MAKING ALL THINGS NEW

Restoring Joy to the Sexually Broken

DAVID POWLISON
“In Making All Things New, David Powlison offers us a gem, a helping hand, and a sure bet. True to the Bible, he is a realist. He shows us how a Christ-redefined life changes what sex means. This book is not pie in the sky. It is feet on the floor. Where do you or people you love struggle? Take David’s hand and walk this road with the Lord. He shows us all how besetting sexual sin is symptomatic of something yet hidden. Repentance of sin commences sexual repatterning, and this accessible book will take you into that dark place with the light of Christ. As the world clamors about sexual rights and privileges, the people of God must show up with something beyond moral platitudes or behavioral modification programs. We already have a Savior who knows how to rescue his people. And now we have an accessible guidebook, one that helps the sexual sinner recognize the deeper battle, and one that helps parents and allies apply faith to the dire facts of being held captive.”

**Rosaria Butterfield**, former professor of English, Syracuse University; author, The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert

“Sexual sin can seem like a trap from which one can never escape. David Powlison brings good news to those caught in sexual sin, and to those who have been sinned against. This book addresses sexual sin not with shame and moralizing but with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We all need to hear the message of this book.”

**Russell D. Moore**, president, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

“David Powlison’s ministry to all fallen humanity is evident in this book. He calls those impacted by the pain and sorrow of sexual struggle and sin to repentance while finding refuge in the arms of our faithful Savior. Likewise, he presents to all who bear God’s image a picture of what God is doing to restore the beauty of sexual intimacy in the lives of his people.”

**Timothy Geiger**, president, Harvest USA; author, What to Do When Your Child Says, “I’m Gay”
“Finally, a gospel-centered book for both genders that beautifully brings the hope of Christ to bear upon broken sexuality. Women, like men, have been sinned against sexually and have pursued their own expressions of sinful sexual behavior. *Making All Things New* masterfully achieves the author’s vision to be candid and hopeful regarding the real possibility of life transformation and to restored joy to women and men bound up in the shame and pain of sexual brokenness.”

Ellen Mary Dykas, women’s ministry coordinator, Harvest USA; author, *Sexual Sanity for Women: Healing from Sexual and Relational Brokenness*

“I love David Powlison. Few living authors have shaped my approach to gospel growth, and even preaching, more than he has. Gifted Christian counselors like Powlison read the Bible in a unique way, laying open both the truth of Scripture and the foundations of the human heart, showing where one intersects the other. I have to think that if you heard Jesus preach in the first century, you would have assumed you were listening to a very gifted counselor. In this remarkably insightful book, Powlison offers gospel hope to those who have sinned through sex and those who have suffered through it. I am excited to provide this resource to people dealing with an area in which many first experience their need of the gospel.”

J. D. Greear, pastor, The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina; author, *Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches That Send*

“*Making All Things New* is a helpful perspective for understanding a common theme in life. David Powlison will help you to see sexual transgression and sexual affliction under the unique lens of the gospel, and will guide you to find hope in the purity and the cleanness of Christ. Jesus makes all things new, even our sexual experience.”

Alexandre Chiaradia Mendes, pastor, Maranatha Baptist Church, São José dos Campos, Brazil; director of vision and expansion, Brazilian Association of Biblical Counselors; coauthor, *Dating and Engagement That God Desires*
“Nothing hinders joy more than sexual misuse and abuse, and nothing troubles more people more profoundly today than sexual deception, corruption, and brokenness. This easy-to-read book is compassionate yet uncompromising, practical yet principled. It shines light into darkness for those seeking a way out, and extends hope to those needing it most desperately.”

Daniel R. Heimbach, senior professor of Christian ethics, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, True Sexual Morality: Recovering Biblical Standards for a Culture in Crisis
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DAVID POWLISON

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A vibrant quilt has adorned a wall in our home for many years. The artist took bright swatches of fabric and cut hundreds of tiny squares and triangles. She created a lattice pattern through which you gaze into a luminous, iridescent garden. I view her quilt as an invitation to pause and catch a glimpse into a paradise. The latticework encloses, protects, provides structure, and reveals wonders. The garden within creates an impression of flower and color, air and light, life and pleasure. It gives a small picture of our God’s two great works: the goodness of his creation and the goodness of his salvation.

