

“I’m so thankful that Helen has bravely addressed this widespread but rarely mentioned struggle facing women (yes—even Christian women!) today. Her biblical insight, honest personal testimony and extremely wise, practical advice are for you, whether you are in the throes of a porn addiction, engaging in an occasional fantasy world, one click away from investigating what all the fuss is about, or eager to help other women in the battle for purity. My prayer is that God would use this book to encourage us to pursue purity at levels often neglected in our discipleship.”

Hilary Nicholls, founder of FrockChicks

“This is a book that addresses issues that women are grappling with—and all too often on their own. The church needs to wake up to the reality that pornography is not just a man’s problem and that the popularity of women’s erotica is reaching epidemic proportions in our culture. Written with an understanding of the issues involved, Helen is convinced that the gospel of Christ provides the only way out for people caught up in a life of sexual fantasy—and offers something much more intoxicating.”

Carrie Sandom, Director of Women’s Ministry, Cornhill Training Course, London

“At last, a book on sexual temptation for women (though there’s much for men to learn here as well). *Purity Is Possible* is honest, real, realistic—all of which makes the hope that it offers truly hopeful. Above all, it points to the freedom and purity that we find through faith in the work of Jesus.”

Tim Chester, author of *Captured by a Better Vision: Living Porn Free and Enjoying God*

“Helen rivets biblical truth to life with courage and conviction, warmth and humility. Exposing the destructive nature of female sexual fantasy as a disorder of worship often fuelled by pornography, she shows what it looks like for us to live out the gospel of Christ in sexual purity. Warmly recommended.”

Sally Orwin Lee, Biblical Counselling UK

“This is a great book; realistic, honest, wise, warm and joyful. If this area is one you’re struggling in, I hope you feel able to pick it up and read it—Helen understands where you’re at, and how you’re feeling, and can point you to real help and hope.”

Andrea Trevenna, Associate Ministry for Women at St Nicholas Church, Sevenoaks, Kent; author of *The Heart of Singleness*

“We have many reasons to be grateful to Helen for this book. She writes with personal honesty, which will get us talking about a virtually ignored struggle. She writes wisely and perceptively, which means those conversations will be pastorally rich and biblically faithful. And she writes practically about the gospel of grace, which means women will be helped to change. Buy it and use it, not simply to escape the snare of sexual fantasy, but to find something better.”

Steve Midgley, Minister of Christ Church, Cambridge



PURITY
IS POSSIBLE

HELEN THORNE


the good book
COMPANY

Purity is possible: *How to live free of the fantasy trap*
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Introduction

There is a rumour going round that women don't watch online sex. There's a school of thought that says that our fantasies are romantic rather than explicit. Some argue that we don't think as visually as men, so pornography is rarely appealing. A few believe that we are, by nature, more pure and innocent.

I wish the rumours were right. They're not. Not in my experience, and not in the experience of most women I know.

I'm going to be honest with you because in what follows, I'm going to be asking you to be honest with yourself. In the past:

1. I have created sexual fantasies in my mind.
2. I have read women's erotica.
3. I have watched porn on the web.

And I've enjoyed it.

I know I'm not alone. An increasing number of women are watching internet pornography. One in three visitors to porn sites are female, according to a 2007 Nielson study. Gone are the days when films were just made by men for men. There are now alternatives to the seedy scenarios where blondes swoon at the first glimpse of the photocopier repair-man and give

in to his every whim. Now female directors are producing short pieces that are specifically designed to arouse pleasure in women. The material is sensitive, sensual... appealing.

And many Christian women are no strangers to these sites. A survey in 2006 conducted by ChristiaNet found that 20% of Christian women use pornography regularly, and other surveys have produced a similar figure. That is one in five of us—perhaps it's you. My own experience in women's ministry would suggest that the true figure is much higher.

Even more of us are reading erotica. We tend not to call it that—it sounds better to refer to it as “romance”, or simply as the latest bestseller—but reading it we are. *Fifty Shades of Grey* became the bestselling book in both Britain and the USA in 2012, and women consumed it avidly at home, on the bus and during lunchtimes at work. A book soaked through with explicit scenes, including violent sexual encounters, became the must-have novel of the year. And with *Fifty Shades of Grey*, explicit erotica became socially acceptable. Society attached no shame to reading and enjoying it—and millions did. Maybe you were one of them.

But maybe you weren't. Perhaps you've never visited a porn site, and never read an erotic novel, and never even wanted to. You picked up this book because it mentioned “fantasy” on the front (and now you're wondering whether this book is for you). Yet there are many, many more women who don't watch or read porn, but who write it—not on paper for publication, but in our minds for private enjoyment. It's sexual fantasy.

By sexual fantasy, I don't mean remembering a past sexual experience with a smile, or looking forward to sex with anticipation. I mean constructing a fantasy world—a better

sex life—than our reality. I mean when we daydream about a different us, having a different sex life to the one that exists in the real world. That's sexual fantasising. For some, it's a fleeting thought; for others, a complex web of characters and intrigue that preoccupies our waking hours and leaves us feeling simultaneously intoxicated and disgusted.

