Hill Graduate School  
and author of *The Healing Path*

“If you’re like me, you want the deepest connection possible with your husband. You want a soul-to-soul connection that is not encumbered by anything that could damage it. And if you’re like me, you are going to find Shannon’s book immeasurably helpful in doing just that. *Every Woman’s Battle* is the best resource I know for embracing God’s plan of sexual and emotional integrity as a woman.”

—LESLIE PARROTT, author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good Marriages*

“A powerful shield for every woman. Shannon’s words are convicting, challenging, and confronting.”

—DR. TIM CLINTON, president of the American Association  
of Christian Counselors

“Many of my *Bad Girls of the Bible* readers have tearfully confessed to me their struggles with sexual sins—promiscuity, adultery, and self-gratification among them. Since we cannot pretend Christian women don’t face these temptations, it’s a relief to have a sound resource like this one to recommend. Shannon Ethridge’s straightforward, nonjudgmental, step-by-step approach can help women come clean in the best way possible—through an intimate relationship with the Lover of their souls.”

—LIZ CURTIS HIGGS, best-selling author of *Bad Girls of the Bible*,  
*Really Bad Girls of the Bible*, and *Mad Mary: A Bad Girl from Magdala*

“It’s time to take the blinders off and recognize the crucial message of *Every Woman’s Battle*.”

—KAREN KINGSBURY, best-selling author of *Remember* and *One Tuesday Morning*

### Readers Rave About *Every Woman’s Battle*

“Thank you for writing this. I wish I had it when I started dating. I’ve been a Christian all my life but compromised because I thought I was strong enough. I wondered why I had trouble resisting temptation and kept getting involved with the wrong guy. Now I realize the wrong guys just know what to say. I’ve read your book twice and will read a couple chapters even more when I feel tempted. I have recommended it to many women.” —SHAUNA

“This weekend, my husband finally realized how his pornography addiction is affecting our marriage. I was full of righteous indignation until your book. I discovered I’m guilty as well. I thank God He used you to help me see my own weaknesses. Now I’m surrendering to Christ for healing and growth.” —LISA

“This book has transformed my relationship with God and my husband. God has worked through you to alter my life and many others, and I can’t fully express my gratitude. I feel I’ve been waiting all my life for this. I finally understand, and my skepticism dissolved at the end of the first page.” —ANNE

“I’m thirty-four in Moscow. Your book is great! I started meetings for young girls here, translating off the page, letting them ask questions and make comments. They’re very grateful for the book—it’s extremely practical and applicable. The things you discuss are so true, but I’ve never heard anyone mention them. I’ve attended many women’s conferences, but nowhere have I come across such practical, *necessary* information.” —RHONDA

“I’m reading your book for the first time and feel beyond blessed! I’m from Puerto Rico, thirty-four years old, and it seems this book is a biography of my life. I still don’t believe how timely God’s power is in putting this book into my hands. I intend to lead other women in this study so I can share this happiness and freedom with others. I feel so blessed; you have no idea!” —G.F.

“This has long been on my heart, especially being a military wife. Our husbands go out for a year or more at a time, and though we deny it, we struggle with remaining faithful. We pretend we’re stronger than we are. I’m facilitating a class for military wives using this book, and I want to thank you for showing us how God provides the way out of temptation.” —V.R.

“I’ve been married for sixteen years, and I know the Lord wanted me to read this book. The timing could not have been better. It’s so helpful to know that what I feel is normal. It helps me get over my guilt and get busy (with God’s help) dealing with solutions.” —B.C.

“This book calls it as it is, and through that, God pointed out issues I needed to think about. It’s such a clear guide; I’ve been reading bits to my boyfriend, helping him understand how women work.” —S.B.

“I can’t tell you how much reading this has changed my life. Though I’m not ‘fixed’ yet, I have learned so much and applied it to making our home a happier place. I feel as though you know me inside and out! Your books have played a huge part in saving my marriage. You are doing God’s work to change people’s lives. *And it’s working!*” —L.T.

“All I can say is, ‘Wow!’ How can God work so profoundly? I was praying about my relational hang-ups, asking how I could love Him while still struggling with these issues. I went to the bookstore the same day and picked up your book. I feel loved, very loved, like someone cares. You helped me receive His unmerited mercy. He really loves us and is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. I don’t know you, but I feel like we’ve shared in this together.” —K.N.

“I just had to tell you I can’t even eat my lunch without stopping and thanking you for writing this book, for your honesty and openness about an area so few women talk about. I read my own thoughts that I didn’t know anyone else had! I’m experiencing great healing—healing I didn’t know was possible.” —T.B.

“After stumbling upon your book a few years ago, I can honestly say I’ve learned more from it than just about any other I’ve ever read. Thank you, thank you, thank you for writing this incredibly honest and straightforward book—and for changing my life in the process. I cannot say enough. I am reading it again.” —ANGELA

“I read your book when I was having an affair and on the verge of losing my husband and family. It was my mirror and the reflection scared me. Reading about your experiences saved my life and my marriage. I’ve handed out dozens of copies, and now three and a half years later, I’m leading a study with my staff and friends from church. I’ve seen this book open many women’s eyes to their significance and fill the void in their lives. Your passion has touched many lives, and if I have anything to do with it, it will touch many more!” —M.H.

