

“Jennifer Kvamme answers students’ difficult questions with the deep compassion that comes from two decades of dedicated next-generation ministry. She infuses every page with a personal freshness that relates to the real-life struggles and highest joys of a teenager’s world. Guided by the whole story of God’s word, this book is a trustworthy map that leads students to discover joy and freedom in God’s wonderful design for human connection.”

**DR. KEN CASTOR**, NEXT-GENERATION PASTOR AND AUTHOR

“This book manages to be wise, persuasive, warm, and sensitive in answering the hardest questions, in a hopeful and helpful way. A great resource for giving away, but also worth keeping in your back pocket!”

**LINDA ALLCOCK**, AUTHOR, “HEAD, HEART, HANDS” BIBLE NOTES

“Our culture’s story around gender, sex, and identity is told loudly and often enough to be compelling to those hearing it. But, as Jennifer Kvamme wisely and winsomely demonstrates, God has another, better story for us. This is an easily accessible, up-to-date, and compassionate take on our culture’s false promises that we can find true satisfaction in things that are good but which are not ultimate. Written in an engaging and down-to-earth style, it’s perfectly pitched to answer the burning questions young people are asking. That it does so with humility, grace, openness, and a genuine sense of inquiry makes it a safe, sage book in these bewildering times.”

**STEPHEN MCALPINE**, AUTHOR, “BEING THE BAD GUYS: HOW TO LIVE FOR JESUS IN A WORLD THAT SAYS YOU SHOULDN’T”

“These are the issues where our teenage children most need help. That help has arrived! This book tells the better story about sex, gender, and sexuality that our teenagers desperately need to hear. Thank you, Jennifer!”

**ED DREW**, DIRECTOR, FAITH IN KIDS: AUTHOR, “RAISING CONFIDENT KIDS”

“Clear and gracious, this book shows how God’s story of redemption and a committed relationship with Jesus are the foundation for making sense of some of the most important questions young people are facing today. An essential read for teens and young adults. Pastors, youth workers, parents, and grandparents will also benefit greatly from this well-written explanation of God’s perspective on these significant issues.”

**KEVIN KOMPILIEN**, PRESIDENT, EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH OF AMERICA

“Full of compassion and grace, truth and love, Jennifer paints a better picture—a glorious picture—of God’s good design. This book will be a catalyst for desires to become realigned with the heart of God.”

**KRISTEN HATTON**, AUTHOR,

*“FACE TIME: YOUR IDENTITY IN A SELFIE WORLD”*

“Every pastor, every youth worker, every parent needs to read this powerful conversation tool as they wrestle honestly with reaching and discipling this generation. These are conversations that need to be had, and Jennifer approaches them with clear, compassionate biblical wisdom.”

**DOUG HOLLIDAY**, PRESIDENT, SONLIFE MINISTRIES

“This book is an essential read for those who are feeling lost or uncertain about their true self, or for those seeking deeper understanding of their purpose according to God’s plan.”

**RENNIE GARDA**, CADRE DISCIPLEMAKING MISSIONARY

“For the person who desires more clarity about God’s perspective, purpose, and plan, this book builds a foundation of how to think about God and self. I am thankful that there is more to the story that God invites us to embrace and live out. I highly recommend this book!”

**GLENN OLSON**, DIRECTOR OF STUDENT MINISTRIES,

NORTH CENTRAL DISTRICT EFCA

*“More to the Story* is such an important book. Jennifer talks about some of the most challenging topics of the day—body, gender, dating, abuse—in such a clear manner. There’s so much that’s helpful in this accessible resource. A vital book for parents and youth workers to put in the hands of their pre-teen, teen, or older.”

**JOHN PERRITT**, DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES, REFORMED YOUTH MINISTRIES

“This is an important discussion for students right now (and adults too), and Jennifer is the right person to address it. Writing with years of experience as a youth worker and with commitment to the gospel, she addresses this topic through the lens of who God is and who we are in him. I recommend getting this book into the hands of any student in your life!”

