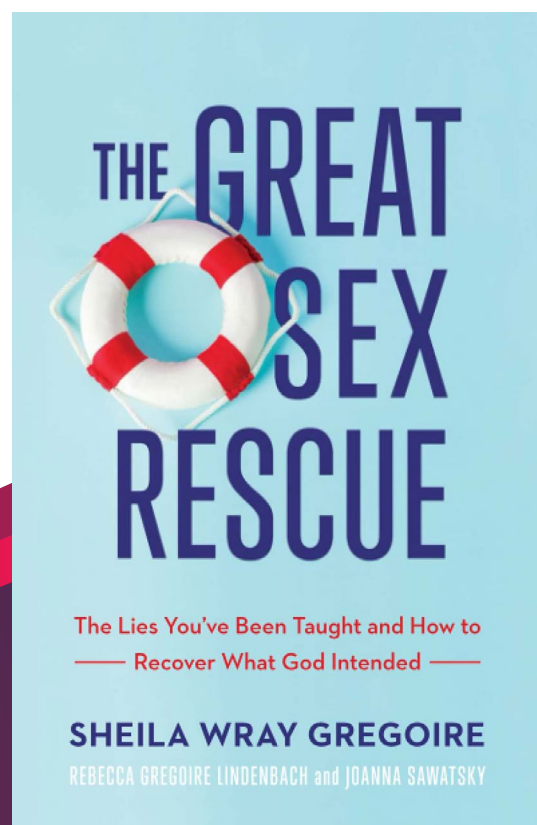


LUST

Is Lust Every Man's Battle?

Based on a survey of 20,000 predominantly evangelical women, spanning the spectrum of theological beliefs and denominations, for our book *The Great Sex Rescue*.



BARE MARRIAGE

HEALTHY, EVIDENCE-BASED, BIBLICAL ADVICE FOR SEX & MARRIAGE

with Sheila Wray Gregoire

LUST

Is Lust Every Man's Battle?

Does every man fight a daily struggle against lust? That's what popular Christian books like *Every Man's Battle* teach. These authors portray sex as an insatiable need that men have due to their male nature, and if that need isn't met, they'll be overcome by their desires and fall into sin. In fact, some of these books even make it sound like if a guy doesn't struggle with lust, he's not a real man.

NOTICING IS NOT LUSTING

Let's start by defining what lust is. Jesus said in Matthew 5:27, 28: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that **anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**"

Jesus is teaching that the principle of the seventh commandment extends beyond the physical act of adultery. But **He is not saying that seeing a woman is committing adultery.** He is talking about a man who looks at a woman with the intent to lust after her. This is an important distinction.

Seeing and even looking at a woman is not wrong. It's looking at her for your sexual gratification that crosses the line. **Sexual attraction is not the same as lust.** It is possible to notice that someone is very good looking and then do absolutely nothing else with that information. We believe that the temptation to lust can feel insurmountable because we conflate it with attraction. This makes men and boys hypervigilant, trying not to even see women.

While it's true that, on average, men respond more to visual sexual stimuli than women do, **too many Christian authors have misrepresented what the psychological research says.** It is one thing to say, for most men, sexual arousal results primarily from visual stimulation, and quite another to say, for all men, lustful thoughts will happen unless he avoids any visual stimulation.

According to books like *Every Man's Battle*, lust is the near-inevitable result of seeing a woman (unless he "bounces his eyes" away from her to avoid the temptation her mere existence poses to him). This hypervigilance stresses out a lot of men who are simply trying to be good guys. **It also leads men to think of women as the enemy.** After all, it's their bodies that supposedly represent this overwhelming threat to every man's sexual purity.



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"Women must cultivate the problem of visual lust, whereas men almost universally must cope with the problem just because they are men."

TIM & BEVERLY LAHAYE
The Act of Marriage

"Because men and women are wired so differently, women often don't realize how the opposite sex sees the world. Most women simply aren't aware of what men's visual nature means, or how much it impacts literally every area of most men's lives and relationships."