“This is certainly not the last book of yours I’ll read. It’s opened my eyes! If I had the money, I’d give it to every woman I know!” —AASLAUG, from Norway

**SHANNON ETHRIDGE**

with Foreword and Afterword by

**STEPHEN ARTERBURN**

**WORKBOOK INCLUDED**

# Every Woman's Battle

**Discovering God's Plan for  
Sexual and Emotional Fulfillment**



**WATERBROOK  
PRESS**

EVERY WOMAN'S BATTLE  
PUBLISHED BY WATERBROOK PRESS  
12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200  
Colorado Springs, CO 80921

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (TLB) are taken from The Living Bible, copyright © 1971. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (MSG) are taken from The Message by Eugene H. Peterson. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (NRSV) are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (RSV) are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1952 (2nd edition, 1971) by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Names and facts from stories contained in this book have been changed, but the emotional and sexual struggles portrayed are true stories as related to the author through personal interviews, letters, or e-mails.

ISBN 978-0-307-45798-1

Copyright © 2003 by Shannon Ethridge

Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications Inc., 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920, [www.alivecommunications.com](http://www.alivecommunications.com).

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House Inc., New York.

WATERBROOK and its deer colophon are registered trademarks of Random House Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Ethridge, Shannon.

Every woman's battle : discovering God's plan for sexual and emotional fulfillment /  
Shannon Ethridge.—1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Sex—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Love—Religious aspects—Christianity.
  3. Women—Religious life. I. Title.
- BT708.E84 2003  
241'.66—dc21

2003005867

Printed in the United States of America  
2009

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

#### SPECIAL SALES

Most WaterBrook Multnomah books are available at special quantity discounts when purchased in bulk by corporations, organizations, and special-interest groups. Custom imprinting or excerpting can also be done to fit special needs. For information, please e-mail [SpecialMarkets@WaterBrookMultnomah.com](mailto:SpecialMarkets@WaterBrookMultnomah.com) or call 1-800-603-7051.

*To my husband, Greg.  
Thank you for your obedience  
to God and your faith in me.  
Your love has been my strength  
and shield in the midst of every battle.*



## **contents**

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| Foreword by Stephen Arterburn . . . . .             | xi      |
| Acknowledgments . . . . .                           | xv      |
| Introduction . . . . .                              | 1       |
| <br><b>Part I: Understanding Where We Are</b>       |         |
| 1 Not Just a Man's Battle! . . . . .                | 5       |
| 2 A New Look at Sexual Integrity . . . . .          | 19      |
| 3 Seven Myths That Intensify Our Struggle . . . . . | 31      |
| 4 Time for a New Revolution . . . . .               | 50      |
| <br><b>Part II: Designing a New Defense</b>         |         |
| 5 Taking Thoughts Captive . . . . .                 | 67      |
| 6 Guarding Your Heart . . . . .                     | 86      |
| 7 Locking Loose Lips . . . . .                      | 102     |
| 8 Building Better Boundaries . . . . .              | 116     |
| <br><b>Part III: Embracing Victory in Retreat</b>   |         |
| 9 Sweet Surrender . . . . .                         | 131     |
| 10 Rebuilding Bridges . . . . .                     | 143     |
| 11 Retreating with the Lord . . . . .               | 162     |
| 12 All Quiet on the Home Front . . . . .            | 178     |
| <br>Afterword by Stephen Arterburn . . . . .        | <br>187 |



**Workbook**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Questions You May Have About This Workbook . . . . . | 193 |
| 1 Not Just a Man's Battle! . . . . .                 | 197 |
| 2 A New Look at Sexual Integrity . . . . .           | 202 |
| 3 Seven Myths That Intensify Our Struggle . . . . .  | 208 |
| 4 Time for a New Revolution . . . . .                | 213 |
| 5 Taking Thoughts Captive . . . . .                  | 218 |
| 6 Guarding Your Heart . . . . .                      | 223 |
| 7 Locking Loose Lips . . . . .                       | 230 |
| 8 Building Better Boundaries . . . . .               | 236 |
| 9 Sweet Surrender . . . . .                          | 241 |
| 10 Rebuilding Bridges . . . . .                      | 246 |
| 11 Retreating with the Lord . . . . .                | 251 |
| 12 All Quiet on the Home Front . . . . .             | 257 |
| Don't Keep It to Yourself . . . . .                  | 263 |
| Notes . . . . .                                      | 265 |

## **f o r e w o r d**

(by Stephen Arterburn)

A couple of years ago, I worked with Fred Stoeker to produce the book *Every Man's Battle*. At first I was reluctant to be involved with the project because I did not think men would want to read a book that so blatantly confronted the battle that almost all men fight, the battle against lust and sexual impurity. So when over four hundred thousand books in the Every Man series sold within two years, it both surprised and encouraged me. I was surprised to see the books remain on the best-seller list and encouraged that men in churches all over the world are addressing an area of their lives that up until now has been a huge secret. A new openness has led to hope for many men who were trapped in their silence and their sins.