**LAURIE SEAY**, EVENT DIRECTOR, EFCA

“I knew that the Bible’s standpoint on sex and relationships was different from the world’s, but this book really helped me understand why God views sex in the way he does, why it’s so special, and why the world’s view is so far out of line with God’s design for humanity.”

**KATE, 18**

“This book helped me see what kids at school might be thinking or feeling, and gave me language to show love to people walking a different road than me. And yet it stayed true to God’s word.”

**RANI, 15**

“The book makes you realise and appreciate why sexuality and everything that comes with it is so important to God. It puts our world’s ideas into context by giving us a bigger, more godly picture. It’s worth reading because you can reality-check your own thinking.”

**JACK, 17**

*“If we realise that our fascination with romance is actually a memory-trace of a deeper story—an echo of a greater tune, a signpost to the ultimate destination—then we will find the reality that can transcend even the most intimate of relationships we can experience.”*

— Sam Allberry <sup>1</sup>

MORE  
TO THE  
STORY

Jennifer M.  
Kvamme

the goodbook  
COMPANY

*To Greg,  
whose steadfast, selfless love  
daily paints me a living picture of Jesus.*

— J.M.K.

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# Start Here



***I WONDER WHAT BROUGHT YOU*** to this book.

Maybe you love following Jesus and you want to know what he really says about sexuality—or how to explain his teachings to your friends. Maybe you find the Bible’s teachings on sex offensive, and you come to this book skeptical. Or maybe you bring some deep pain. Maybe just having a female or male body is a constant source of discomfort, or you wonder if God hates you because you’re gay. Maybe you feel shame around your sexuality, and you want to know if there’s hope. Or maybe you just want to know why sex is such a big deal to Christians!

The Bible has gotten a bad rap lately when it comes to its teachings on sexuality. I mean, if you asked the average teen in your school what the Bible had to say about sex, what do you think they’d say? When I’ve asked students, the most common response I get is “Don’t do it.” Not exactly captivating.

Meanwhile, our culture is telling a story more like this: “You can be whoever you want to be, love whoever you want to love, and use your body however you want. Sex is fun, and it’s no big deal. No one else can tell you who you are or who to love. Just respect everyone.”

It's pretty clear which message sounds more like good news.

Here's the deal, though: I absolutely believe that the Bible's message about sex, attraction, identity, and relationships is *by far* the better news. And it saddens me that too often it hasn't been communicated like that. When people hear condemnation, or a weighty list of "don't"s, and leave burdened (or proud), they're missing the heart of God. And if this has been your experience, I'm so sorry.

You see, it really isn't just "Don't do it." When the Bible talks about sex and related topics, it's not primarily through a list of rules and warnings. It's through a story. That story doesn't shy away from the darkness and brokenness of life, but it's ultimately full of good news for the longings of our hearts and bodies.


## **HOW TO READ THIS BOOK**

You've probably looked at the contents page already. You know which questions you want answers to, and you're likely tempted to skip ahead to particular chapters and find out what the Bible has to say about dating, or porn, or gay and trans issues. I get that—but let me ask you to resist that urge for now. The chapters build on each other, and in particular I really, *really* don't want you to miss the first three chapters. Because I don't just want to give you rules to follow. I want to introduce you to a story—and a person—that has transformed me and many, many others. And I believe that if you can pause long enough to listen to the story God is telling, you'll hear of something much bigger and more beautiful than you dreamed.

So, here's the important thing: read the first three chapters first.

One more note: at the end of every chapter you'll find a couple of reflection questions. Those are intended to help you think through what you've read for yourself. You might also want to use them to help you chat about your thoughts with a friend or a trusted adult, or to journal about them. Then, at the end of the book, there's a discussion guide—this is a bit more in-depth and designed to work best in groups. You'll also find a list of recommended resources if you want to delve further into one of the topics raised in the book.

