

==== Step 1 ====

Know You're Not Alone

But remember this—the wrong desires that come into your life aren't anything new and different. Many others have faced exactly the same problems before you.

1 Corinthians 10:13 TLB

A crisp breeze blew off the ocean. Waves broke on the sand with a rhythmic, gentle thunder. Sea gulls soared, their plaintive squawks a stark contrast to the sudden silence in conversation. But at that moment, I was oblivious to it all. I stopped dead in my tracks.

I couldn't believe the words I had just heard from my good friend Stephanie.

We had been walking on the beach for nearly an hour. I spent all that time agonizing, trying to muster the courage to tell Stephanie about a private and overwhelming struggle in my life. I had never shared it with anyone before. But it was time.

Stephanie and I first met as members of the same small prayer-and-share group at church and quickly became friends. As our friendship grew, we began sharing our personal

concerns, agreeing upon accountability issues, and praying together. And as our friendship progressed, God began nudging me, the way he does when I'm being obstinate, to get my dark secret out in the open. He had recently blown apart my

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neat rationalizations and revealed to me just how black and ugly this sin really was. And now, the pain of bearing my secret alone was greater than the fear of sharing it. And he provided me with Stephanie, a caring, understanding friend. Today was the day.

I began. The words poured out, taking on volume and emotion as the story progressed. I avoided her gaze and focused on the sand at my feet, too embarrassed to look her in the eye. I shared with her how, from an early age, I learned to escape the disappointments and hurts and missing pieces of my life by relying on unhealthy substitutions. Blushing with the memory, I told her how I became infatuated with almost any romantic scene or character from a book, a movie, or TV. I thought about it constantly. I replayed each scene in my mind over and over. I confessed to her how these practices got a toehold in my adolescent life as fully developed fantasies, involving real and imagined men, and led me into a downward spiral of greater mistakes as an adult.

With stammering words, I spoke of the joy I lost over the years because of my almost constant preoccupations, and of the guilt and self-deprecation I felt as a consequence of my thoughts and resulting behaviors. Tears rolled down my cheeks and I averted my eyes in shame as I told her that what began as emotional escapes ultimately turned into the reality of affairs. And as I came to the hardest part, I choked up and barely got the words out—in one of those situations a family was torn apart.

Lastly, I told her, I now realized that my attempts to feel loved and valued by men had led, not to happiness and love, but to guilt, remorse, emptiness, resentment, and much of my life wasted.

Finally, the words stopped flowing. I felt a strange combination of embarrassment, relief, and fear. I was so afraid of what my “perfect” friend would think of *me*, the “nice little Christian woman.” I had just dumped a bucket of “uglies” at her feet. I knew she would be shocked and disgusted. I was sure she would be repulsed and totally disappointed in me as a Christian sister. I held my breath and waited for a response.



Some of you may be shocked at hearing about my transgressions. Others of you may feel my downfall is nothing compared to yours. As I look back on it now, I find it hard to believe that was really me. But I do realize it all began with a deep-seated and unfulfilled need. A need only God could meet. But I didn't understand that way back in the beginning.

My Battle

My struggle began in junior high school. But the story behind the story begins much earlier.

My biological father died when my mom was pregnant with me, so I grew up dreaming of the day I would have a daddy. I finally got one when I was ten years old, but unfortunately he had no desire to fill that role. One of my early survival skills was learning to be a people pleaser, and I vividly remember trying *everything* I knew to try to win that man over. I so desperately wanted him to love me. But because he was just not equipped for love, and because part of his brokenness evidenced itself in complete self-centeredness, I got absolute rejection instead. I cannot remember getting one kind look from him. Ever. Nor did he ever take my hand or hug me. In fact, when I wasn't being picked on mercilessly or ignored completely, I got looks from him that made me

feel like I should be ashamed for being alive, not to mention for being in the house.

Needless to say, my little “Please love me, Daddy” hole grew into a yawning chasm by the time I hit my teens. And it continued to grow.

Once I discovered Perry Mason mysteries in junior high, I became a voracious reader. I plowed through every volume I could get my hands on and couldn’t wait to get the next one. Being quite the reader herself, my mom was delighted in my newfound interest in reading. What she didn’t know was that it was my anticipation of Della and Perry eventually getting together romantically that fueled my obsession. Well, that never happened, except in my fantasies.