Just this morning I was introduced to a young woman named Danielle. She handed me two books that looked like they had been left out in the rain and run over by a garbage truck. The books were *Every Man's Battle* and *Every Woman's Desire*. Danielle explained that they looked so tattered because her husband, David, had read and studied them so much. She told me that David is leading a class of men through the books, and that this is the second time he has done so. I find such dedication to this material and subject matter astounding.

As Danielle and I talked, she told me that her church is taking on a new project. They are using the material from *Every Man's Battle* and creating a group for women to address the same issues. I reached into my briefcase and showed her the manuscript for *Every Woman's Battle*. She was thrilled. But not nearly as much as I was to see her excitement to help other women find the truth her husband and his group of men have found.

Since I helped write *Every Man's Battle*, many women have asked me, "Where is the book to help us with our battle?" In *Every Man's Battle* I gave my e-mail address and asked readers to contact me directly. I have been very busy answering

thousands of e-mails from men who are committed to sexual integrity and sexual purity. But men were not the only ones who contacted me. Women read the book and many had the same questions. It was out of those e-mails and face-to-face discussions with women like Danielle that *Every Woman's Battle* emerged.

While it may not be so obvious for women as it is for men, there is a battle that almost every woman will have to fight—the battle for emotional and sexual integrity. But a woman's battle does not usually begin with a lustful or a wandering eye, as it does for a man. While women are visually stimulated as well, their battle is typically more subtle and begins in much deeper territory. For women the battle often begins in a heart full of disappointment.

A woman's disappointment in men, circumstances, God, life, money, kids, and the future can cause her heart to wander. If she's single she may turn to fantasy and self-gratification, hurting her potential to develop a healthy sexual connection with her future husband. If she's married, she may start comparing her husband with every other man, and when she does, he always comes up short. She may obsess over all that he is not and all that he could be. She may express her desires for him to be different and better, creating criticisms and complaints in almost every conversation. It becomes so serious that she begins to feel entitled to something better, someone who can meet her needs the way she deserves. Unknowingly she betrays her husband with almost every thought of him and someone else she views as superior. And with each comparison comes a greater and deeper disconnection between the two of them and the increasing likelihood that she may fall into an emotional affair or even a sexual one. But even if she does neither, her rejection of her husband destroys the potential for her to experience the fulfillment she longs for.

I believe that women want a deep connection with a man—a connection that is so deep it grows into an inseparable intimacy that results in great satisfaction as friends as well as sexual partners. But in order for this to happen, men and women have to live lives of sexual integrity. For men, that means keeping our minds and hearts from other women, including pornographic images and sexual memories from the past. For women, that means accepting rather than rejecting their husbands. It means overcoming disappointment to keep their connection with their husbands healthy.

When I heard Shannon's story and met her, I knew she could write this book.

She has experienced the temptations that most women are too embarrassed or afraid to admit. For years she had a wandering heart—but no longer. Shannon's heart was healed as she embraced God's plan for sexual and emotional fulfillment. Her openness, wisdom, honesty, and integrity can help you live a life of sexual and emotional integrity as well.

In order for you to grow and mature, your sexuality must be integrated into the rest of your life. That means integrating your thought life and fantasy life into your marriage. When you do, you feel complete, congruent, and whole. The danger of living in your private world of fantasy and gratification is that you end up with a segmented life, one with secret fantasies, secret sexual practices, and obsessions. If this describes you, this book will show you how to integrate all parts of your being so that you become a whole and healthy woman, faithfully connected in intimacy with your mate and your God.

If you have been wandering in the disappointing world of what was and what might have been, *Every Woman's Battle* will bring you back to the reality of what God wants you to be and what your marriage can be. Married or single, you can find help and hope within these pages. I pray that when you are finished reading you will be on a path of spiritual growth and maturity that will allow you to stand pure before the Lord and experience true sexual and emotional fulfillment.

May God bless you greatly for your desire to seek His truth.

P.S. This book was written primarily for women who are married or plan to be. If you are single, this book will be invaluable as you are envisioning a fulfilling marriage. If you are not planning on being married, it will help you give wise counsel to your friends.

## **a c k n o w l e d g m e n t s**

My deepest gratitude goes first to Jesus Christ, the Lover I've longed for all my life. Thank You for revealing Yourself to me and for trusting me with Your vision for Well Women Ministries. Thank You also for the precious gift of a godly husband. Greg, where would I be had you not loved me as Christ loved the church, especially in the midst of my most "unlovable" moments? Your example of faithfulness through the past thirteen years has proven that true, unconditional love isn't just a fairy tale. No writer could compose words deep enough to express my love and commitment to you.

Thank you to my children, Erin and Matthew, for believing in me and cheering me on. The sunshine and laughter you bring into each day is such a gift. Of all the hats I wear in life, I'm most proud of my "Supermom" hat. You are incredible kids!