**"I WANT TO  
INTRODUCE  
YOU TO A  
STORY THAT HAS  
TRANSFORMED  
ME AND MANY  
OTHERS."**



It's possible this book won't answer all your questions. I couldn't cover everything! Or maybe you're not convinced by what I'm telling you. That's actually ok with me. My hope is that it will lead you to dig into the Bible for yourself to see if what I'm telling you is true or to find answers to other questions. Ultimately, I pray it will show you that Jesus is good, that he can be trusted, and that following him is worth whatever he asks of us.

## **THERE'S MORE TO THE STORY**

I've been working with teens at my church for 20 years, and I've been privileged to be a part of many of their stories. I've watched middle schoolers grow into adults, listened as they shared their deepest struggles and highest joys, and seen Jesus heal pain and transform lives. I've heard their questions about God, life, and yes, sex. And I've grieved as I watched students walk away from the

church because they sensed judgment and exclusion and didn't see how Jesus could be good news for them. That's what led me to write this book.

Here's what I've seen: everyone craves acceptance, connection, and love. We want people to see us, to know us deeply, and to love us fully. That's hardwired into us as humans, even though that kind of love can feel elusive.

But here's what not everyone realizes: this longing for love and connection is by design. It's part of what it means to be human! And as with anything, understanding the meaning and purpose of its design tells us how to make the best use of our sexuality.

The truth is that there is more going on in our gender than biology, and more to sex than pleasure and connection. We're all looking for a relationship that will satisfy, but the Bible tells us that only God satisfies—and all our longings and desires are supposed to lead us to him.

That might sound pretty weird at this point. I get that. But in order to uncover the better news about sexuality that the Bible has to offer, we need to start with the story of God.

# An Eternal Echo

## SEXUALITY AS A GLIMPSE OF SOMETHING DEEPER

**IMAGINE YOU MEET SOMEONE NEW** at school this year—the most attractive person you’ve ever known. He or she seems to be attracted to you, too, and before long, romance has blossomed. This person loves listening to you and getting to know your heart; they make you laugh and make your heart thrill, and before long you share all your deepest secrets... and they love you even more for it. They constantly plan romantic surprises, speak well of you in front of your friends, buy you the most meaningful gifts, and promise they’re going to be there for you forever.

It’s the stuff of fairy tales, the happy-ever-after ending. Deep down you probably know this kind of perfection isn’t real. But isn’t there still a part of you that wants it to be true?

We long to be known. We want to be seen for who we really are and loved without condition. We want someone else to know deeply, to share life with, to adventure with,

to talk with about anything—someone who is just *there*. Our hearts have an insatiable craving for intimacy.

And, actually, so do our bodies. We've all experienced the sight—or touch—of someone who made our heart beat a little faster. Maybe you've felt the full-on physical pull of your body to be connected to someone else. There's little doubt, even from a purely scientific look at our physical design, that our bodies were made for intimacy with another... even if the details of *who* and *when* and *how* have less agreement.

What we're about to see is that all of this is *good*. It's by design. God made our bodies and our hearts to crave intimacy and togetherness. God was the one who thought up sex and romance.

But what we're also going to see is *why* God designed us that way. Spoiler alert: your sexuality was intended to show you how intensely he loves you.

## **A PERFECT DESIGN**

In the first chapter of the Bible, God begins with nothing and creates everything. And he does so with amazing intentionality, creativity, and order. Day one, he says, "Let there be light," and there is light. He calls it good and separates the light from darkness, and there's evening and morning—the first day.

So begins a pattern for all of creation. God makes something new—something from his own imagination and design, without consulting anyone or using any materials—and then creates a boundary for it. He makes sky and separates it from the waters below. He makes dry ground, separates it from the seas, and fills it with plants. He makes lights in the sky to separate day from night and mark seasons and years. He creates sea creatures for the

water and birds for the skies and animals for the land, and all of it is good.

But it was all setting things up for the climax of his work: people. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him” (Genesis 1:27). Humans were an intentional, culminating masterpiece of God’s creation. We were his idea. From the mind-blowing detail of how our eyes and brains work to the practicality of fingernails and opposing thumbs—and yes, the design of our gender and sexuality—all of it was God’s ingenuity. And he delighted in it. He called the creation of humanity *very* good.

