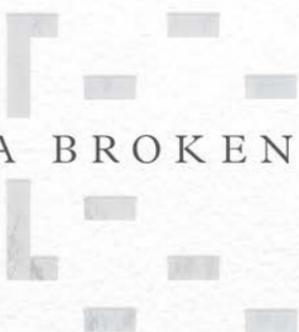


PAUL DAVID TRIPP



SEX IN A BROKEN WORLD



*How Christ Redeems What Sin Distorts*

“*Sex in a Broken World* is a wise and needed reminder about the deep roots of sin and the even deeper power of the gospel. This is a pastorally sensitive and theologically informed book. I recommend it.”

**Gerald Hiestand**, Senior Associate Pastor, Calvary Memorial Church;  
Executive Director, The Center for Pastor Theologians; author, *Sex,  
Dating, and Relationships: A New Approach*

“Paul Tripp has dealt with many important issues common to Christians. Now he takes up another, in his customarily engaging style. This time, he addresses what is perhaps the most important moral issue of the church today: sexual brokenness.”

**Ronald J. DeHaas**, CEO, Covenant Eyes, Inc.

“Paul Tripp’s writing always challenges, encourages, and inspires me. *Sex in a Broken World* did just that. Sexuality can be beautiful, but it’s also broken, so we have to be honest about the topic. If you read this book with an open and humble heart, God will use it to deepen your passion for Christ and help you discover a life of freedom, purity, and joy.”

**Craig Groeschel**, Pastor, Life.Church; author, *Daily Power: 365 Days  
of Fuel for Your Soul*

“Once again, Paul Tripp has graciously and pastorally applied the comfort and challenge of the gospel to the street-level reality of our lives. This time, with *Sex in a Broken World*, sexuality and relationships are unpacked and explained in a way that leads readers to be gently disciplined, not scolded or made to feel shame. I am so grateful for a book that I can recommend to women, who, like men, need the hope and wisdom of Christ applied to this aspect of their humanity!”

**Ellen Mary Dykas**, Women’s Ministry Coordinator, Harvest USA;  
editor, *Sexual Sanity for Women*

“Lots of books are written about sex, but none of them are like this one. This book is an unapologetically God-centered view of sex, exploring not only how God intended it to work, but also why it so often does not. Paul Tripp, who has to be one of our generation’s most insightful Christian thinkers, asks questions in this book that few people of faith dare to ask: Why did God create me with unfulfilled desires? Why do I so often feel disappointed? What does God really feel toward me when I fall to those same temptations again and again? You will not only read this book, but you will devour it, and you’ll likely find yourself recommending it to everyone you know.”

**J. D. Greear**, Pastor, The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, North  
Carolina; author, *Not God Enough and Gospel: Recovering the Power  
That Made Christianity Revolutionary*

“Sexual insanity has taken over our world, so we need sane counsel from a wise counselor. Paul points us to Christ, grounds us in truth, and navigates a pathway through the craziness. Would you expect anything less from Paul Tripp?”

**Deepak Reju**, Pastor of Biblical Counseling and Family Ministry,  
Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC; author, *The Pastor and Counseling* and *She’s Got the Wrong Guy*

“This is everything we’ve come to expect and appreciate from Paul Tripp’s writing: searing realism about ourselves and unbounded confidence in the power of the gospel to bring insight, wisdom, and restoration. This is an urgently needed book and will be an eternal blessing to many.”

**Sam Allberry**, Speaker, Ravi Zacharias International Ministries; author, *Is God Anti-Gay?*

“This wonderful book shines the bright hope of the gospel into the deep darkness of guilt and shame. Not simply scapegoating our post-Christian culture, Paul ‘normalizes’ a universal human struggle that afflicts every child of God. Like me, you will find yourself in these pages: assured you’re not worse than others and that your loving, heavenly Father understands your weakness, offered up his Son to redeem your sexuality, and poured out his Spirit to empower your transformation. Join me in celebrating with Paul our great God who redeems broken things!”

