

Praise for
Every Young Woman's Battle

“*Every Young Woman's Battle* is shockingly honest and straightforward, which is exactly what this generation needs. I think Shannon Ethridge takes the perfect approach in dealing with some sensitive topics. The result is a very true, honest, and effective look at issues facing young women today.”

—SARAH KELLY, recording artist for Gotee Records

“Like a steady IV drip, today's teenage girls get a message of confused and cheapened sexuality. They are desperate for reasons to guard and preserve themselves. Shannon Ethridge gives girls reasons in this relevant and readable book. Every young woman and every young woman's mother need to read this book!”

—SHARON HERSH, author of “*Mom, I Feel Fat!*” and “*Mom, I Hate My Life!*”

“I'm so grateful that Shannon decided to be as honest and real as she is—that's the only way this book could be as powerful as it is.... God is going to heal in unbelievable ways through this potent work of art and heart!... I can honestly say that this book has changed me—because it gives a clear picture of who Jesus is, who we are as His bride, and why we can't seem to be satisfied with anything or anyone else.”

—BETHANY DILLON, songwriter and recording artist

“A must-read for every teenage girl! Honest and informative, this book is not only highly readable with its true-to-life illustrations, but it's packed with answers for every sexual situation today's teens encounter. What a great antidote for the twisted sexual messages our pop culture continues to dish out. Way to go, Shannon!”

—MELODY CARLSON, author of *Diary of a Teenage Girl* series and *Torch Red, Color Me Torn*

“Shannon writes with a forthright style, yet she remains tactful and kind as she presents her balanced, godly teaching on dating and relationships. Without question, this is a must-read for any young woman who longs to remain pure in her relationship with God, and I suspect this book will very quickly become a staple of small-group studies.”

—FRED STOEKER, coauthor of *Every Young Man's Battle*

“This book should be required reading for any teenage girl who has been exposed to the negative influences of the culture through media, music, movies, and fashion magazines. As someone who is in the trenches of ministry to teen girls, I appreciate Shannon’s candid approach and her willingness to tackle some difficult topics facing our young women. She does a beautiful job of exposing the godless issues of the culture while at the same time offering godly solutions.”

—VICKI COURTNEY, founder of Virtuous Reality Ministries and author
of *Your Girl: Raising a Godly Daughter in an Ungodly World*

“This book is awesome! I will be buying it and reading it with teens that I mentor. I wish it had been available to me when I was a teen.”

—ADRIENNE FREAS, homemaker and Campus Crusade for Christ staff member

“All I can say is, ‘Wow!’ Shannon and Steve have done an awesome job. I see excellence and God’s wisdom on each page of *Every Young Woman’s Battle*. Its practical applications and insights will touch and heal many.”

—LISA BEVERE, speaker, cofounder of Messenger International,
and author of *Kissed the Girls and Made Them Cry*

Readers Rave About *Every Young Woman’s Battle*

“I own a Christian bookstore in Jacksonville, and of the many copies of your book we’ve sold, I know of three girls who’ve been saved. God is using the book in young girls’ lives. Thank you so much for listening to Him. I know some girls who would love to thank you personally!” —J. E.

“I’m a sixteen-year-old Christian girl, and I live in Cambodia. A friend of mine introduced me to your book, and I wanted to say thank you. Wow! This is how I want to live—as God’s princess! I have a better way of thinking and pray that I will grow into exactly who He wants me to be. I look forward to thanking you personally in heaven.” —ELIZABETH

“I truly loved reading *Every Young Woman’s Battle*. I am only twelve, but it has opened my eyes to the world of cyber relationships and all the immoral stuff the world has made ‘okay.’ I have not been tempted yet, but I have all the weapons to resist! Thank you!” —ARIANA

“My friends are what you called technical virgins, but they’ve gone quite far. I’ve not done anything myself, but your book has inspired me not to feel pressured to mess up my life.” —ANN

“I’m sixteen and committed to purity, but it’s been tough. I found your book this morning and immediately read it start to finish. I can’t get over how well it addresses so many of the temptations and confusions I’ve had. Thank you so much for being so honest. Everyone talks vaguely about saving yourself and being pure, but what I needed were the facts. You gave me the whole package. This could be a turning point for me. Thank you so much for giving me the straight truth, the way I needed to hear it. You’ve truly been an instrument of God in my life.” —RACHEL

“I just want to thank you so very much for allowing the Lord to guide you in writing this book. I’m twenty-one, and my eyes are open to the constant battle of remaining pure mentally, emotionally, and physically. I was sexually abused very young, and in many ways your book saved my life. I’m so grateful for God protecting me until I was given this book.” —A.D.