Both creation and salvation embrace human sexuality. Sex is an elemental good in God’s fruitful work in creation. Our sexuality is a renewed good by his fruitful working in salvation. Imagine sexuality transformed into a garden of wise love, safety, wisdom, self-control, and delight.

Imagine growing up within the protection of the lattice. Children are protected from the stains of betrayal, molestation, and assault. Sons and daughters are not defiled and sexualized by exposure to lewd humor and to suggestive or pornographic images. The sexually immature are cared for.
Imagine the dignity of sexual restraint as the first lesson of budding adulthood. We enter sexual maturity as singles, not marrieds. Friends, brothers, sisters, children, parents, and strangers are never meant to become objects of sexualized attention. Every willing learner must learn (and often relearn) broad-spectrum self-control as a core expression of love. And those who eventually marry will find that there are seasons where sexual restraint is the form love takes.

Imagine sexual desire freed and focused within the union of husband and wife. There is love, pleasure, and beauty in sexual expression during those seasons when it is a core facet of marital fidelity and love. Our sexuality was designed to be a willing servant of love. It becomes distorted by our willfulness or our fear. It is being remade into a willing servant of love. Love makes sexuality like a laser beam: its power under control, its intensity focused, nothing wasted or promiscuously scattered.

God began a comprehensive good work in you. He will complete what he has begun. Wrongs are made right, and, to quote Julian of Norwich, “all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”1 You will flourish in a garden of safety and joy.

How can this ever be? We become so stained with lewd desire and our own transgressions. And the transgressions of others so darken us with hurt and fear. How can all wrongs be made right? Jesus, the merciful, steadily intervenes. To the indulgent, he brings forgiveness, covering perverse pleasures with new innocence. To the frightened, he brings refuge, the name that calms our fears and bids our sorrows cease. There is plea-
sure and protection in Christ, God’s inexpressible gift. Sexuality becomes wise, and wisdom is that gift of God to which nothing else you desire can compare (Prov. 3:13–15).

The lovely quilt is an object lesson in creation and re-creation.

Needing a contrasting object lesson, I stopped in to talk with my auto mechanic. He fished a greasy rag from the trash bin at the back of his garage and handed it to me. Unnamable filth had soaked through that scrap of fabric. Ground-in, oily dirt. If your hands are clean, you don’t really feel like touching such a sordid rag. If you must handle such an object, you pick it up by one corner between thumb and forefinger, holding it out away from you at arm’s length. The filthy rag gives us a second, all-too-familiar picture of sexuality. Sex soaks up dark, dirty stains. We must face ground-in evils if we are to repair what’s wrong with us and help others with what’s wrong with them. You understand why Jude evokes an unpleasant sense of wariness even amid his call to generous-hearted love: “To others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh” (Jude 23 NIV).

Greasy-rag experiences turn sex itself into a darkness of renegade desires, lingering hurts, haunting shame. The darkness and stain reside not in being created sexual beings but in the doubled evil of the human condition. Evils arise from within us; evils fall upon us. We misuse our bodies, and our bodies are misused by others.
How is your life turning out with regard to sexuality? A garden in the lattice? A greasy rag from the trash bin? Here is Jesus’s personal purpose statement as he goes about his good work in us: “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev. 21:5). This book explores that making new. But before we delve into the processes of that renewal, let me begin by identifying three orienting realities.
GETTING ORIENTED

In order to renew anything, we must have a vision for what it is intended to be, for what’s gone wrong, and for how to bring about transformation. This chapter will establish that threefold vision for sexuality and then orient you to particular emphases in how I am coming at the issues.

A Threefold Vision

Christian Faith Revels in Sexual Fidelity

The Bible is frank about sexual joy within the circle of faithfulness. Fidelity first orients you as a child of God in relationship to your Father. You come under his care and oversight. Fidelity then orients you as a steward of your own body. We all enter adult life with the gift of singleness; many of us continue with the gift of singleness for many years, even a lifetime; and a majority of us will end life with the gift of singleness. We must be stewards of ourselves. Fidelity then orients you in relationship
to your husband or wife, if God subsequently gives the gift of marriage. God made sex, defines sex, evaluates sex—just as he made communication, food, family, work, money, health, and every other good thing. In his design, the man and the woman went unclothed and celebrated a unity that was frankly physical. The blessing “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:22, 28) would be realized by knowing one another “in the biblical sense,” as sex used to be whimsically described. Passing this vision on, a wise father encourages his son:

Let your fountain be blessed,
    and rejoice in the wife of your youth,
    a lovely deer, a graceful doe.
Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight;
    be intoxicated always in her love. (Prov. 5:18–19)

The Song of Solomon then sings with rhythms and images of sensual pleasure in the union of husband and wife. The Word of God chooses to spend whole chapters gazing in delight at male and female anatomy. Felicity and fidelity become one flesh.