The trouble is, few of us admit to any of this. Few of us feel we *can* admit to it, because no one ever talks about it. Churches certainly don't. When it comes to men, there's an acceptance that porn use is a common struggle. It's OK to admit to it, to talk about it, to get help with it.

Not for us. Women's struggles in this area are hardly ever mentioned, preached about, or made the focus of a conference. It's the great unspoken issue of our technological age.

So I want to say thank you for picking this book up and starting to read it. If you are using porn, reading erotica, or constructing sexual fantasies—whether you feel trapped in it, or whether you're not even sure it's that bad—you are in the same position as thousands and thousands of other women. You'll read about some of them in this book (all of their names have been changed, but they are all real women). You are not alone. And you have been pretty courageous just by getting a copy of this book, and opening up the first page. Thank you.

I don't think reading this book will be easy for you. It wasn't easy for me to write, because it brought me face to face with who I am. But it will take you on an exciting journey into freedom. You can leave excuses behind, and you can leave guilt behind. You can start walking with me towards a place far more intoxicating than pornography—a place that is full of love, free from guilt and grounded in utter security.

Helen Thorne

You can discover that, for all of us, and no matter what you've done, a beautiful purity *is* possible.

1. Beauty

We were designed to be beautiful. *You* are designed to be beautiful.

Not *Cosmopolitan* beautiful—that demands perfect proportions, symmetrical features and flawless skin. Magazine beauty is superficial beauty, an attractiveness that’s only millimetres deep, and few of us were designed for that. Our noses are bent, our hair lacks shine, our wobbly bits are, well, a little too wobbly. For most of us, 21st-century western ideals of loveliness are out of our grasp.

Real beauty—that’s what we were designed for. We were made for the kind of beauty that starts in the heart and overflows into every part of our being. It’s a beauty that is utterly captivating, precious beyond measure, and deep; so deep that it’s foundational to everything we say and do. It’s the kind of beauty that flows from utter fulfilment, complete contentment, a purposeful life and a sense of security about who we are.

It’s a beauty that no one can manufacture for themselves but which is instantly obvious and overwhelmingly alluring when it comes into view. It’s an attractiveness that has absolutely

nothing to do with how we look on the outside and everything to do with how we are on the inside. It's a quality that makes you smile whenever you see it. That's what we are made to enjoy.

Not just stopping

I was discussing this book with my hairdresser recently. My hairdresser has a wonderful way of speaking her mind. "So basically," she said, "your book's about sexual fantasies and pornography, and you're going to say: *That's stupid, stop it, don't do it anymore*". I pondered her words for a while (I had some time, the blow-drier was far too loud for an instant response). Was that all my book was going to say? *Stop it!?*

No.

"It's about starting, not stopping," I eventually replied. "It's about becoming something, or someone; about becoming the attractive women that we are made to be."

And that means becoming more and more like Jesus, by enjoying knowing him more and more.

That might not be what you were expecting. I guess you may have picked up this book because you want to stop struggling with sexual fantasies or because you've got a friend who's trapped in the web of pornography use and you want to help them give up their addiction. Maybe you're expecting the tone of this book to be negative: "It's important to change your awful ways". Maybe you were expecting the message to be very practical: "Here are six steps to defeating the grip of porn".

That's not how it's going to be. Because neither really works.

In the coming chapters we'll be talking about things that

aren't beautiful. We'll be being honest about the murky world of our minds and the impact of pornography on every facet of our lives. But the real aim, the ultimate goal, of these pages is to encourage you to become more like Jesus, the perfect embodiment of true attractiveness. We'll be setting aside the world's lies about loveliness, and pursuing a complete reorientation of our beings so we can enjoy the fruit of deep-down beauty. My hope is that this will be an exciting, liberating and positive journey to take.

So take a moment to reflect: Can you imagine yourself having a true, soul-deep beauty? Does it seem possible that you could become that kind of woman... or does it feel unobtainable, unrealistic, maybe even unpalatable? It can be hard to imagine ourselves in that light when we know just what our minds are capable of right now, but change is possible.

But change is rarely easy. So let's capture the vision of what this life of real beauty looks like, so that we want, more than anything, to experience it.

Beautiful or boring?

I asked a few of my Christian friends what they thought their lives might look like if they were living a truly beautiful Christian life now. One thought about the image of a nun: someone who spends hours in prayer and contemplation, knows the Bible backwards, and goes about doing good works during the day before retreating to solitude at night. Another painted a picture of a stereotypical missionary, who spent their waking hours wandering from village to village doing evangelistic talks and developing callouses on their knees from fervent praying.

There is an element of truth in those scenarios. But my friends' conceptions of a beautiful Christian were ones where there was no time to enjoy God's world, no time for relationships, no time for sex or child-bearing, no time for laughter (or any other emotion for that matter). When they thought of a beautiful Christian life, they thought of a dull life.

And that is not what a beautiful life, or a good life, looks like.