“I didn’t realize being pure meant so much more. It’s everything we do, say, wear, and think. Now I don’t want to get a guy excited unless he’s my husband. You showed me that God doesn’t just love me like a daughter, but like a bride! That’s what I’ve been craving as long as I can remember. Someone to love me for who I am. Oh my goodness, emotional craving hurts. When I realized that God was in love with me, I started to weep. He is *in love* with *me!*” —P.

“I’m a Christian father who has struggled with drug addiction, immorality, and many issues. I believed in God, but the last four years I’ve come to know Jesus. I prayed for help for my three daughters, raising them as a single parent. He answered loud and clear with you. I want to give your book to every woman I know.

You will never really know the blessing and answer to my prayers you have been. Thank you for your courage, strength, and love for Christ and for others. He is using you!” —ROBERT

“I just finished the book and the workbook, and I just had to say, ‘Thank you!’ I loved it so much that I’m craving more! It’s like you wrote this book just for me. I feel so confident about myself and so excited to know there are other girls with the same problems. I’m doing a book report for my class, and I’m so excited to see how God will use me with my classmates who don’t know Christ.” —LINDSEY

“I’m fifteen. I took your amazing book with me when my family and I went camping this past weekend and couldn’t put it down. This past March I was saved, and my life has changed so much. I hear about all kinds of things happening to friends at school, but your book is a true gift to me!” —JANELLE

“How great a blessing your book has been to me and my friends. Not only has it brought us laughs, tears, and good conversation, it brings joy to pass it on to others in my dorm. We have felt the Spirit’s conviction, and it’s helped me get my life back on track. I will read and reread it and continually pass it on.” —K. POWELL

“Your book is amazing! I am reading it with my thirteen-year-old daughter. I wish this would have been available when I was a teen. I’m also leading a Bible study from it with my daughter and her friends in middle school. Thank you for your honest approach and for not shying away from the difficult topics and descriptions. It is changing girls’ lives daily!” —ALICE

“I’m a youth leader from Argentina, and it’s been incredible how God is ministering to these kids’ lives as we’ve started studying the book. Thank you from the women around the world!” —PAULA

Foreword by Josh McDowell

SHANNON ETHRIDGE
STEPHEN ARTERBURN

WORKBOOK INCLUDED

Every Young Woman's Battle

**Guarding Your Mind, Heart, and Body
in a Sex-Saturated World**



WATERBROOK
PRESS

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

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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 978-0-307-45800-1

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

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

Every young woman's battle / Shannon Ethridge and Stephen Arterburn.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Young women—Religious life. 2. Young women—Conduct of life. I. Arterburn, Stephen, 1953–
II. Title.

BV4551.3.E84 2004

241'.66—dc22

2004002068

Printed in the United States of America

2009

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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c o n t e n t s

Foreword by Josh McDowell	ix
Dedication and Acknowledgments	xiii
A Note to Parents	xv
Introduction by Stephen Arterburn	1

Part I: Understanding Our Battle

1 Daring to Be Truthful	7
2 Back to the Blueprints for Sexuality	16
3 Building Lives of Sexual Integrity	23
4 Myths That Intensify Our Struggle	31

Part II: Avoiding Self-Destruction

5 Fueling Your Own Sexual Fire	43
6 Making Friends with the Mirror	51
7 Doing a Reality Check	61
8 Breaking the Cycle of Abuse	70

Part III: Avoiding the Destruction of Others

9 Pursuing Power	81
10 Dressing to Impress	89
11 To Flirt or Not to Flirt	97

Part IV: Guarding Your Mind

12 Winning the Mental Battle	107
13 A Healthy Starvation Diet	115
14 Mastering the Media	123

Part V: Guarding Your Heart

15 Winning the Emotional Battle 137
16 Good to Go! 141
17 Proceeding with Caution 146
18 Knowing Where to Stop! 154

Part VI: Guarding Your Body

19 Winning the Physical Battle 163
20 “Technical” Virginity 173
21 Sex Without Strings 181
22 “But We’re in Love!” 188

Part VII: Looking for Love in the Right Places

23 When the Time Is Right for Mr. Right 197
24 Becoming Mrs. Right 204
25 Falling in Love with Jesus 211

Afterword: If You Desire Other Women 221

Workbook

Questions You May Have About This Workbook 227
1 Understanding Our Battle. 231
2 Building Lives of Sexual Integrity 236
3 Avoiding Self-Destruction. 243
4 Avoiding the Destruction of Others 250
5 Guarding Your Mind. 256
6 Guarding Your Heart 263
7 Guarding Your Body. 269
8 Looking for Love in the Right Places. 275
 Don’t Keep It to Yourself. 282

Notes 283

foreword

Have you ever become frustrated working through a maze in a puzzle book? The goal is to discover a pathway from the starting point to the end without crossing over any lines. However, the multitude of dead ends can make this a true test of your patience and concentration.