Looking for Love

My freshman year of high school, I developed an infatuation with one of my teachers. He was oblivious, of course, or maybe he knew and was just a very kind man. Now, as an adult, it’s obvious to me that I was still looking to a father figure for love. But for me at the time, it was an experience in burgeoning romance—in my head, anyway.

Many of us can identify with the character in this story:

Once upon a time there was a little girl who wanted to feel like a princess. She had dress-up princess clothes and a little princess tiara, but she still didn’t *feel* like a princess. She read princess stories and dreamed of a fairy-tale prince, but she still didn’t *feel* like a princess. She had little princess slippers and practiced her princess smile, but she still didn’t *feel* like a princess. Every day she would look in the mirror and say to herself, “I look like a princess and act like a princess, so why don’t I *feel* like a princess?” Then she figured it out. In order to feel like a princess, she needed a prince. And she’s been looking for him ever since.

And aren’t we all!

I accepted Christ as my Savior when I was seventeen, but I still thought and acted like a wounded, abandoned child. Inside I wanted to feel like a princess, so I desperately reached out to anything that might help me feel like one. What I didn't know for many, many years was that there is more than one way to be a princess. You can marry the fantasy fairy-tale prince, or you can be the daughter of the glorious King! Little did I know that God would be the one and only Man who would ever make me feel like a princess.

But much more was to happen before then.

As I grew older, I became more proficient and elaborate in my fantasies. They briefly took a backseat during the early years of my marriage, but once the hope for love and happiness wore away, the fantasies returned. They were certainly better than my real life, which was growing increasingly painful. Unfortunately, the issues of emotional abandonment that I experienced in my younger years were repeated in my marriage. So, after ten years of effort and off-and-on marriage counseling, I divorced and went off on my own, along with my four-year-old daughter.

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The Affair

My fantasies soon took a turn for the worse. I became infatuated with my boss, a married man with children. The familiar pattern began. First, I began indulging myself in the thought of being involved with him. Then I began creating and re-creating very realistic romantic scenarios in my mind that served to fire up my passions and make me feel the way I so desperately wanted to feel—loved and desired. Soon I began to orchestrate situations at work that on the surface seemed innocent enough. However, my motives were anything but. The odd thing is, I somehow rationalized it all.

Then, because I was able to create situations where our behavior could be compromised—it was. We began an ongoing affair, and it continued until it was discovered and brought out in the open. It was an utterly humiliating experience. But far beyond the embarrassment and disgrace was what it did to my boss and his family. Because of our affair, he lost his job and his family was destroyed.

Talking about it now makes my heart ache and brings to mind Paul's words, I am the "worst of sinners" (see 1 Timothy 1:15–16). I know I'm forgiven, but I can do nothing to change the reality of the consequences.

The Downward Spiral

Logic would dictate that I would learn from this horrific lesson. But I didn't. It was as if there was a separate person living inside me. On the exterior I appeared to be a nice, wholesome, and moral person. And I *felt* that way. I wasn't pretending. But on the inside something insidious had taken over. My obsession to feel okay about myself could be satiated only by attracting and winning the attention and "love" of a man. I made mistake after mistake. I was still going to church, reading my Bible, and praying. But the blinders were so securely attached that I literally could not see the sin. It makes no sense, I know. But it also demonstrates that when we give ourselves to sin, we can no longer trust our conscience.

As I look back on all this, I am so incredibly grateful to God that he somehow protected me from making further devastating mistakes with married men, some with kids. I know he was protecting those wives and children too.

The Beast

In the midst of this black and despicable time in my life, one of the guys in my Bible study group told me about his Adult Children of Alcoholics group. For a reason I don't remember

now, I decided to go. It was moderately interesting, and I picked up a few pieces of material as I left. Later that evening I began reading the information and a strange thing happened.

I recognized myself.

I was dumbfounded. I was reading about people with *addictions*, and they were describing me.

I felt like I had been hit by lightning. The more I read, the more irrefutable the facts became. I was struggling with a full-blown, had-me-by-the-neck, cruel, evil addiction. And it was leering back at me with a malevolent grin.

The blinders were ripped away. My eyes were opened.