To Mom and Pop—oh, how I appreciate your discipline, patience, and prayers. I was very lucky to have you as parents, more lucky now to have you as friends. To Jay and Wanda—thank you for loving me like a daughter and for raising such a great son. What a joy to have parents and parents-in-law who are so supportive.

Thank you to all my "other mothers" in the Little Flock Sunday-school class for praying me through the peaks and valleys in life. What an example you have set for me.

To my accountability friends who helped me see the Light when I was blinded by Satan's schemes. Lisa, whoever said blood is thicker than water didn't know about the fierce friendship that we share! I love you so much.

To Ron and Katie Luce, David Hasz, and all my collaborators in Christ at Teen Mania Ministries. Your encouragement, inspiration, and trust is so much of what God used to keep me pressing on with this manuscript and ministry. It is an honor and a privilege to work with you to raise up a generation of Worldchangers! To

Kym Blackstock and Tracy Kartes, you came alongside me at such a vital time in this writing process, and I am grateful for your assistance.

To Jack Hill, Dean Sherman, and all of our friends at Mercy Ships International, with sincere appreciation for the wisdom gleaned and the hope and healing you allow us to spread to women in other parts of the world.

To my phenomenal mentors, Jerry Speight and Susan Duke—you have been wind underneath my wings! Jerry, you have encouraged me to pursue avenues that I never dreamed of walking down. Thank you for inspiring me to become all God intended. And Susan, my “hen with a pen” friend—thank you for adopting this baby chick and giving me “eggstra” courage to press on!

Special thanks to all those who came alongside me to get this project into the hands of many other women. Linda Glasford and Greg Johnson, thank you for catching this vision and taking a chance on me. All of the pink roses and seashells in the world wouldn’t express the magnitude of my appreciation. Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker, thank you for sharing my passion for starting a new kind of revolution! What a privilege to be invited to come alongside you in this movement. Finally, to my incredible editor, Liz Heaney, and to all the wonderful folks at WaterBrook Press, a sincere thank you for your patience and professionalism in helping me develop this manuscript into something that I pray will be instrumental in changing many lives.

## i n t r o d u c t i o n

One day my husband, Greg, brought home the book *Every Man's Battle*, tossed it at me, and with a straight face said, "I think you ought to write *Every Woman's Battle*."

My immediate response was, "Yeah, right!" Not that I didn't feel qualified to write such a book (having graduated from the school of hard knocks when it comes to recognizing and overcoming sexual and emotional temptations), but I had already been trying to publish a manuscript on these exact issues for over a year. Time after time I heard publishers say, "Women don't deal with sexual issues enough that a book on that topic would really sell."

Meanwhile, *Every Man's Battle* was climbing to the top of the best-seller list. I wondered how people could be so naive as to think that sexual integrity is strictly a man's issue. Both men and women were created by God as sexual beings, weren't they? It takes two to tango, and for every man who falls prey to sexual temptation, there is a woman falling with him. While many men limit their affairs to what they take in lustfully through their eyes, women also submit longingly to mental fantasies or emotional affairs. Some compare their husbands to other men and become disillusioned by their husbands' failure to measure up. So many of us fail to recognize how we compromise our sexual integrity, how we rob ourselves of what we long for most—true intimacy and fulfillment.

Curious as to why my husband felt so strongly about *Every Man's Battle*, I read it through voraciously. I kept thinking, *Many of these issues are not common just to men, but to women also! They simply manifest themselves differently!*

Stephen Arterburn was hearing the exact same thing from so many women that he believed the need was undeniable. Little did I know that within a few months God would, in fact, divinely bring Steve and me together on this project

(thanks to my friends Ron and Katie Luce, our literary agents at Alive Communications, and the visionaries at WaterBrook Press).

So take heart and know that your cries for help have been heard. This book is a training manual that will help you avoid sexual and emotional compromise and will show you how to experience God's plan for sexual and emotional fulfillment. I also wrote a comprehensive workbook to accompany *Every Woman's Battle*. It will help you learn more about what God has to say on this subject and will help you examine your own personal life so you can develop a practical plan for victory in your own unique battle for sexual and emotional integrity.

Do you want to be a woman of sexual and emotional integrity? With God's help you can. Let's get started.





# **understanding where we are**

# not just a man's battle!

You stumble day and night...

My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.

HOSEA 4:5-6

At one time I was having extramarital affairs with five different men.

First, there was Scott. I met him while volunteering at a summer camp. Scott was so outgoing and talkative. What initially attracted me to him was how he could have a conversation with anyone—not just a superficial one, but a deep, meaningful discussion. I could walk into a room and he would pour on the attention, asking all about how things were going and how I was feeling. In comparison, however, my husband was a man of few words: the strong, silent type.

Then there was my scuba coach, Mark. With his distinguished, salt-and-pepper hair, he looked just like Lloyd Bridges. Mark's maturity and love for diving intrigued me. He encouraged me to overcome my fears and helped me discover my underwater adventuresome side. I felt safe with him, like a daughter feels safe with her dad. My husband, on the other hand, was only a few years older than I. He didn't evoke within me a feeling of being nurtured and safe as Mark did.