Imagine a *giant* maze the size of a football field. Suppose someone offers you a ten-thousand-dollar reward if you can successfully make your way from start to finish within four minutes. You are certainly motivated, but when you enter the maze, you find that you can't see anything but the nine-foot-high walls directly in front and on each side of you. There are no markers to direct your path, and you have no way of discerning when a dead end is right around the corner. Your chances of victory are next to impossible. You need the help of a trusted advisor who is more familiar with this maze than you are.

If my daughter asked me to help her with such a challenge, do you know what I would do? I'd get a forty-foot ladder and two cell phones. I'd give one phone to her and carry the other with me to the top of the ladder where I'd have an aerial view of the maze. Then I'd call her to give guidance from above. I could warn her when she follows a dead end path, and I would tell her when to turn right and when to turn left.

Now let me ask you this: Would my daughter choose to disregard my instructions and attempt to trust her own sense of direction in that giant maze? Of course not. She would listen carefully to my every word, because she knows that I can see things ahead that she can't, that I am worthy of her trust, and that I love her and want her to succeed.

All young people face a similar challenge, only the prize is much greater than a measly ten thousand dollars. The prize is the health, happiness, peace, and

contentment that come from saving yourself for marriage, choosing a good mate, and bringing beautiful children into the world. I have four such children, and after thirty years of being a husband and a dad, I can honestly tell you that nothing on this side of heaven brings me greater joy than my family. You're probably one of the 93 percent of teenagers who expect to marry someday and the 91 percent who hope to have children.¹ If so, please know that your entire future, including your ability to have a successful marriage and your own children someday, is made up of one decision after another. You may not always have the foresight to know where each decision will lead you.

Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." All over the world, young people are making wrong decisions that seem right to them. Whether it's the movies they watch or the lies they tell their parents or how far they're willing to go on a date, many young people think, *It's no big deal... Everybody does it... It feels right to me.* They can't tell the difference between right and wrong, because they have no moral compass to direct them in the path of absolute truth.

Because of their poor sense of direction, many of your peers are making decisions that lead them not toward an abundant, joy-filled life, but toward destruction and even death. Each day in the United States,

- 4,219 teenagers contract a sexually transmitted disease, and many of these will later face a premature death as a result;
- 1,106 teenage girls abort their unborn babies; and
- 6 teens commit suicide, often because of a broken heart or out of guilt over a premarital sexual relationship.²

Every single day we lose precious lives because of one former decision made in the heat of the moment. Choices that seem right to these young people eventually lead down the wrong path entirely.

You have to decide whether you are going to trust your own judgment in your pursuit of sexual purity or whether you are going to look to a trusted advisor for guidance. Even though I can't be waiting on a forty-foot ladder for your cell phone call, I want you to know that you have a heavenly Father who sees the big picture, knows exactly which turns lead to dead ends, and recognizes the clear path toward victory. God has divine knowledge of where each and every decision will take you.

Isaiah 30:21 says, “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’ ” You may not hear an audible voice with the ears on your head, but if you are trusting in Jesus Christ to guide you through life’s maze, you can hear Him with the ears of your heart—if you tune out the distractions of the world and listen for His perfect direction. He will not fail you in your time of need. He is completely trustworthy. He loves you so much, and He certainly wants to see you succeed.

As a matter of fact, He so desires that you consistently choose the right path that He gave you a road map (the Bible) and a trusted advisor (the Holy Spirit) to guide you. You may think that God is some kind of cosmic kill-joy who just throws out a bunch of “thou shalt nots” to steal all your fun. But God’s commandments offer us valuable precepts—or guidelines—to live by. These precepts will do two things: protect you and provide for you. Think of these precepts as an umbrella. As long as you walk under them, you are protected from getting wet and provided with dryness and comfort. But moving out from underneath that umbrella brings uncomfortable consequences. Similarly, when you cherish your sexuality and guard it according to God’s plan, you’ll be protected from sexually transmitted diseases, unplanned pregnancy, unhealthy relationships, and extreme emotional roller-coaster rides. You’ll be provided with safety and security and hope for a promising future. If, however, you ignore God’s guidance and move out from under His precepts, you will most certainly experience painful consequences down the road.