But then came the first time God said something was *not* good. Initially he created only one human, a man; and it was not good for the man to be alone (2:18).

This wasn’t an oversight in God’s perfect design. He didn’t create Adam, watch him for a while, and then realize that Adam was lonely. Adam’s need for another person was no surprise to God. It was all part of his plan.

And so he put Adam to sleep, took a rib from his side, and built a woman. Eve was “fit for” him (v 18). She was a custom-made match, just perfect, just what he’d been missing and didn’t know he needed.

Here’s where sexuality comes into the design. God gave the first man life, created the first woman custom-fitted for him, and then gave them both the gift of marriage. And within this gift of marriage (drumroll, please...) we find sex introduced. God talks about the man and the woman becoming “one flesh” (v 24). In other words, the “fit” between Adam and Eve was not just relational and spiritual—it was also physical. The bodies of a man and a woman are designed to fit together in sex. And this act is meant to draw two people into a union that is the closest of human relationships. In sex you become one flesh, and that

relationship is intended to be lifelong. (This, by the way, is why Christians say sex should be kept for marriage.)

Do you know what God's first command to his newly created people was? "Be fruitful and multiply" (1:28). He was talking about sex. His very first command wasn't *Don't do it* but *Do it—a lot!* God wanted his people to enjoy the good gift he'd given them and, in turn, to be creators with him of more humans.

Adam immediately recognized this as something to be celebrated, something wonderfully good. When he first saw Eve, he joyously responded with a poem, or a love song:

} *"This at last is bone of my bones*  
 } *and flesh of my flesh;*  
 } *she shall be called Woman,*  
 } *because she was taken out of Man."* (2:23)

So here we have Adam and Eve, together, naked, and without shame (v 25). Their bodies are designed to be a reason for celebration, a gift to one another. Sex, as God created it, is meant to be full of joy and free from shame. There is perfect intimacy, closeness, nakedness, without fear or guilt or manipulation. There's no embarrassment, selfishness, or flaunting. Adam and Eve are together, nothing between them, nothing to hide, full of delight.

Of course, this is not the reality you and I are familiar with today. Adam and Eve's relationship is the ideal marriage, but this perfect, shame-free fitting together of a man and a woman is not how most human relationships turn out—even the good ones. We'll get to why in the next chapter, but for now let me say that just because we sometimes find our experiences of sexuality much more complex and difficult than Adam and Eve did, it doesn't mean we should dismiss God's good design. This is super



important—because God’s plan for sexuality isn’t just about sexuality. The perfect human marriage was good, but it was not God’s endgame.

## HINTS OF MORE

Sometimes we need something we can see and touch to help us understand an idea. The diagrams in science books are important, aren’t they? My husband is an engineer for a nuclear power plant, and there are definitely times he has to stop his explanation and sketch me a picture so I can track with the conversation.

God loves sketching his people pictures, too! And sexuality and marriage are among the most powerful pictures we have. They’re God’s way of helping us understand the intimacy we can have with him.

To see why, let’s go back to Genesis. The first time the Bible tells us people had sex, it says, “Now Adam knew Eve his wife,

and she conceived and bore Cain” (4:1). You could say “knew” is a polite way to say “had sex with” because God was trying to keep things PG. But if you read the rest of the Bible, it’s pretty clear that keeping things PG isn’t what God is after. The word “knew” is significant. Sex brings a deep, intimate kind of knowledge of each other’s bodies—and, in the context of a marriage between two people over the long haul, an intimate knowing of their whole persons.

But it’s more significant even than that. The same Hebrew word, *yada*, is used in Psalm 139:1 when King

**“THE PERFECT  
HUMAN  
MARRIAGE WAS  
GOOD. BUT IT  
WAS NOT GOD’S  
ENDGAME.”**

David says, “O LORD, you have searched me and known me!” God knows us perfectly, and he desires for us to know him intimately. The deep “knowing” found in sex is a picture of our relationship with him.