**David White**, Director of Targeted Discipleship, Harvest USA; author, *Sexual Sanity for Men*

“Many books today confront the sexual brokenness of the modern world. Precious few equip you to spot counterfeit hopes while leaving you with an exhilarating sense of true hope. I know of no better antidote to our sexualized age than *Sex in a Broken World*. Read it, examine your own heart and habits, and soak in the renewing, restoring, overcoming grace of Jesus Christ.”

**Owen Strachan**, Associate Professor of Christian Theology,  
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; coauthor, *The Grand Design*; coeditor, *Designed for Joy*

# Sex in a Broken World



# Sex in a Broken World

*How Christ Redeems What Sin Distorts*

Paul David Tripp

*Sex in a Broken World: How Christ Redeems What Sin Distorts*

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For new morning mercies and daily rescuing grace  
I am eternally grateful.



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## Preface

It's the afternoon following the morning that I finished the book you're now reading. The best description of my mood right now is that I am a sad celebrant. I am devastated at what this book has exposed in me. I am grieved by the lust that still resides in my heart, but I am far from hopeless, because writing this book has excited me at an even deeper level than ever before with the liberating and transforming power of the grace of the Lord Jesus.

I am sad to think that when it comes to sex, we still buy into the legalism that says if we can organize people's lives, give them the right set of rules, and attach them to efficient systems of accountability, we can deliver people from their sex insanity. The fact that we can look at the power of sexual sin to deceive and enslave people and feel comfortable in our reliance on the scant power of human intervention is itself insane. Few areas of the human struggle reveal more powerfully the sad sinfulness of sin than the sex evils that are done to people and through people hundreds of thousands of times every day. The delusion and confusion is so great that we cannot even agree anymore on how to define what were once commonly understood terms such as *sex* and *gender*.

Yet in the face of all this, there is still robust reason for joy. All over, the church of Jesus Christ is returning once again to the hope of the gospel. All over, Christian leaders young and old are looking

to the gospel of Jesus Christ to help them diagnose sex problems, while at the same time holding out to those who are tempted, weak, or addicted the hope that is found only in the grace of Jesus.

Still, it is sad to think of how many people will look today to sex to give them what sex cannot give and, in so doing, give way to temptation and deepen their addiction. It is sad to think of how many people in their shame will deny the wrong of what they are doing and the depth of their enslavement. And while so many struggle in private, it is sad to see that the surrounding culture seems to get more and more sex insane with every passing day.

Yet in the face of all this, there is a happy rest in knowing that Jesus still reigns and will continue to advance the march of his kingdom until the last enemy is under his foot. He reigns over all the situations, locations, and relationships that would otherwise give you and me cause for despair. He reigns for his own glory and our good. And his reign is our guarantee that he will deliver all he has promised, because only he can guarantee he'll make good on his promises in the places he rules—by the way, that's everywhere.

So go ahead and read this book as a sad celebrant. I hope that at times it will bring you to tears and at other times cause you to shout for joy. Rejoice with a frown or celebrate with tears. It really is what we should be doing between the “already” and the “not yet,” while we still wait with the assurance that our Messiah will bring our sex struggles to an end.

Paul David Tripp  
October 11, 2012

## Sex in a Broken World

She felt robbed. She was thirty, single, and in most ways very content except for one area of her life. She just couldn't understand why God would design her to be a sexual being with strong sexual desires and then forbid her to participate in and enjoy sex. She would see couples at the local gastropub snuggling in the corner, and the sight would fill her with an explosive combination of envy and anger. She had always been serious about her faith and tried to live it practically, but this sex thing was about to push her over the edge. More and more God seemed more of a harsh judge than someone who loved her. She thought, "How can I serve a God who hardwires me with desires and then tells me he'll discipline me if I fulfill them?" It left her depressed and confused.