Over the past four decades, I’ve spoken to over seven million young people in over eighty-four countries about *Why True Love Waits*, how to discern *Right from Wrong*, and most recently how to move *Beyond Belief to Convictions*. Most of the questions I receive from teenagers as I travel and speak have to do with sex, love, or dating relationships. While I’m concerned about what you and your peers may be tempted to do when alone with the opposite sex, I’m more concerned with what you believe about your sexuality and God’s desire for your purity. That’s why I’m thrilled that you are holding this book in your hands. I know that you are going to discover it to be an invaluable tool that will lead you down the path toward a renewed mind, a strong spirit, a pure heart, a healthy body, and tremendously rewarding relationships with others and with God. I pray that you’ll take every

word to heart, apply these principles in your daily life, and allow God to lead you toward the rich prize of a truly abundant life.

If you are a parent reading this, I want to encourage you not just to give this book to your daughter but to read through it with her and talk with her about this traditionally taboo but vitally important topic. If you think that your child doesn't want to discuss such an intimate subject with you, please think again. Although she may not beg you to talk about sex with her, nearly seven out of ten teens (69 percent) agree it would be easier for them to postpone sexual activity and avoid teen pregnancy if they were able to have more open, honest conversations about these topics with their parents. The same percentage also says that they *are* ready to listen to things that parents thought they were *not* ready to hear. When asked about the reasons teenage girls have babies, 78 percent of white and 70 percent of African American teenagers reported lack of communication between a girl and her parents as one of the key factors. Thirty-one percent of teens say that their parents, not their friends, have the most influence on their decisions about sex.³

The bottom line is this: When it comes to sexuality, your daughter needs your guidance and wants it probably far more than you realize. Don't wait for her to bring up the topic. That may never happen. Be proactive in helping her develop strong personal convictions about guarding her sexuality and give her a reliable moral compass. Chances are, because of your guidance, love, and trustworthiness, you'll someday watch her emerge as a victor in every young woman's battle for sexual and emotional purity.

—JOSH MCDOWELL

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

from Shannon Ethridge:

For Erin.

You bring unspeakable joy into all of our lives.
I pray your hunger for God and your passion for purity
will only increase as you continue to blossom.



from Stephen Arterburn:

For Madeline.

I am so glad to be your father, and I will always
be there to help you walk in the footsteps
of your heavenly Father.

As always, my first thanks goes to Jesus Christ for entrusting me with the vision for this book. I pray that it's everything You wanted it to be, and that it touches every life You want it to touch.

To Greg, my husband and best friend, thank you for all that you do and all that you are to me and our children. You are a wonderful helpmate and father, and I love you fiercely.

To my "almost as tall as me" baby girl, Erin. Thank you for helping us proof

Mister Mattster Monster, you really stepped up to the plate while Mommy was working on this book. I appreciate all of your help around the house and the comic relief that your antics provide. Life would be pretty dull without you.

Thanks to my family and friends who have been so supportive. I appreciate your patience with me and your many prayers that have sustained me.

To my friends at Rockin' C Ranch and others who have made writing retreat places available, thank you for your warm hospitality and for a quiet place to be alone with God and my laptop.

Tracy Kartes, you have been such a blessing to me and to this book. I love you to the moon and back, girlfriend.

To Ron and Katie Luce, Dave Hasz, and the many Honor Academy interns who contributed significantly to this book, a sincere thank you for allowing me to serve alongside you at Teen Mania Ministries. I count it one of my greatest blessings in life.

To Adrienne and Brian Freas, I appreciate how you allowed the Holy Spirit to use you in miraculous ways during the finalizing of this manuscript. You are definitely chosen instruments of God and a true blessing to me and the many girls who'll read this book.

To Don Pape, Laura Barker, and all the folks at WaterBrook Press, thank you so much for collaborating with us to change lives. We make a great team!

To Liz Heaney, my phenomenal editor, thank you for gracing this project with your wisdom and insight. Also, a sincere thanks to all of our "junior editors"—both guys and girls. There are too many of you to name, but you know who you are and so does God. I pray He blesses your socks off for your willingness to contribute.

Last, but certainly not least, a special thank you to Steve Arterburn, Fred Stoeker, Kenny Luck, and Mike Yorkey. It is such an honor and a privilege to partner with you guys. Thank you for laying such a strong foundation with the Every Man series.

—SHANNON ETHRIDGE

a n o t e t o p a r e n t s

In *Every Young Woman's Battle*, we discuss sexual purity from emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical perspectives, teaching readers to guard their minds, hearts, and bodies in this sex-saturated world. We do so using very frank, contemporary language, writing especially for young women in their teens to early twenties.

Perhaps you are wondering how frank we've been or if this book is appropriate for your daughter at this point in her life. If she regularly watches television, listens to pop music, or reads teen magazines, nothing in this book will be too graphic or shocking for her. Our goal is to present a credible, helpful, Christian perspective on the images your daughter is exposed to every day.