Let me be really clear: I’m not saying our relationship with God is in any way sexual! That would be unbiblical, not to mention creepy. But our sexuality is one way God helps us understand just how fully he knows us, how deeply he cherishes us, and how passionately he desires for us to return his love. This means that the most important thing to understand about sex and marriage isn’t actually the one-flesh lifelong commitment we’ve seen already—important though that is. It’s that sex—and marriage—are not ultimate. *Marriage is not the deepest possible intimacy nor sex the most intense possible pleasure.* (Yes, go ahead and read that sentence again. It’s true!) Marriage and sex—even at their best—are faint shadows of something infinitely greater: the relationship with God for which we were ultimately designed.

I know, I know. You’re a little skeptical on that. But hang with me and let’s see how the Bible has been showing us this from beginning to end.

## **GOD’S UNFAITHFUL WIFE**

The themes of intimacy, faithfulness, and love aren’t just abstract concepts in the Bible; they repeatedly play out in the storyline of God and his people. God frequently describes his chosen people, Israel, as his “wife.” Nowhere is this metaphor more clear than in the story of Hosea.

Hosea was a man in Old Testament times who got a big (and really personal) glimpse of God’s metaphor of marriage. God gave him a surprising command: *Go, marry someone who’s promiscuous and sure to be unfaithful*

to you. *I've got something to teach my people* (Hosea 1:2). Hosea did exactly that. He picked a woman named Gomer. And guess what? After they had had a couple kids together, she left him and started sleeping around with other men. *Umm... what are you up to, God?* Think of the heartache for Hosea and these kids! Why would God command such a thing?

(Side note: Hosea was given a unique task by God. Don't take it as general marriage advice!)

Well, God told him why: "For like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD" (v 2, NIV). In other words, Hosea's wife was just like the people of God: unfaithful to the one they had pledged to love forever, the one who had always been faithful to them. Hosea, through his heartbreaking marriage, was showing the people something about themselves.

And, as it turns out, something about God. Because here's what we see in Hosea 3:1:

} *"Go again, love a woman who is loved by another*  
} *man and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the*  
} *children of Israel, though they turn to other gods."*

Just as before, Hosea obeyed. He had to buy back his own wife out of prostitution, but she returned to live with him. In doing this, Hosea displayed to the whole nation of Israel something about the character of God.

God loves his people (which meant Israel then, and means Christians now) like a husband loves his bride. And he is faithful, even if we are not. Even when we rely on ourselves and ignore God. Or we flat-out disobey his commands and disbelieve his word. Like a wounded husband who just keeps wooing his bride, God doesn't give up on us but actively seeks us out. No matter the cost.

That's beautiful... and a little crazy. I mean, would we counsel someone whose wife became a prostitute to go pay the fee and bring her back? Maybe cut your losses and move on, right? But not God.

Do you see the point? The deep feelings and intense experiences that go with human sexuality are supposed to tell us about God's love for us. The pain we feel when someone is unfaithful is a tiny picture of the wrenching pain he feels when we turn away from him. The wonder we feel when a spouse loves us in our weaknesses and forgives us when we hurt them is a small glimpse of what it is like to experience God's unceasing tenderness. He designed our sexuality to show us how much he loves us.

## **THE ULTIMATE BRIDEGROOM**

While there are moments like that, likening God to a husband, throughout the Old Testament, it's not until the New Testament that we learn that, all along, marriage has been doing something even more. It's been pointing to Jesus. In Ephesians 5, the apostle Paul is giving married couples instructions about how to treat one another—and in the middle, he quotes from the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2, reminding us that marriage is rooted in the creation story: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” Next, he gives the meaning of that familiar story an astonishing twist by saying, “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:31-32).

Paul is claiming that, all along, Genesis 2's “one flesh” idea was really talking about Jesus and his followers. That somehow, the uniting that happens between a husband and a wife—and the deep intimacy and commitment