Tom was my accounting teacher at the university I attended. What struck me about Tom was his wit and intelligence. I had expected accounting to be the most boring of all my classes, but Tom had a way of making it the most fun and interesting part of my day. My husband was an intelligent accountant also, but he couldn't make me laugh like Tom did. His wit paled in comparison to Tom's.

Then there was Ray. He had been my boyfriend before I married Greg. Ray was such a die-hard romantic, heaping compliments on me and sweeping me off my

feet with whirlwind passion. My relationship with my husband never seemed to have that magic spark that I felt when I was with Ray. Ray had set the romantic standard that my husband couldn't live up to.

Finally, there was Clark. He was ruggedly handsome, suave, and debonair. I looked forward to being with him every Friday night. As I approached the counter at the movie rental store, the owner automatically went to the Classics section and pulled out any Clark Gable movie. It didn't matter which one. I loved them all. Even standing tall at six foot and seven inches, my husband just couldn't measure up to Clark.

Even though I wasn't having sexual intercourse with any of these other men, I was still having an affair with each of them—a mental and/or emotional affair. My fantasies of being Clark Gable's leading lady, memories of my romantic relationship with Ray, and fascination with Tom's wit, Mark's maturity, and Scott's verbal talents affected my marriage in a way just as damaging as a sexual affair would have.

I was overlooking all of the many wonderful things about my husband because I was either focusing on the positive attributes of one of these other men or focusing on my husband's negative attributes. Because I lived with Greg, I saw not just the good, but also the bad and the ugly. He left the toilet seat up in the middle of the night. He snored, and when he woke up he had morning breath. Then he'd brush his teeth and leave toothpaste in the sink. Sometimes I felt that Greg couldn't do anything to suit me. With all of my criticizing, he probably felt like he couldn't do anything to suit me, either.

The other men's warts, however, were out of my line of sight. I could look at them and see nothing but their shining qualities, the kind I initially saw in Greg but had lost sight of over the years because of all my comparisons.

I felt distanced and disillusioned. Could he ever excite me like the other men did? Was I still in love with him? Could he ever measure up? Could I ever learn to live with my less-than-perfect partner?

Fortunately, the positive answers to these questions have surfaced since I ended these affairs and changed my measuring stick. I am thrilled to report that our marriage of thirteen years is still going strong and has never been better (although we, like any other couple, still have our moments). I'm thankful I never traded Greg in for another model and even more thankful that he didn't give up on me, either.

Together, we have discovered a new level of intimacy that we didn't know existed, all because I stopped comparing and criticizing and began embracing the uniqueness of my spouse.

Over the past decade of pursuing my own healing from these (and other) issues, as well as teaching on the topic of sexual purity and restoration, I have come to understand that in some way or another sexual and emotional integrity is a battle that every woman fights. However, many women are fighting this battle with their eyes closed because they don't believe they are even engaged in the battle. Many believe that just because they are not involved in a physical, sexual affair they don't have a problem with sexual and emotional integrity. As a result, they engage in thoughts and behaviors that compromise their integrity and rob them of true sexual and emotional fulfillment.

Let me show you what I mean by introducing you to a few women whose eyes are closed to the compromises they are making.



Rebecca has been happily married for over ten years and says that her husband is very sensitive and caring in bed.

Craig has always been as concerned with my sexual pleasure as he is with his own. I feel as if it is important to him that I have an orgasm, so most of the time when we are making love, I just close my eyes and imagine being with another man. It's not a man that I know or anything. It's just an imaginary face and body who excites me because I don't know him and it feels dangerous, you know? The thought of being seduced by this stranger in some exotic place puts me in the mood for sex. I can't seem to get into that mood just sitting around the house with my husband. It's not that he's not attractive; I just get more excited at the thought of a dangerous liaison with someone whose socks I don't have to pick up off of the floor.

I would never actually do such a thing (at least I don't think I would), it's just that I feel obligated to climax, and fantasizing about another man just seems to be the only way I can do that. I don't think there's anything wrong

with it, but I joked about it with Craig one day and now he is making a big deal out of it. He says he feels betrayed that I am not ‘mentally present’ with him during our lovemaking. He says there is no difference between what I am doing and his looking at pornography, but I don’t agree. There’s nothing wrong with this if I’d never really be unfaithful to him, is there? Doesn’t every woman do this?



Carol is a very attractive woman in her midforties and has been married for over twenty years. She and her husband, Chris, are leaders in their church and serve as “marriage mentors” to couples in the congregation needing help in their relationship. However, Chris often travels out of town with his job, and Carol is left to fly solo with some sticky counseling situations.

Several months ago Carol received a call around 9 P.M. from Steve, a longtime member of her Sunday-school class. It was public knowledge that Steve’s wife had been an alcoholic for many years, and on this particular night her drunken rampage had sent Steve running for cover. He asked Carol if he could come over and talk with her and Chris for a little while.