If, on the other hand, you believe she is already committed to sexual purity, or you fear that a frank discussion on the topic may be inappropriate for her, we encourage you to review *Every Young Woman's Battle* before passing it on to your daughter. We have made every effort to address sensitive issues with tact and respect, emphasizing God's desire that young women live with sexual integrity. Our commitment to helping young women requires us to be honest and open with them, and we hope that our doing so will pave the way for your daughter to make many healthy choices about her sexuality.

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

(by Stephen Arterburn)

Years ago when I was dating, young men used young women like you for their own pleasure. They manipulated and pressured girls sexually in order to prop up their own flagging egos.

Nothing felt better to these guys than to prove they still “had it,” so they would go out and get whatever they wanted from any girl who would give it to them. These young men didn’t see girls as people, but as inferior objects there for a guy’s pleasure. They judged a young woman by her body parts and how much she exposed them and what she gave away on a date. They never thought much about what she might be feeling or thinking; they just wanted what they wanted, and they expected a girl to give it if she wanted the “relationship” to continue. The way these guys saw it, girls were there to help guys prove they were “real” men.

When I was in high school and college, every young woman had a reputation—those who would “put out” and those who wouldn’t. Guys would compare notes—“Did she or didn’t she?”—and brag about their sexual conquests. The girls with a reputation for giving guys what they wanted may have gone out on lots of dates, but they didn’t have healthy dating relationships. Young men wanted to look, touch, and feel these girls, but they didn’t want to commit to a girl with such a reputation. They simply took what they could get for as long as they wanted it, and then moved on to the next sexual target.

The young men of my day would say or do whatever a girl wanted so that she would be willing to give him her body, even if it meant saying things such as “I love you,” “You’re special,” or “I have never felt like this before.” He would take her out to eat or to a movie, because he believed those things would ensure that he’d receive payoff at the end of the evening. He’d make her feel loved and cared for

because he knew that was how he could get what he wanted from her. But what these young men took, they never gave back. Each time they had sex with a girl, they took a piece of her soul.

Why am I'm telling you this? Because I want you to know what guys are like—even Christian guys. You see, guys haven't changed when it comes to how they view women. The situation has not improved. In fact, in many ways it has become much worse. I don't want you to be used and abused. You are a special creation of God, and He loves you even more than I love my daughter. He wants the best for you, as I want the best for her. God does not want you to be used, nor does He want you to use others. He wants sexual and emotional integrity for you. He has a great life ahead for you, and you can most easily find it if you find a way to live with sexual integrity.

You are growing up in a culture that does not value sexual integrity and purity. Instead, it values instant gratification and pleasure at all costs. Some of you have begun to live by the values of this culture. You have abandoned what you know to be right deep down inside. You have stopped listening to the small voice inside of you that wants to guide you to stay pure and live with self-respect and high self-esteem. Perhaps you no longer resist the sexual advances of young men, or perhaps you have become the aggressor. You may be the one going after the boys and participating in sexual behavior that dishonors God, your family, and yourself. If you have, this book will show you a path to healing and a second chance with God. If you have not, it will help you develop a defense for yourself, your reputation, and the life God intends you to live. My prayer, our prayer, is that you will read this book, believe it, and live according to the truths we present here.

Before you read what my coauthor, Shannon, has written, I want to tell you what has happened to the young men of my day. We have all gotten older, but many have not gotten wiser. Our culture has changed significantly in the past decade. Sadly, the Internet, television, movies, and advertising have made women seem more like objects than ever before. Men have gone from feeding their sexual obsessions with young women to feeding them with sexual images anywhere and everywhere: billboards, lingerie ads, swimsuit special editions, over two million porn sites, and network television shows. They've become hooked on images, counterfeits of the real thing. Everywhere they look they see women as objects of

gratification. Believe me—more men than ever are looking at women as objects to be used for their own pleasure. For every man it's a battle just to view women in the proper light. For many it's the battle of a lifetime.

The more a guy sees and experiences pornography and other sexually explicit images, the more he wants. He tells himself he is just being a man, just doing what all men do. "It's normal" or "It's not hurting anyone," he says as his focus shifts more away from the real women in his life and more and more to the unreal world of sexual gratification at any cost. Many husbands—even Christian husbands—regularly enter a private world of sexual pleasure and shame. For many, sex inside of marriage is no longer enough because they have become hooked on sex as conceived by our wayward culture.