SHAUNTI FELDHAHN & CRAIG GROSS
Through a Man's Eyes

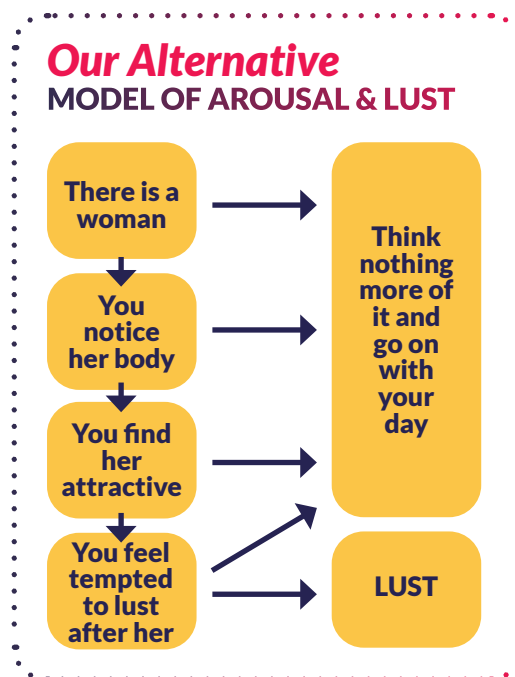
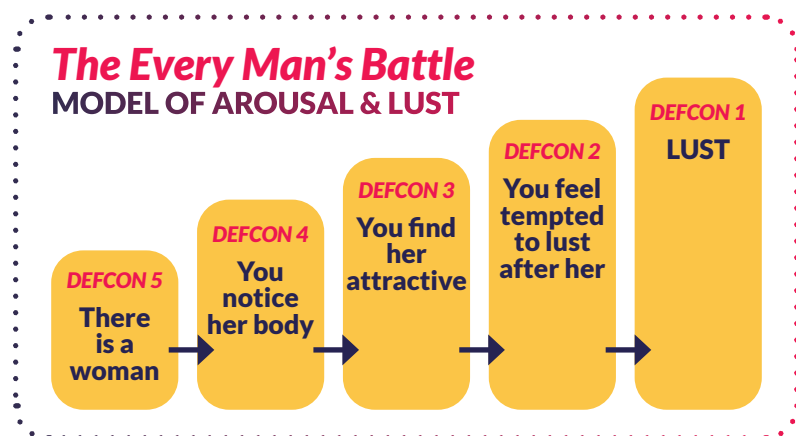
"We find another reason for the prevalence of sexual sin among men. We got there naturally—simply by being male."

STEPHEN ARTERBURN, ET AL.
Every Man's Battle

"A man can't not want to look."

SHAUNTI FELDHAHN
For Women Only

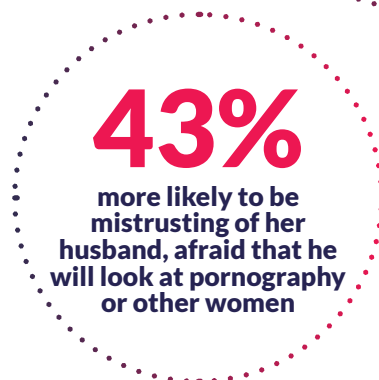
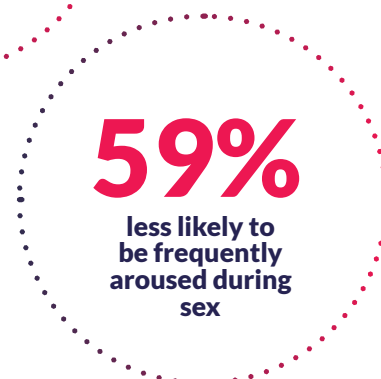
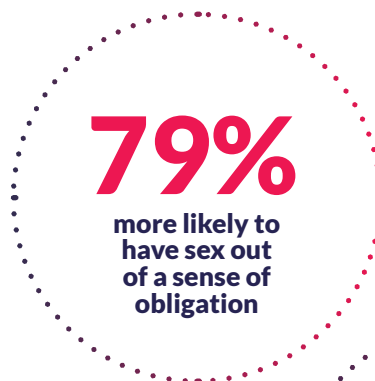
We propose an alternative model of arousal and lust. The route to lust is not straightforward, and there are **many chances to avoid lust** that don't need to lead to stress. It is possible to notice a woman is beautiful, and even to feel a flash of attraction, and then to think nothing more of it and go about your day.



THE IMPACT OF EVERY MAN'S BATTLE TEACHINGS ON WOMEN

Not only do these teachings about lust cause unnecessary stress for men, they also **negatively impact women**. When we equate lust with maleness and portray visual sexual stimulation as something unique to men, we make women who are visually stimulated feel like freaks and become **ashamed of their own sexuality**. Just because men, on average, are more sexually aroused by visual stimulation doesn't mean no women are. Both men and women should understand that noticing is not lusting. And for those who do struggle with lust, both men and women need to know that **victory is possible in Christ**.

These teachings about lust also have a **negative impact on marriages**. In our research, we found that women who agree that all men lust have **lower marital and sexual satisfaction** than those who do not. They are 79% more likely to have sex out of a sense of obligation and 59% less likely to be frequently aroused during sex. In fact, believing this message as a high school student means that when a woman gets married, she is 43% more likely to be mistrusting of her husband, afraid that he will look at pornography or other women. The *Every Man's Battle* message **is destroying intimacy and trust in marriages**.



DOES SCRIPTURE PRESENT LUST AS EVERY MAN'S BATTLE?

Let's take a step back and ask, Does Scripture talk about lust the way these books do? According to the Bible, once we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit, we should expect that lust will be defeated.