“I knew better than to invite Steve to the house since Chris wasn’t home. After all, he was very vulnerable—and very handsome. I suggested we meet for coffee at a local deli instead. His anguish really tugged on my heartstrings. We talked past midnight, and I suggested we pray together and then head home since the deli was trying to close up.”

As Carol bowed her head with her hands clasped on the tabletop, she felt Steve’s strong hands envelop hers and she listened as he poured out his heart in prayer. “Lord, help my wife to see what she could be if she would just sober up. Help her to be more patient and kind and caring...like Carol.”

Months later, Carol still spends time imagining becoming even more intimate with Steve. As a matter of fact, things between her and Chris have gotten tense, as Carol often becomes angry or depressed for no apparent reason. “It just seems like every time I hear Steve speak in Sunday school, I hang on to every word and won-

der what else I can do to ease his pain without causing any suspicion that I have developed strong feelings for him. Some days I tell myself that I need to confess this to Chris and to our pastor and remove myself from the marriage mentoring program for a while. However, there are many other days that I think, *I'm not doing anything to compromise my marriage, so stop feeling guilty! Just because I find Steve attractive doesn't mean that I shouldn't try to help him.*



Twenty-eight and single, Sandra has been masturbating often for over fifteen years. Her struggle began at age twelve, when she found one of her mother's Harlequin romance novels. A voracious reader, Sandra was soon devouring several novels per week, becoming sexually aroused and often masturbating to get "relief." Sandra confesses:

By the time I was out of high school, I was regularly holding a book in one hand and stimulating myself with the other. While I felt in my heart that what I was doing was wrong, I could always justify it. After all, the Bible did not expressly forbid it. God had made my body to be responsive, so He surely wouldn't deny me this pleasure, would He? Since He had not given me a husband, I felt it was my right. Surely He couldn't expect me to wait that long, could He? And who was I hurting? No one else was involved.

However, I have always felt as if there is this barrier between me and God. I have sensed Him calling me to stop this behavior, to turn away from it, but the desire is so strong. I stopped reading the romance novels several years ago, but I still fantasize when I am lying in bed by myself, and I usually end up masturbating. I always say to myself, "I'll be obedient tomorrow or next week, but for right now, I just need the release." Sometimes I even get angry with God and think, *If you would give me a husband, I wouldn't have this problem!*



Lacy has been married seven years and has two young children. Even though she and her husband, David, got along great while they were dating, things have steadily gone south in their marriage because of financial pressures. Since David got laid off last year, he's had to do odd jobs to make ends meet. He took one job throwing a paper route in a neighborhood across town. He gets up at 4 A.M. to take care of the paper route responsibilities and then goes to whatever job the temporary agency has for him that day. Lacy complains:

All David wants to do is work, come home to eat, and then go straight to bed. He shows little interest in spending time with me or helping out with the kids. It's a good thing that we don't want any more children because we rarely ever have sex anymore.

I get jealous when I see other husbands grocery shopping with their wives, going to church with their families, taking their kids to the park, and stuff like that. I confessed this to a friend one day, and she said that the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. She preached me a little sermon about coveting thy neighbor's husband, so I just shut up.

Even though I would never divorce because I take my wedding vows seriously, I often wonder if David will die before me so that maybe I can have the chance at a happier marriage with a more successful and attentive husband someday. I often dream about that, usually as I lie in bed by myself in the morning after David has already left for his paper route. Somewhere between being fully awake and fully asleep, I have dreams about going on a date with a new guy who wants to take us all out to eat or about a new husband who is in the kitchen preparing to bring me breakfast in bed.

## SEEDS OF COMPROMISE, HARVESTS OF DESTRUCTION

Even though none of these women could be tried in a court of law for marital unfaithfulness and convicted of adultery, haven't they been sowing seeds of compromise? Doesn't emotional and mental unfaithfulness still compromise our sexual integrity?

Scripture warns about this very thing:

The one who sows to please [her] sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction. (Galatians 6:8)

But each one is tempted when, by [her] own evil desire, [she] is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.  
(James 1:14-15)

In these scriptures we are called to righteous living. This is the principle: The pursuit of fleshly desires will end in our ultimate demise. When we sow emotional and mental seeds of compromise, we reap a harvest of relational destruction. Just ask Jean.

## CAUGHT IN THE WEB OF INTRIGUE

Jean is in her late thirties and married to Kevin, a computer salesman. Once all of their children entered school, Jean decided to reconnect with some old friends during her extra free time. With the first big telephone bill, Kevin insisted that Jean learn to use e-mail to cut down on the expense of all this “reconnecting” she was doing! Being the adept computer salesman that he was, Kevin convinced Jean that she could learn to use the Internet just like everyone else.

She loved this new hobby of forwarding cute e-mails, surfing the Web for coupons, bidding for antiques on eBay, scanning and sending pictures in cyberspace, and so on. Then Jean discovered chat rooms.

A few minutes in a chat room each day grew into several hours each day. One morning while waiting for her buddies to log on, she read a question from someone with the screen name of MiamiMike. “Is *anyone* out there yet or am I in this room alone?”