Many men want out but have not known how to get out. About three years ago, Fred Stoeker and I wrote a book called *Every Man's Battle* because we wanted to give men a strategy for freedom and help them win this battle. The book quickly became a best seller and remains on the bestseller list today. The fathers who read it wanted something for their sons, so Fred Stoeker and I wrote *Every Young Man's Battle*. It, too, hit the bestseller list. Fred and I began receiving hundreds of e-mails and a few letters from young men saying that the book had changed their perspective on sex and young women and that they wanted to live the life of sexual integrity that we had written about.

Then something else began to happen. We began receiving e-mails from women expressing a desire for a book of their own on sexual integrity. They, too, wanted to live according to God's standard. Additionally, readers of *Every Woman's Battle* asked for a book for their daughters, so Shannon and I decided to write the book you hold in your hands. We hope it meets a tremendous need for frank talk about your sexuality and that it gives you some solid answers on how to live in a culture designed to throw you off God's track.

You have a job to do, one that will impact your future fulfillment and security. The job? To successfully integrate your sexuality with the rest of your life. We want you to be the same person on Friday night that you are on Sunday when you are at church. We don't want you to live a Christian life in front of some people but then act differently around guys. A segmented life brings confusion, guilt, and often despair.

We don't want that for you. We want you to have a healthy view of sex. We want you to believe that sex as God intended it is so great that it's worth waiting until marriage to experience. We want you to be comfortable with yourself and with others, deeply connected, and free of guilt and shame. We want the best for you and hope this little book will be the beginning of your seeking, finding, and living the best life possible.



understanding our battle



daring to be truthful

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

JOHN 8:31-32

Truth or dare. You've probably played this game with girlfriends at a slumber party or perhaps been warned by your parents not to play it at all. It's a game where you agree to do anything another player dares you to do, regardless of how embarrassing or disgusting it may be, or else to tell the absolute truth in response to a particular question, regardless of how private or humiliating your answer may be.

As a young girl, I never opted out of playing such games. It never even occurred to me I had a choice. My friends dared me to do some ridiculous things—eat a ketchup, mustard, and mayonnaise sandwich; drink a Dr. Pepper as fast as possible and then burp as loudly as I could in front of my friend's older brother; and passionately kiss my stuffed monkey while my friend took a Polaroid picture. But I usually took the dare because I didn't want to answer questions such as these: Who do you think is the cutest boy in school? How many boys have you kissed? How far have you ever gone with a boy? Eating something gross or making an idiot out of myself was easy compared to telling the truth about certain things.

Sometimes the truth hurts, and it's much easier if we can keep it hidden. As a matter of fact, sometimes the secrets we harbor are so painful that we don't want to face them ourselves. We assume that these secrets will go away if we don't think or talk about them with anyone. But the opposite is true. Shameful secrets fester like a splinter in a finger, and it's much better to name the secret and to let someone help us remove it from our lives so the wound will heal.

You will read many stories in this book from young women (ages twelve to twenty) who have courageously done just that. They've dared to tell the truth about

their battle to guard their minds, hearts, and bodies from sexual sin. We hope that you will learn some lessons the easy way and avoid making mistakes of your own, or that you will recognize the truth about any struggles you are currently facing in your battle for sexual purity and understand how you can overcome them.

IGNORANCE IS NOT A VIRTUE

You may find some of the stories in this book eyeopening or surprising. Please know that we are not trying to shock, disgust, or defile* you in any way. We want you to be wise to the ways of the world so you can guard yourself against them. Ignorance is not a spiritual gift, nor is it a virtue. You can be wise *and* innocent at the same time, and we intend to prepare you to make responsible decisions if and when temptations come across your path. Also, don't assume that the temptations we'll be discussing won't come to call in your life. The apostle Paul wrote:

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)

Let's peek into the private lives of some of your peers who were brave enough to tell the truth about their battles for sexual purity.

MOLLY'S PRIVATE WAR

Molly's struggle began when she stumbled upon a pornographic television show and later chose to stumble onto it again...and again...and again.

* *defile*—to corrupt one's purity

I know that it was wrong and that everyone messes up big time, but I still feel bad, mainly because I not only exposed myself to pornography,* but I also exposed two of my very best friends. One of them was a good enough friend to me to confess to her parents what we had done. My parents were extremely upset, and I don't blame them. They even helped me by having someone change the television settings so that nothing pornographic comes in now, and that channel is blank.

I was fine for a while and tried very hard to forget what I saw, which worked for the most part. But recently I have developed a habit of masturbating† to these images and cannot stop. I know this is wrong, and I feel dirty and guilty. I have confessed my sins to God, but that doesn't seem to be enough. I don't want anyone to find out, because I know that they would be disgusted and disappointed in me.