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Sharon knew that her son was messing around with sex, but she couldn't get him to admit it. She tried to get into his computer but didn't know his password. At times he would make an off-

color comment or tell a joke with sexual overtones, and, every time, Sharon's heart would sink. They had tried to prepare him for life in this fallen world, but changes had come fast and hard, so much so that Sharon felt she was living in a world she herself no longer understood. Her son was never off his phone. He seemed always to be talking about a girl or texting a girl or going out somewhere with a girl. And when he was with a girl at home, Sharon felt that the interaction between them was too physical. It got so that Sharon hated sex—hated that God had created it, hated that her sixteen-year-old son already had strong sexual desires. She hated that sex talk was everywhere. She felt helpless and powerless; she thought she was losing her son, and there was nothing she could do.

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She was fourteen, and she liked being sexy, but she didn't want her mom to know. She would leave for school in a parent-approved outfit but often with a "cooler" outfit in her book bag to change into at school. To her, a "cool" outfit was one designed to reveal the body rather than modestly cover it. Although most of her friends did the same, she knew her dad would kill her if he ever found out. She longed to be popular, and being popular meant getting lots of Facebook and Instagram likes, and the way to get likes was to be provocative. Her selfies became increasingly sexual. She hadn't posted anything nude, but the image she was projecting was intentionally sexually provocative. She was getting lots of attention from the boys at school and from "boys" on the Internet whom she didn't know. She was living a full-blown Kardashian fantasy, and she loved it. Her parents didn't have a clue, and if they had, they would've been heartbroken and

gone ballistic at the same time. She was only fourteen, and sex is what drove her world.

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He drove home that night with a heavy heart. The story he had already heard too many times, he had heard again today. He was depressed from pastoring people he couldn't seem to help. That day in his office he had talked to yet another couple whose marriage had been shattered by illicit sex. The wife cried and shed the tears of yet another betrayal. The man sort of confessed, but his confession was laden with excuses and the typical minimizing of what he had done. He seemed more mad that he had been caught than grateful that he had been rescued from the hold of something that had the power to destroy him. His sin had not only shattered his marriage, but lost him his job as well.

It was all so discouraging for the pastor to hear. He spoke to them of the grace of the gospel, but his heart wasn't in it. He once had confidence in the power of God, but his confidence had been weakened by the number of men in his church who had fallen into sexual sin. It not only weakened his confidence in God's grace, but it made him question his calling. Why in all his teaching, preaching, and counsel had he not been able to protect the men whom God had called him to pastor? It was hard to keep going when God seemed distant and when he felt like a failure. He knew that when he got home, his wife would ask about his day. He dreaded that question so much that he took the long way home. Sex was eating holes in his church, and there seemed to be no stopping it.

- - -

So, what's your story? You're probably reading this book because, like me, you're concerned. You're probably concerned because in the middle of the onslaught of all that our culture is saying about sex, you want to think about it in a distinctly biblical way. Or maybe you're concerned because you're raising children in a sexual culture that, frankly, scares you. Or perhaps you know people who have gotten into some sort of sexual trouble, and you'd like to understand what they're dealing with and how to offer them help that is truly helpful. Or maybe you're a pastor, and you want to teach your people well about an area of life that the church often fails to speak forthrightly and clearly about. Perhaps you're battling with sexual sin in your own life, and you feel defeated and hopeless.

If you're in any of those situations, this is what you need to understand: you live in a deeply broken world that simply does not function as God intended. If you want to understand the nature of sexual sin, or if you want to develop a biblical-sex worldview, you have to include this fact. Now, you may be thinking that this is an awfully negative way to start a book about sex, but here's my response: you will never completely understand our deep struggle with human sexuality unless you first understand the context or the environment in which that struggle takes place.