Suddenly I saw it the way God saw it: black, slimy, repulsive, insidious, loathsome, horrific, and vile.

It was also powerful, malicious, resolute, and tenacious. In the ensuing months of my battle, I came to call it The Beast.

This was the struggle I shared with my friend Stephanie that day on the beach.

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Stephanie stopped walking. My heart was racing, dreading what she might say next. I braced myself when she turned to me and spoke.

“You know, I’ve struggled with very much the same thing.”

I was stunned! No awkward silence. No false words in an attempt to sound understanding. No rebuke. Instead, she shared some of her own pain. She had made mistakes too. Her stumbles were different than mine, but they shared the same origin—the desire to fill an aching, longing, empty space deep inside. She understood. I wasn’t alone! And for the first time in my life, I felt free of my secret.

Now, to fully appreciate the significance of this moment, you have to understand a little something about Stephanie. She is one of those truly admirable people. She is incredibly funny and can be outrageous at times. She is intelligent, tremendously creative, caring, and thoughtful, yet one of the humblest people I know. But her most attractive quality is that she's an awesome Christian woman, totally committed to her walk with God. And this brings me to my point: not in a million years would I have dreamed that Stephanie—wonderful, sweet, exemplary Stephanie—ever struggled with the same yearnings and temptations as I did.

The Journey Begins

That morning on the beach was only the beginning. My road to recovery was long and hard-fought. But God is faithful, and he walked every inch of that road with me. Best of all, he forgives me. I have to live with the consequences of my sin, but he graciously and patiently forgives the sin. In 1 Timothy

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is unlimited!*

1:15–16, Paul says, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.”

So, if you're hiding something dark inside, fearing it's unforgivable, remember Paul's words. No matter how badly we mess up, God's patience is unlimited!

From time to time I have to remind myself of his forgiveness and grace—especially as I put this on paper for the first time. I am no longer the same person. God has performed a “renewing of my mind,” and I am now free from the bondage of that sin. But like a recovering alcoholic, I know how important it is not to take that first drink. In my case, it's

the drink of fantasy. My rule now is to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). The moment my mind entertains the slightest notion of fantasizing, I must grab that thought and present it to God. No hesitation.

I’m sharing this with you in the hope that you will see that where there is *longing*, there is something bigger and deeper.

Real Feelings, Real Desires

That day marked a fresh beginning for me. Until that moment, I didn’t believe other women had the same wrong desires I did, at least not women in the Christian community. Boy, was I wrong!

Not long after my walk on the beach with Stephanie, I began to get a little bolder. One evening following our Saturday night church service, I went to dinner with a few of my single female friends. After ordering our meals, our conversation quickly turned to other things: the sermon, our diets, hot social issues, and, inevitably . . . men. We had just settled into our modest repast of fresh green salads, garlic cheese toast, and pasta when the topic veered to the feelings we had about being single.

This was my chance! I wanted to go deeper into this unexplored terrain. And I knew that as I became more comfortable sharing my own struggle, it would hold less power over me. Still, it was a scary proposition. I looked around the table at these three godly women. Tentatively, I began.

I believe I blurted out something along these lines: “I really struggle with my romantic and sexual thoughts and feelings about men.” I paused here to assess the reaction. Noting Elena’s raised eyebrows and a bit of facial paralysis but no out-and-out shock with Rebecca or Jennifer, I valiantly continued.

“I’ve been going through a major battle with my thought life. God has been showing me—in no uncertain ways—that allowing myself to fantasize about guys is wrong. And in the past, it has led to trouble for me. But this is something that has become an ingrained habit in order to feel okay about myself, and it’s really hard to deal with when I feel so untouched and unloved in my life.”

Silence.

In an offhand manner, and in hopes that someone would change the subject or rescue me from this rapidly deepening pit into which I was digging myself, I made a sweeping motion toward my friends around the table and said, “Maybe I’m the only one who . . . ,” and before I could finish my sentence, I witnessed vigorously shaking heads all around, and all three women began talking at once.

Married and Single

The conversation that followed was both animated and thoughtful. Rebecca, a single mom, openly and honestly began to share her frustrations with being alone and with not having physical affection. Quiet, smiling, and sensitive, Rebecca is the essence of Christian femininity. And she’s struggling with all the challenges any mother of a teenage son faces.