After a few moments, Jean responded, “Looks like it’s just you and me!” By the time Jean’s friends finally entered the chat room half an hour later, she and Mike had found out quite a bit about each other—quite a bit they had in common,



in fact. Jean grew up in Florida and absolutely loved the beach. Reading about Mike's oceanfront condo while sitting in her snowy Minnesota home gave her cabin fever.

Jean began dropping the kids off at school and heading straight back home to go online, knowing that Mike would be expecting her. Once Mike asked her to log back on that evening so they could chat again before he went to bed. That night, Jean tucked the children in bed, lay down with Kevin until he fell asleep, then tiptoed out of their bedroom and into the study where MiamiMike was waiting. Jean felt deceitful, but thought, *After all, he's hundreds of miles away! What could possibly happen with that much distance separating us?*

The emotional bond between Jean and MiamiMike grew as thick as wet cement. Several weeks later, curiosity got the best of Jean, and she asked Kevin if she could fly back to Florida for the weekend to reunite with some old school girlfriends. "Sure, honey. I can manage," Kevin responded, thinking he had done her a favor. He had actually just given Jean enough rope to hang herself.

Within seventy-two hours, she was on a plane bound for Miami. Pleasantly surprised, MiamiMike met Jean at the airport and escorted her to his condo where a chilled bottle of champagne and two stems of crystal were waiting beside the hot tub. (We'll hear from Jean later in the book.)

## NOT JUST A MAN'S BATTLE!

Jesus said:

You have heard that it was said, "Do not commit adultery." But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28)

Was He speaking strictly to men here? Absolutely not! To help us apply this scripture to our own lives, let's paraphrase the verse this way:

I tell you that any woman who envisions a man longingly has already committed adultery with him in her heart.

When I hear people say that women don't struggle with sexual issues like men do, I cannot help but wonder what planet they are from or what rock they have been hiding under. Perhaps what they really mean is, the *physical* act of sex isn't an overwhelming temptation for women like it is for men.

Men and women struggle in different ways when it comes to sexual integrity. While a man's battle begins with what he takes in through his eyes, a woman's begins with her heart and her thoughts. A man must guard his eyes to maintain sexual integrity, but because God made women to be emotionally and mentally stimulated, we must closely guard our hearts and minds as well as our bodies if we want to experience God's plan for sexual and emotional fulfillment. A woman's battle is for sexual *and* emotional integrity.

While a man needs mental, emotional, and spiritual connection, his physical needs tend to be in the driver's seat and his other needs ride along in the back. The reverse is true for women. If there is one particular need that drives us, it is certainly our emotional needs. That's why it's said that men *give love to get sex* and women *give sex to get love*. This isn't intended to be a bashing statement, it's simply the way God made us.

Another unique difference between men and women is that many men are capable of giving their bodies to a partner without feeling the need to give their mind, heart, or soul, whereas women are relatively unable to do this. He can enjoy the act of sex without committing his heart or bonding spiritually with the object of his physical desire. A woman's body, however, goes only to someone whom she

| MEN   | WOMEN   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• crave physical intimacy</li> <li>• give love to get sex</li> <li>• body can disconnect from mind, heart, and soul</li> <li>• stimulated by what they see</li> <li>• recurrent physical needs cycle</li> <li>• vulnerable to unfaithfulness in the absence of physical touch</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• crave emotional intimacy</li> <li>• give sex to get love</li> <li>• body, mind, heart, and soul intricately connected</li> <li>• stimulated by what they hear</li> <li>• recurrent emotional needs cycle</li> <li>• vulnerable to unfaithfulness in the absence of emotional connection</li> </ul> |

Figure 1.1

thinks of night and day and with whom her heart and spirit have already connected (unless there is dysfunctional or addictive behavior involved). When she gives her mind, heart, and soul, her body is usually right behind. The four are intricately connected (more about this in the next chapter).

While men are primarily aroused by what they see with their eyes, women are more aroused by what they hear. He may fantasize about watching a woman undress, but she fantasizes about him whispering sweet nothings in her ear. The temptation to look at pornography can be overwhelming to a male, while females would much rather read the relational dialogue in a romance novel. Men want to look and touch, whereas women much prefer to talk and relate.

Most men experience a regular, recurring need for a physical, sexual release. Some feel this intense need as often as every couple of days. Others experience it a couple of times per week or even less (according to their season of life). While the frequency of the need varies from man to man, each one has his own sexual “cycle” in which he experiences these physical desires. While it may be difficult for some women to fathom that sex is actually a cyclical need for men, don’t we have our own unique cycle as well? Although physical pleasure may not be a cyclical need, we long for attention and affection on a regular, recurring basis.

Just as a man would become far more vulnerable to a sexual affair if his wife rarely responded to his physical needs for a sexual release, a woman becomes far more vulnerable to an affair when her emotional needs are neglected over and over. When a woman falls into a sexual affair, most often her affair begins as an emotional one. It is out of her emotional needs that her heart cries out for someone to satisfy her innermost desires to be loved, needed, valued, and cherished. A woman’s emotional needs are just as vitally important to her as a man’s physical needs are to him.