### **And Now for the Bad News**

I can't think of a more descriptive, honest, insight-giving, and hopeful description of the present state of the world you live in, and how it affects areas of life such as human sexuality, than Romans 8:18–39. What follows is a lengthy quote, but take time to read it in full. As our discussion proceeds, you'll be glad you did.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribu-

lation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;  
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:18–39)

This shocking, dark passage is also one of the most gloriously helpful and hopeful passages in the New Testament. The apostle Paul unpacks for us here the environment that we all live in between the already and the not yet. Take note of the foundational assumption that frames everything else he says in the passage (v. 18). Paul assumes that suffering is the universal experience of everyone living between the already and the not yet. If you begin to pay attention, you will realize that you and I never live a day without experiencing suffering of some kind. Suffering is not an indication that something alien or weird is happening to us. Suffering is not a sign that we have been singled out for abuse. Suffering is not a sign of the failure of God’s rule, his plan, or his promises. Suffering is the natural experience of everyone who lives where you and I live. Rather than being shocked when trouble and difficulty enter our lives, we should be surprised how well this world works, given its condition.

If suffering is every person’s experience, then you should expect suffering to impact your sexuality. You will suffer the reality that right here, right now, sex doesn’t function the way that God intended. You will face the redefinition, distortion, and misuse of

sex. You suffer the temptation to take your sexual life outside of God's clear boundaries. You will suffer being blindsided by sexual temptation at the mall, on your computer, when watching Netflix, or, sadly, even when you're doing a Google search on your phone. You will suffer women exposing their bodies in public or men treating women like they're little more than physical toys for their pleasure. You will suffer the hardship of trying to protect your children from all the sexual danger out there, while you work to keep your own heart pure. Because you know of all the seductive temptations, you will suffer issues of trust with those you love. Some of us will suffer sexual abuse, and others of us will suffer the exhaustion that comes from trying to keep our hearts pure. You will suffer misunderstanding and mockery as you try to stay inside God's boundaries in a culture that laughs at the thought of sexual boundaries. Paul assumes that we will suffer, and if he's right (and he is), that suffering will include our sexuality.

Why does Paul assume we will suffer? He assumes suffering because he understands the condition of the world in which God has chosen us to live (vv. 19–25). With graphic and provocative terminology, Paul wants us to understand that God has chosen to keep us right now in a terribly broken world, one that does not function in the way he intended. Again, our present address is not an interruption or failure of God's plan for us. Paul's way of capturing the brokenness of our world is to say that "the whole creation has been groaning." Picture the old man whose body is aged and broken, where even something as simple as getting out of a chair, bending to pick something up, or taking a few steps makes him audibly groan. That's our world. Nothing is simple anymore. Everything is affected by brokenness. There is no location or situation or sector of the world that does not groan.

If you don't understand your address, you will live with all kinds of unrealistic expectations, and you will be way too naïve

about the myriad of temptations that greet you every day. And because your understanding and expectations of your environment are unrealistic, you will be functionally unprepared for the struggles you will inevitably face. You'd better understand, and help those entrusted to your care to understand, that the whole sex aspect of our world groans in sad and comprehensive brokenness. And you'd better understand that that brokenness doesn't live just outside you but inside you as well. This is important to get, because the brokenness inside will hook you to the sexual temptations outside.

You are a sexual being, but that aspect of your personhood lives not in a sexually healthy world but one that is deeply broken, and that changes everything. *Where, right now, is your sexual life groaning? Where, right now, are you facing the brokenness of the sexual world around you?*

There is one more aspect to Paul's description of our brokenness and the brokenness of the world around us. He says that this broken world is *waiting for redemption*. Governments can't fix this brokenness, institutions of higher learning can't fix it, and physicians can't fix it. This world and all its brokenness cry out for one thing: a redeemer. That redeemer is Christ, whose forgiving and transforming grace is the only hope for us, our world, and our sexual brokenness.

There are maybe few areas of our lives that preach more loudly to us of our need for redemption than our constant struggle with sex. When it comes to sex, the promises we make to ourselves and others tend to be short-lived. Our commitment to purity of heart and hands tends to weaken in the face of temptation. It doesn't take much for our eyes and our desires to wander. In the sexual arena we are confronted with the truth that we will never be righteous on our own. Sex preaches to us all that we deeply and desperately need grace.