Jennifer brought up how hurt she felt being excluded from social life with married couples at church. Now here is a brave woman. Jennifer is a single woman in her thirties who decided to go back to school full-time for a degree in family counseling. Which also means homework, an almost full-time job, living on a shoestring budget, and very little discretionary time. She is gifted as a speaker, counselor, nurturing friend, and cook.

Elena lamented about how difficult it seemed to meet single, Christ-focused, emotionally healthy men in our particular age groups. Snatched by God from her self-professed “wild” lifestyle, Elena is now a woman deeply committed to purity

and to discovering all that God has for her life. With Elena, you never know what to expect. One moment you're in awe of an incredibly profound insight she has shared. The next, you're holding your ribs in gales of laughter after hearing a hilarious family story, complete with Elena mimicking her mother's German accent.

And, as the dinner progressed, we eventually spoke about how we wrestled with what the world has to offer as substitutes for genuine love and feelings of self-worth. As Elena put it, "There's just so much out there you can indulge in if you let yourself."

That's when Jennifer brought up an important fact: "You know, it's not just about being single. Married women have these same problems." She then launched into a story about a friend who had discovered that marriage was nothing like she had expected it to be. "My friend hinted that instead of the deep, emotionally rewarding relationship she had envisioned, hers turned out to be a 'routine and mundane life, totally without romance or spontaneity.' And she feels she mostly spends it alone."

"I have a Christian friend at work in the same boat," Elena added. "She feels her husband treats her more like a sexual object than a wife or friend. It seems that the only time he shows any real interest in her at all is when he's interested in sex. She feels used and rejected. And trapped in her marriage."

"My friend Sarah is married to a great guy, but she says even he can't always make her feel the way she wants to feel," Rebecca continued. "She says a guy just can't be everything a woman expects him to be."

Each of us felt most of our married friends had similar stories. And we acknowledged that many of them struggled with wanting to feel loved and valued, just like us.

"So what's the answer?" we all wanted to know. As we continued to talk, and we brought God's love for us into the picture, we agreed that humans are just too human to be completely selfless all the time. And we also agreed that only

God is capable of completely and unconditionally loving us, and that he alone can know exactly what each of us needs.

We reached a significant conclusion that evening. We had somehow assumed that a man in our lives would meet our needs of “just wanting to feel loved.” But we now knew the hard truth, and here it is: no man can meet all of our needs,

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yours and mine. Only God can fill our empty, yearning places inside. Only he can make us feel whole. Only his love can make us feel adored and cherished the way we really, really want to be adored and cherished.

And we also knew that just *knowing* and acknowledging this truth didn’t make the feelings change and didn’t make the temptations go away.

As we finally pushed back from the table and began to gather our things to leave the restaurant, Rebecca said, “This is really good. We need to be talking about these things more often. Why haven’t we talked about all of this before?”

And the resounding response was, “NO ONE talks about it! Pastors don’t. Women don’t. Books don’t.”

Well, this book does! Single or married, as you move through the chapters that follow, you’ll have an opportunity to consider how to balance your genuine, unmet needs, feelings, and desires with God’s best for your life. If you’ve ever felt dissatisfied or incomplete, and believed that the right kind of man could meet those needs, then this is the book for you. If you’ve ever felt that you’re not lovable enough, beautiful enough, worthy enough, or talented enough to be really loved, then you’ll appreciate that you are not alone! And if you ever yearn to feel more cherished, adored, accepted, and valued than you do right now, read on. You’ll realize in a new, fresh, and very practical way how you can experience God more personally and intimately, and how you can allow him to love you with a passion you’ve never imagined!

Embrace the Adventure!

I encourage you to write in this book—fill the margins with your reactions, thoughts, questions, feelings, and insights. Highlight things that jump off the page for you. Do the exercises. Answer the questions. Accept the “Challenge!” at the end of each chapter and “Involve God in Your Resolve” to seek his clarity, his will, and his abundance for you—his child, his daughter.

At the end of the book, we will look at information and tools that will enable us to live victorious, no-compromise lives. And as part of our wrap-up, you'll have an opportunity to formulate your own Personal Action Plan. Take advantage of the exercises, and put your passions on paper where you can review and track your progress.