"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your *earthly nature*: sexual immorality, impurity, *lust*, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry."

Colossians 3:5

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to *offer your bodies as a living sacrifice*, holy and pleasing to God—this is your *true and proper worship*. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Romans 12:1, 2

We're not to fight a perpetual battle; we're to win the battle. Sexual sin can feel like a thick chain that ties us down, but we are called to put lust to death and live in freedom—and we can!

It is perfectly reasonable for a woman to expect her husband to live out his wedding vows. She isn't being selfish or failing to understand what it is to be a guy. She is standing on biblical principles! And we are so sorry that the **Christian community has made women think men are animals who can't help themselves** and made men think they are sinning simply for seeing.



RESPECT: THE MISSING PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

"Jesus never refused to look at women; Jesus chose to truly see women."

**SHEILA WRAY
GREGOIRE**

The solution to the problem of lust is not to "bounce your eyes" and avoid ever looking at women, which ironically perpetuates the objectification of their bodies. **It is to see women as people, human beings made in the image of God who deserve respect.** Rather than seeing women as a threat to men's purity, we should ask, Am I being respectful to this person as an image bearer of Christ?

One woman whose husband was not raised in the church commented that her husband struggled to understand the "every man's battle" view of lust because it's not how he viewed women even as a non-Christian. He had many female friends and didn't struggle not to lust after them. He considered that disrespectful. She says:

"It is crazy to him—and me—that even as a non-Christian he could control himself, but the church treats this as an insurmountable obstacle for men who are indwelt with the Holy Spirit! He has told me that the easiest way not to disrespect women is to view them as people. If a non-Christian could figure that out, what is giving the church so much trouble?"

HOW MEN CAN FIGHT LUST

The key to fighting lust is to see women as whole people rather than potential threats.

1. When you are passing by a woman, instead of bouncing your eyes, look her in the eye, give a quick, friendly nod, and turn away.
2. When you are with a woman, look her in the eye, and engage her in conversation. Ask her opinion about different topics.
3. Don't live a sex-segregated life. Join groups where women are in leadership roles or where women's opinions are considered.
4. Identify women in your life from whom you can learn, whether it's advice about work, parenting, finances, etc. Make it a practice to consult women as well as men when you are making a decision.

“MODEST IS HOTTEST”

There's still more baggage from the lust conversation to unpack. Because of the belief that lust is every man's battle, and that the mere sight of a woman's body can cause him to sin, **a heavy burden is placed on women to dress modestly in order to protect men** from their own (apparently uncontrollable) thoughts.

This message is even given to young girls entering puberty (and sometimes even before). Girls are taught that their bodies are the problem. *Brio*, a magazine for teen girls published by Focus on the Family, put it this way: “If a guy sees a girl walking around in tight clothes, a miniskirt or short shorts, you might as well hang a noose around the neck of his spiritual life.” **What a weight to carry for young girls who are still adjusting to their own changing bodies.**

What's worse, **girls are taught that their bodies will tempt even grown adult men** to lust. In her article “A Letter to Our Teenage Daughters about How They Dress,” Shaunti Feldhahn warns girls:

“When that guy sees you—this attractive girl who is drawing attention to her figure (even though you may not think of it that way)—a part of his brain called the nucleus accumbens is automatically stimulated. Instantly, even the most honorable guy is instinctively tempted to want to visually take in. . . . EVEN the dads who are there.”

Let that sink in: teenagers are told that their friends' fathers will struggle not to lust after them. **We put the responsibility for adult men's sins on the shoulders of children.** Perhaps instead of telling children to cover up, pastors should be giving messages on the evils of pedophilia and ephebophilia (sexual attraction to pubescent children). In following what Jesus taught us when discussing lust, **let's put the responsibility back on whom it belongs:** the one who has the eye causing him to stumble.

God does not blame women for causing men to sin simply by existing. And He did not create men with an automatic, uncontrollable, and sinful reaction to seeing women. For everyone's sake, it's time to change the narrative about lust.

RESCUING AND REFRAMING

INSTEAD OF THIS

“All men struggle with lust; it is every man's battle.”

“Don't dress in a way that could be a **stumbling block** for your brothers in Christ.”

“Men are **visually stimulated.**”

“Bounce your eyes to ensure you **never become tempted** by women around you.”

SAY THIS!

“Lust is a battle many people struggle with. **In Christ, we are no longer slaves to sin but to the Spirit.** When the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

“You have a responsibility to **treat others with respect regardless of what they wear.** Take every thought captive to Christ—you cannot be forced to sin by another's clothing. Sin is a choice.”

“People are visually stimulated, some more than others, and often but not always, men to a greater degree. But being **visually stimulated does not mean you are doomed to lust.**”

“Treat and respect women as whole people made in the image of God.”



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