Thankfully, in this passage it's not the brokenness of the world that dominates Paul's discussion, but grace. In a powerful and practical way, Romans 8:18–39 points us to the only place where we can find help and hope for our sexual brokenness. Grace offers us what we cannot do for ourselves. Grace offers us what changes of situation, location, and relationship will never give us. There is grace for every aspect of the sexual brokenness in and around us, and that really is the very good news of this passage.

### **The Best News Ever for Our Sexual Struggles**

The question begged by dark honesty about our present address—identified in Romans 8—is this: What does God give us to face our inevitable struggles and sufferings? The resoundingly glorious answer of Romans 8 is that God does not give us this thing or that thing to help us. No, he gives us the only thing that can truly provide the rescue, wisdom, and strength we need. What is that one thing? I love saying this! God's best and most precious gift to us between the already and the not yet is the gift of himself. He doesn't promise a life free from struggle. He doesn't promise us that we will not suffer. He doesn't promise that our sexuality will be free from distortion and temptation. No, he promises us that in all these situations he will be with us, in us, and for us. God *is* the grace he offers us.

In fact, this passage carries with it one of the most powerful and concise definitions of God's presence and grace that you will ever find. It's there in verse 31: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Where can hope for a healthy, godly, and morally pure sexual life be found? Here is the answer in three wonderful words, *God for us*. Let it echo in your mind: *God for us*. Let it ring in your heart: *God for us*. Let it shape the way you think about how to live God's way sexually in a world that ignores him and rejects his wise and loving plan. Let these words give you courage in the face of confusion, misunderstanding, and temptation. Let

them give you hope when you feel defeated by sexual temptation. It's never us against the giant of seductive sexual allure, because by grace God really is for us.

So Romans 8 doesn't just alert us to the broken, groaning world we live in, but it points to God's presence with us and the grace he offers us. Let's examine this grace.

1. *God's grace is often uncomfortable grace* (Rom. 8:18–25). The difficulties we face in the here and now are not a sign that God has forgotten or abandoned us. He knows where he has placed us. He has placed us here because he is not after our ease; he is after our hearts. It is important that we embrace the theology of uncomfortable grace, because between the already and the not yet, God's grace comes to us in uncomfortable forms. Notice in the apostle's description of our groaning world are the words "hope" and "redemption." In the hands of our Redeemer, this broken, groaning world becomes a tool of his transforming, refining, heart-changing grace. God uses the sexual brokenness around us to expose our wandering hearts. No, he won't ever tempt us to sin, but he will use the sexual chaos around us to drive us to more deeply and consistently follow him. He is able and willing to turn what is broken and groaning into a tool of his grace.

2. *God's grace is intervening grace* (Rom. 8:26–27). At times the battle is so great, so discouraging, and so emotionally taxing that you don't even know how to pray. You've fallen again and focused your eyes on what God prohibits or used your body for what God has forbidden, and you feel so defeated. This passage says that in those moments, when the weakness is so deep, and you're distraught and confused—so much so that you don't know how to pray—God does not turn his back on you. No, the opposite is true. The Holy Spirit, who lives inside you, carries your intelligible cries in words of grace to the Father. He intervenes for you when you have no strength or ability to intervene for yourself.

3. *God's grace is unstoppable grace* (Rom. 8:28–30). I've had countless people say to me in counseling sessions, "I think I've fallen too much. I think I've wanted my way too much, and I sometimes think my life is in such a sorry state because God has given up on me." It is a cruel lie of the Enemy that God would ever give up on one of his blood-purchased children. Because my sex life exposes what a wandering heart I have, I need to know that the heart of my Redeemer will never, ever wander. This is exactly what these verses tell us, that God will absolutely finish the work of grace that he has begun in each of us. His grace is never at risk. His grace is never at stake. His grace is never up for grabs. His grace never waffles. Here's the vital message of these verses: *the grace you are receiving today is the present expression of a plan that was firmly set in place before the foundations of the world were laid*. Nothing or no one can stop the move of this grace.