Beautiful image

The beginning of the world was wonderful. In the first two chapters of the Bible, as the creation events unfold, every word drips with delight. As God brought into being seas and stars, fish and birds, his repeated verdict was: "It is good". As he brought everything into being, he was very pleased with what he had made. And he was right to be—the world is astonishing. The stunning views, the mind-blowing sunsets, the delicacy of tiny flowers, the power of the wind, the complexity of the nervous system, the humour of the duck-billed platypus... Few hearts remain unmoved by the diversity and artistry of God's handiwork.

But none of that was the best bit—no sunrise or petal brought God as much pleasure as what came next. The highlight, the absolute pinnacle of creation, was us. When God made people, his work that day wasn't just good; it was "very good" (Genesis 1 v 31). The man and woman God made weren't just animals with larger brains and a greater capacity for communication: "God created mankind in his own image ... male and female he created them" (v 27). We are little images of God himself. We are designed to relate to God and to one another in ways that

are supremely intimate and unswervingly loving, because that's how God wants to relate to us. We are designed to look after the world carefully and generously, because that's how God rules his creation.

We don't live in that world now—it has been spoiled by humanity. But when we cry for more than this world seems to offer... when we sense that we need more than this world says will satisfy us... we are right. We were made beautiful, in God's image. We were made for perfection.

There's great value in being a human being. And there's great beauty in great value. It's truly beautiful.

Beautiful relationships

The relationships in that world were truly beautiful, too. Right from the start, God said that it wasn't good for a human being to be alone. It's impossible to live a good and full life in isolation. That's why God made men and women—to complement one another, to be community together.

And the relationship between the first man and woman was wonderful. When the Bible describes their relationship, it says simply:

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. (Genesis 2 v 25)

It's hardly a full account of their marriage! But think about what it shows us: here was a relationship characterised by intimacy, concerns to be avoided.

There are no relationships this good in this broken world. But we can enjoy relationships that come close, at least at times.

That doesn't mean we have to have a husband or boyfriend for life to be bearable—singleness is a gift from God that is in no way a second-class life. We don't have to be in a romantic relationship to be complete, and we can be satisfied without sex. But a beautiful life is one where there are significant relationships of great depth to be enjoyed.

After all, God is a relational God—he is Father, Son and Spirit. And you are made in his image. So a beautiful life will mean relating to others; will mean giving and receiving love. We are designed for relationships. We simply cannot live as God wants and as, deep down, we want, unless we are in community.

Beautiful life

Here is a wonderful, deeply beautiful life. A life of great dignity, real love, complete security and total trust. But as we've said, we don't live in that world. Where is that life to be found today?

I suppose everything I've written so far could be summed up in one simple sentence. A beautiful life is one that is centred on Christ and the work he did on the cross. When Jesus was on earth, he said something beautifully simple:

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10 v 10)

A full life—a life that is ever more beautiful, satisfying and enjoyable—is what Jesus, the Son of God, came to offer you and me. Just as those first humans knew a life of beauty because it was lived with God, so we know that life as we live with Jesus, the God-man.

In the verses that follow, Jesus goes on to explain that this wonderful, purposeful life comes through him laying down his life for us.

So if we want to pursue an ever more beautiful life, we need to be clear from the start that we can't do it without knowing Jesus. He is the place where beauty is seen, offered and enjoyed. You might be someone who indulges in the occasional sexual fantasy, or someone who has an addiction to internet pornography that overtakes you every day, or someone who is somewhere between those two.

Whoever you are, you cannot fix this by yourself. You might kick the porn habit. You might shut down the fantasising for a while. But that won't make you beautiful, deep down inside. That won't change your heart, and its inbuilt tendency to ignore God and love what is second-rate or worse. On your own, you'll end up exhausted, disillusioned or defeated.

But with Jesus—loving him, knowing we're loved by him, and seeking to live his way—things can be different; things can change; a beautiful purity is possible; we can become the people that, deep down, most of us want to be.

Beautiful isn't easy

Becoming this kind of beautiful isn't easy. It means swimming against the tide of our society, which sees a "full life" as a life that grabs sexual experience in whatever form looks good and feels right. It will mean working against the misguided desires of your own heart. It's hard to live beautifully.

But the question is: what kind of woman would you like to be? Do you want to give in to your instincts on a whim? Do you want to cover up the pain of the past or the longings of

the present with some cheap sex-substitute? Or do you want a life where your mind, your heart, your mouth and your body are in step with the Spirit of God and bringing glory to Jesus? Do you want to experience a pure life, without regrets and the desperation of settling for second best? Do you want a life of contentment, of value and of peace?

The possibility of deep beauty is real and it's truly wonderful. The more you experience it, the more you want it. And the tragedy is that, when we seek to feel beautiful in our fantasies, we walk further and further from beauty—we become less and less the people we'd like to be. It's to those people—the people we are right now—that we turn next. That will be less pleasant. But as we do it, keep your eyes fixed on the person you can become. You were designed to be beautiful. And, through Jesus, you can be that woman.