We're sure that if Molly had known how addicting pornography can be, she would have avoided it altogether. If either pornography or habitual masturbation have become problems in your life, this book will help you break free from these habits that hinder your sexual integrity and spiritual peace.

LAUREN'S PRIVATE WAR

Lauren attended a sexuality conference when she was in junior high and made a pledge to remain sexually abstinent until marriage. Now in high school, she is disheartened by the choices her friends are making and can't help but wonder if it's realistic for her to maintain her pledge.

I went to a dance at my school and most of my friends were freak dancing, moving around like they were having sex with their clothes on, and doing nasty stuff with each other—girls with guys, girls with girls, anything goes.

* *pornography*—material that graphically demonstrates sexually erotic behavior

† *masturbating*—touching one's own genitals in order to cause self-arousal

Everyone looked like they were having so much fun, and they kept telling me to lighten up and join the party. Also, a couple of my girlfriends accepted a dare to perform oral sex* on some guys in the back of the bus—and now those girls are *really* popular with the guys. I try to remind myself that they are popular for the wrong reasons, but sometimes I wonder if I'm being too prudish and am missing out on all the fun it seems that everyone else is having.

We know many of you reading this book want to maintain sexual purity, but like Lauren, you feel all alone in your desire and are wondering if it's even possible. Don't be discouraged. It's not only possible, but we believe you'll agree that it's much better to wait to enjoy sex according to God's perfect plan—in marriage someday—than to engage in sexual activities as if they're just another recreational hobby. Keep reading and we'll show you exactly how you can do just that.

EMMA'S PRIVATE WAR

Emma was daring enough to share the truth about her struggles in hopes of encouraging other young women to avoid the mistakes she made. She felt very insecure in her early teens and believed something was wrong with her because guys never seemed attracted to her. Even though she had good relationships with her parents, she wanted to be pursued by a young man. In order to make herself look more like the popular girls at school, she started dieting and exercising to lose weight.

It didn't take long for my weight loss obsession to turn into a serious eating disorder. I felt desperate for boys to notice my slender body, and I craved compliments like crazy. When a guy did compliment me, it puffed me up with pride and I felt like I was really something. I would hang around him more as some sort of "payment" for the attention he gave me as well as a "security deposit" so that he'd keep the compliments coming. I'd also flirt by linking arms with him buddy-style, bumping into him on purpose, or leaning up against him.

* *oral sex*—placing one's mouth on the partner's genital area for sexual stimulation

Over the next three years I got into a couple of relationships that I thought were serious, but the guys weren't so serious. I gave these guys all I had, including my body, but eventually I got dumped for the next girl. Every time I experienced another breakup, I wondered what was wrong with me. Why didn't he want me anymore? Was I not attractive enough? Was I still too fat? Abusing my body and giving it away was how I tried to get the attention and affirmation I wanted from a guy, but what I got was never enough.

The battle to be thin enough, as well as the battle to get your emotional needs met by any boyfriend, can seem like a never-ending one. If you've found yourself craving a relationship so much that you engage in behaviors you are not proud of, this book is for you. It will help you gain a healthy balance between your natural, God-given desire to be loved and your ability to avoid sexually tempting situations.

As a matter of fact, I wish I had known the information in this book when I was your age and fighting my own battles.

SHANNON'S PRIVATE WAR

If anyone had asked me when I was twelve if I wanted to remain a virgin until marriage, I would have said, "Of course I do!"

At thirteen, I would have said, "I think so."

By fourteen, I would have replied, "Maybe."

At age fifteen, my response would have been, "I don't see how that is possible." Unfortunately, my innocence became just a memory that year. I was date raped, which I never told anyone about for fear that I would be blamed. I had, after all, flirted with this eighteen-year-old boy to get his attention and had agreed to spend time alone with him behind my parents' back, so I mistakenly said nothing. Because I kept this secret, no one helped me heal from the abuse or told me I was still a virgin in God's eyes. (We'll talk more about the nature of virginity in the next chapter.)

A few months later, my parents allowed me to begin dating. Because I believed that my virginity had already been stolen from me, I didn't feel I had a reason to withhold my body from most of the young men I dated. Sex became a routine part

of my romantic relationships—the price that I felt I must pay for the attention and affection that I craved. This is one of the reasons I want you to read this book. I want you to have information I did not have. I also want you to live without secrets and to be open about who you are and how you feel about boys and what they want to do with you.

NO EXEMPTIONS FROM SEXUAL TEMPTATION

As you read about the darker side of my younger days, you might think I was a messed-up girl from a dysfunctional home and a bad neighborhood, or that I wasn't a Christian, or that I wasn't too smart.

Wrong.