4. *God's grace is providing grace* (Rom. 8:31–32). I love the logic of these verses. If God went to the extent of harnessing forces of nature and controlling the events of human history so that at just the right time his Son would come and live, die the death we should have died, and rise again, conquering sin and death, would it make any sense that God would abandon us along the way? The cross is our guarantee that in all our struggles with sex, no matter who we are and what those struggles may be, God will give us everything we need. If he willingly gave us his Son, we can rest assured he will gladly supply what we are not able to supply for ourselves.

5. *God's grace is inseparable grace* (Rom. 8:33–39). Finally, in case any doubt still remains about the presence and reliability of God's grace, Paul assures us that we will never encounter or struggle with anything that has the power to separate us from the love of the One who so generously blesses us with his presence and his grace. This world, with all its sexual distortion, confusion,

and seduction, can't separate you from God's love. Your darkest moment of sexual wandering and defeat can't separate you from God's love. Your pride in your independent self-righteousness, where you take credit for what only God can produce, can't separate you from God's love. His love is eternal.

I decided to use Romans 8:18–39 as the launching pad for this book because it so graphically captures the zeal of what you're about to read. Romans 8 is stunningly honest in its description of the groaning world we live in and wonderfully hopeful about the realities of God's presence with us and grace for us. The honesty of Romans 8 doesn't negate its hope, and the hope doesn't weaken its honesty. And this is the way it should be. If what the Bible says is right about who God is and what he has given us in Jesus Christ, then we should be the most honest community on earth, because we know that whatever is known or exposed about us has already been fully covered by his amazing grace.

So take this journey of honesty and hope with me. I'm deeply persuaded that it is an essential journey, because, as I'm about to detail, when it comes to sex we've gone more than a bit crazy.

## **Review and Reflect**

1. What aspect of our sexualized culture most concerns you? On a personal level, can you relate to any of the scenarios at the beginning of chapter 1? As you seek to answer those questions, why is it vital to grasp the reality that “you live in a deeply broken world that simply does not function as God intended” (p. 16)?
  
2. Reread Romans 8:18–39, which Paul Tripp describes as shocking and dark but also helpful and hopeful (p. 18). In what specific ways does the passage portray both sinful darkness and glorious hope? How does the passage inform our thinking about sexuality?
  
3. Paul Tripp writes, “If you don’t understand your address, you will live with all kinds of unrealistic expectations” (p. 19). Explain what he means.
  
4. What is God’s most precious gift to us for living life in our broken world?
  
5. Paul Tripp sheds light on the grace God offers us. Where in your own life have you seen the particular aspects of this grace:
  - uncomfortable grace
  
  - intervening grace
  
  - unstoppable grace

- providing grace
  
- inseparable grace

*Heart Reset*

- Romans 8:18–39





*We live in a deeply broken world . . .  
but there is hope.*

Sexuality is a fundamental part of what it means to be human—part of God’s beautiful design when he created all things. And yet, sex in our world today looks nothing like the way that God intended it to be. Sexual brokenness surrounds us and, in one way or another, affects us all.

This sexual brokenness reveals our deep need for redemption—something quick fixes, mere behavior modification, or a set of rules can’t provide. Honest and direct yet kind and caring, this book points us to the only place we can find help for sexual brokenness—the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. Only this grace offers hope for a life of freedom, purity, and joy as God intended.

“If you read this book with an open and humble heart, God will use it to deepen your passion for Christ and help you discover a life of freedom, purity, and joy.”

**Craig Groeschel**

Pastor, Life.Church; author, *Daily Power: 365 Days of Fuel for Your Soul*

“Paul Tripp has dealt with many important issues common to Christians. Now, in his customarily engaging style, he addresses what is perhaps the most important moral issue of the church today: sexual brokenness.”

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