Figure 1.1 (on the previous page) summarizes the distinguishing differences between how men and women respond sexually.

## NAIVETÉ IS NOT A VIRTUE

Let’s not be naive enough to believe that because Rebecca, Carol, Sandra, or Lacy are not acting out physically with a premarital or extramarital partner that their

actions aren't compromising their sexual integrity. Nor is it wise to think that what happened to Jean or any of the other women could never happen to us.

The apostle Paul writes:

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!... Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled... Do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."... Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality. (1 Corinthians 10:12; 1 Peter 1:13-16; Ephesians 5:3)

Paul understood our very human tendency to live in denial, closing our eyes to the things in our lives that may need to change. Change is hard work, and we would rather stay as we are. But this is not how God has called us to live. He wants to help us control our minds and our desires so that we can be more like Him. He wants to help us discover His plan for relational satisfaction. But we can't do this if we insist on keeping our eyes closed to the compromise that robs us of ultimate sexual and emotional fulfillment.

To help you open your eyes to your own struggle for sexual and emotional integrity, I encourage you to take the following quiz.

**ARE YOU ENGAGED IN A BATTLE?**

Please put a checkmark in the Yes or No column in response to the following questions:

|  | Yes/No |
|--|--------|
| 1. Is having a man in your life or finding a husband something that dominates your thoughts?   | _____  |
| 2. If you have a man in your life, do you compare him to other men (physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually)?              | _____  |
| 3. Do you often think of what your life will be like after your husband is dead, wondering who the "next man" in your life could be? | _____  |

4. Do you have sexual secrets that you don't want anyone else to know about? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Do you feel like a nobody if you don't have a love interest in your life? Does a romantic relationship give you a sense of identity? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you seem to attract bad or dysfunctional relationships with men? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Do men accuse you of being manipulative or controlling? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Do you feel secretly excited or powerful when you sense that a man finds you attractive? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Do you have a difficult time responding to your husband's sexual advances because you feel he should meet your needs first? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Is remaining emotionally or physically faithful to one person a challenge for you? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Do you often choose your attire in the morning based on the men you will encounter that day? \_\_\_\_\_
12. Do you find yourself flirting or using sexual innuendos (even if you do not intend to) when conversing with someone you find attractive? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Do you resent the fact that your husband wants sex more often than you do, or wish that he would just masturbate so that you would not have to perform sexually? \_\_\_\_\_
14. Do you have to masturbate when you get sexually aroused? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Do you read romance novels because of the fantasies they evoke within you or because they arouse you sexually? \_\_\_\_\_
16. Have you ever used premarital or extramarital relationships to "medicate" your emotional pain? \_\_\_\_\_
17. Is there any area of your sexuality that (1) is not known by your husband, (2) is not approved of by your husband, or (3) does not involve your husband? \_\_\_\_\_

18. Do you spend more time or energy ministering to the needs of others through church or social activities than to your husband's sexual needs? \_\_\_\_\_
19. Do you use pornography either alone or with a partner? \_\_\_\_\_
20. Do you fantasize about being intimate with someone other than your husband? \_\_\_\_\_
21. Do you have a problem making and maintaining close female friends? \_\_\_\_\_
22. Do you converse with strangers in Internet chat rooms? \_\_\_\_\_
23. Have you ever been unable to concentrate on work, school, or the affairs of your household because of thoughts or feelings you are having about someone else? \_\_\_\_\_
24. Do you think the word *victim* describes you? \_\_\_\_\_
25. Do you avoid sex in your marriage because of the spiritual guilt or dirty feeling you experience afterward? \_\_\_\_\_

There is no “magic number” that will determine your level of sexual or emotional integrity. However, if reading through these questions has awakened you to the fact that your sexual activity, romantic behavior, or emotional attachments are a hindrance to your spiritual growth or intimacy in marriage, this book is designed to help you achieve victory in your area of struggle.<sup>1</sup>

Let's open our eyes to understand this gift of sexuality more fully and to dispel some of the myths that have perhaps kept you, like many other women, entrenched in this battle. The coming chapters will help you to:

1. understand the complexity of sexuality and better understand women's unique struggle with emotional integrity (chapter 2);
2. recognize the myths about sexuality that dominate our culture and how they affect a woman's sexual integrity (chapters 3 and 4);
3. control your tendencies to look for love in all the wrong places, whether this is a physical, mental, or emotional battle for you (chapters 5-8);

4. reconnect with your husband (or connect with your future husband) so that you can enjoy the sexual and emotional fulfillment God intends for marriage (chapter 10); and
5. avoid placing unrealistic expectations on your current or future husband and connect with the only true source of fulfillment (chapter 11).

If you have wondered why you feel so disconnected from God, your spouse, or others, this book could be your answer. My prayer is that within these pages you will find hope, healing, and restoration.

Excerpted from *Every Woman's Battle* by Shannon Ethridge. Copyright © 2003 by Shannon Ethridge. Excerpted by permission of Multnomah Books, a division of Random House, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this excerpt may be reproduced or reprinted without permission in writing from the publisher.