I grew up in rural Northeast Texas with educated, middle-class parents who were faithfully married to each other. My family lived in a modest home in the country where safety was never an issue. Mother took me to church regularly, and I confirmed my belief in Jesus Christ at the age of twelve. I even served as president of my youth group for several years. I got straight As in high school and went on to graduate from college.

As my life shows, you don't have to be messed up or even come from a messed-up family to make irresponsible decisions that will mess up your life. Not even “good Christian girls” are exempt from sexual temptations. Not even you.

What would cause someone like you or your friends to go from saving herself for her Prince Charming to kissing toads? Is it possible to climb out of the toad swamp once you are in it? Is this a war that can even be won? If so, how?

This book answers these questions. It will show you how you can maneuver through the minefield of youth without losing the battle for sexual and emotional integrity. If you can avoid the land mines and be victorious in the battle, you will be more likely to enter your adult years with confidence and purpose. Your life will be free of desperation, and you will make great choices for your future. The world can be yours, but first learn more about the intensity of your own private battle by answering yes or no to the following questions.

1. Do you watch television shows or movies with sexual jokes or graphic sex scenes?

2. Does the music you listen to talk blatantly of sexual desires outside of marriage?
3. Do you ever act overly friendly or seductively* to get a guy's attention?
4. Do thoughts of having or keeping a boyfriend consume your mind to the point that you find it difficult to concentrate on anything else for any length of time?
5. Are you looking for or entertaining the idea of a serious romantic relationship even though it will be several years before you are ready to get married?
6. Do you habitually masturbate to pleasure yourself sexually or as a means of resisting sexual involvement with others?
7. Do you consider oral sex or other sexual activities okay because they're not vaginal sex and you can't get pregnant from them?
8. Do you feel that your virginity has been stolen from you?
9. Do you feel as if you are "damaged goods" that a "respectable guy" wouldn't want?
10. Do you believe it is ever okay for a couple to live together even though they are not married?
11. Do you believe it is ever okay for a couple to have sex before marriage?
12. Have you ever lied to your parents about where you were going or whom you were with because you knew they wouldn't approve if you told the truth?
13. Would you lie to your parents in order to go out with a particular guy you liked a lot if you knew you could get away with it?
14. Have you ever made out with a guy just because it seemed like the thing to do?
15. Are you anxious to get out from under the control of your parents and gain your freedom to pursue any relationship you want?
16. Do you go into Web sites or chat rooms that you know your parents would not approve of?

* *seductively*—in an alluring or sexually tempting manner

17. Have you ever given your phone number or physical address to a stranger you were flirting with over the Internet without your parents' knowledge?
18. Have you set rules or guidelines for your behavior or your relationships that you've already broken?
19. Do you hide certain things, such as steamy love letters, magazines, or videos?
20. Do you envision that getting married someday will be the answer to all of your problems and relieve you of your sexual and emotional temptations?

Which questions did you mark yes? Each one reveals a potential pitfall that makes you more likely to give in to sexual temptation when it arises. Whether you are just entering puberty and new to this struggle or an experienced young adult, you can design a rock-solid defense to avoid becoming a casualty of this war. Whether you are sexually pure, hanging on to your virginity by a thread, or sleeping with a guy, you can maintain and/or reclaim your sexual integrity not just throughout your youth, but throughout your whole life. Recognizing and understanding what kind of things can cause every woman, regardless of her age or marital status, to stumble and fall into sexual temptation is the key. By learning to guard your mind, heart, and body against sexual compromise and understanding God's plan for your sexual and emotional fulfillment, you can maneuver your way through your teenage years with grace...and without regrets.

As you begin to understand this gift of sexuality more fully, you will be able to dispel some of the myths that can keep you entrenched in this battle. The coming chapters will help you

- understand the complexity of your sexuality and what part your emotions play in the battle;
- recognize the myths about sexuality that dominate our culture and how they can affect your sexual beliefs and choices;
- embrace sexual purity as a preferred lifestyle, not just physically, but mentally, emotionally, and spiritually as well;
- enjoy healthy, satisfying relationships with yourself, God, and others;
- find the love that you are looking for without looking in the wrong places or placing unrealistic expectations on your boyfriend or future husband;
- and

- feel good about yourself not just for a moment but for the rest of your life.

If you have been successful in overcoming temptations thus far, praise God for His protection, and prepare for further victory. If you have given in to any of these temptations, if you wonder why you feel so disconnected from God, or if you feel anxious about your present or future relationships, this book could be your pathway to peace.

Our prayer is that you will find wisdom, courage, hope, and strength to face *and win* the battle for sexual and emotional integrity.

He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.

Proverbs 2:7-11

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