So, join me as we jump into the fray. *Embrace the adventure* of living your life *fully* with the internal, abiding joy God intends for you!

Chapter Summary

Step 1: Know You're Not Alone

1. Remember that many other women struggle with their unmet needs from men, just like you, but they probably don't talk about it.
2. Recognize there may be battles to overcome, but that God is more powerful than Satan.
3. Let God begin where you are right now.

Challenge!

Jot down your responses to the questions below. If you are concerned about writing them here, create a loose-leaf notebook or purchase a journal and keep it in a safe place.

1. What do you hope will happen for you as you read through the remainder of this book?

2. Are you willing to look at how God desires for you to live your life, in spite of how difficult it might seem? Why or why not?

3. What one, specific thing do you want to do differently in your life as it relates to dealing with unmet needs? What are you willing to do differently *this week*?

Involve God in Your Resolve!

Seek God's clarity, his will, and his abundance for you—his child, his daughter.

Abba, Daddy, I know that you are the Giver of every good and perfect gift. Thank you that you love me so much that you were willing to give your Son for me. I love you and I desire to live my life the way you want me to live it. There are areas in my life where I am hurting. I have had people and circumstances disappoint me. My life has not always been the way I imagined it would be. Show me how I am trying to fill the empty places in my life in the wrong ways. Forgive me for seeking my fulfillment from people and circumstances instead of looking to you to meet those needs. Father, I need you and your strength to succeed, and I thank you that you are here for me! As it says in Psalm 119:33–35, “Just tell me what to do and I will do it, Lord. As long as I live I’ll wholeheartedly obey. Make me walk along the right paths for I know how delightful they really are” (TLB).

What else do you want to ask God right now? What else do you want to tell him?

*I pray this in the name of your precious Son, Jesus.
Amen.*

What do you sense he is saying to you right now?

==== Step 2 ====

Admit Your Unmet Needs

What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 1:9

After our conversation around the dinner table that evening, I became more determined to find answers. Married or single, what are we as Christian women supposed to do with all of these deep, unfulfilled desires? And how does our relationship with God fit into the solution of the problem? If he requires purity—“You must be holy because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16 NLT)—then what’s okay for me and what’s not? Is it permissible for me to think about whatever I want to think about, as long as I don’t act on my thoughts? Can I indulge in reading materials or movies that make me feel good as long as it doesn’t go any further? And, after all, the Bible isn’t specific when talking about two unmarried consenting adults, is it? Or is it? If I feel that my life circumstances have dealt me a bad hand, isn’t it my right to look for alternate ways to meet my needs? God doesn’t want me to be unhappy, does he? Good questions. And we’ll answer them. We will also discuss some

of the common pitfalls lurking out there in the world. And we'll deal in depth with the issue of God's benchmark for holiness and purity.

After that landmark dinner, I began reading copiously. I plowed through the Scriptures. I talked to pastors. I spent time discussing these issues with a small circle of intimate female friends. All the while, I was still struggling. I was learning and growing, but still struggling.

One day my search led me to talk with our director of women's ministry. I shared with her about my quest and some of my discoveries. I talked about my yet unanswered questions. And I mentioned that this seemed to be a topic of considerable interest. I told her I had gathered a great deal of worthwhile information that needed somehow to be shared. "We should offer this as a workshop for single women at our upcoming women's retreat," she agreed. I suggested the name of "Ahh . . . Men!" and she loved it. So it stuck.

Now you must understand that in spite of my twenty-some years as a professional trainer and facilitator, this was a scary proposition. It would mean being vulnerable with a group of unfamiliar people. Would anyone even show up? After all, the workshop topic was a bit sensitive. I did, however, believe that God wanted me to share what I had learned so far.

I immersed myself in the task. How could I put all this newly acquired information into forty-five minutes? And what did I hope each woman would get out of our time together? I prayed, did more research, and was finally ready. Well, as ready as I could be!

The Ahh . . . Men! Seminar Is Born

Our retreat was located in the beautiful mountains near Lake Arrowhead, just two hours from Los Angeles. It was Day Two, and so far everything had been wonderful. The keynote speaker was marvelous and insightful. The meals



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