When husband and wife join in intercourse, the One who sees in the dark sees exactly what they are doing and says, “It is very good.” The private intimacy of marriage is public before the God who made male and female, who made their union good. Sexual intimacy is intended to flourish within trustworthy fidelity. It is meant to express love in the generosity and gladness of mutual giving. It bears fruit in children, if God gives that gift. The “one flesh” of marriage is such a good thing that it serves as a central metaphor for the relationship between Jesus Christ and his people. To see sexual immoralities as wrong is not to
be nervous about sexuality. Christian faith envisions sexual joy before the eyes of the holy God. Neither immorality nor prudishness understands that.

**Christian Faith Is Candid about Sexual Wrongs**
The Bible discusses many forms of sexual immorality and sexual victimization. A vision for fidelity does not drive honesty about infidelity and betrayal underground. Prudish? Not Scripture. Squeamish about the sordid details of human life? The biblical authors frequently (though not always) eschew photographic description and details when they speak of sex and sexual organs. They often model a certain delicacy of generic description. Nonetheless, they speak openly, sometimes even graphically, of rape, adultery, voyeurism, seduction, fornication, prostitution, homosexuality, gender bending, bestiality, incest, and the like.

When Tamar experienced betrayal, rape, and humiliation from her half-brother Amnon, we are not given videographic details. But we know what was done to her. When David played the voyeur from the palace walls, we are not given an itemized description of what his eyes took in. But we know what he was doing, and what he and Bathsheba subsequently did together.

To complain about the “sex and violence” in popular culture is to complain about the glorification, mislabeling, and voyeuristic detailing of such evils. It is not the fact that these dark human realities are on the table. The Word of God does not stint in describing sex, violence, and sexual violence. Genesis, Judges, 2 Samuel, and Proverbs capture sordid moments. But God labels sin and suffering accurately. He freely speaks of the
sordid—as sordid. He does not titillate us with alluring lies and excessive pictorial detail. And God freely speaks of how alluring the sordid can be.

For example, Proverbs 7 tells a seduction story in vivid detail. But Scripture tells such a story to warn us of the allure. And whether the wrong is one-sided (e.g., rape) or two-sided (e.g., consensual immorality), sexual sin always proves suicidal. Genesis 19, Judges 19–20, and Proverbs 5–7 unpack that not just in principle but also through stories.

Scripture teaches constructive candor—the opposite of euphemism and evasiveness. It teaches accuracy—the opposite of titillation and brazen exhibitionism.

**Christian Faith Brings Genuine Transformation**

Jesus comes forgiving and changing the immoral. He bridges the chasm between sordid and glorious. He invites us to cross over from death to life. What was perverted can be converted. To disagree with immorality is not simply to condemn the immoral. It is to identify particular forms of lostness that need finding. We worship a seeking and finding God. We have been sought out and found by a Savior. He reproves the unruly in order to invite us to come seek help.

Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD:

though your sins are like scarlet,

they shall be as white as snow. (Isa. 1:18)

This same Jesus comes rescuing and protecting the victimized. He is a refuge for the afflicted. We worship a seeking and finding rescuer, a protector of the innocent. He calls predators,
liars, and betrayers to account. He comes to deliver victims from the pain and power of what their oppressors have done.

O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear
to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more. (Ps. 10:17–18)

This Christ encourages the fainthearted and holds on to the weak.

Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD! (Ps. 31:24)

In sum, the Lord has a highly positive view of sex. He has a highly negative view of immorality. And he has a deep concern both for the consensually immoral and for the victims of the criminally immoral. He has more mercy than we can imagine.

Of course, there are not two gospels, one for sinners and one for sufferers! There is the one gospel of Jesus Christ, who came to make saints of all kinds of sinner-sufferers and sufferer-sinners, whatever our particular configuration of defections and distresses. The proactive sins inflamed by immoral desires are significantly different from the reactive sins energized by fear and self-protection. But unbelief and lovelessness characterize all of us, however vast the differences in how we express them. Similarly, the temptations that come by allure are significantly different from the temptations that come by affliction. But this world misleads and bedevils all of us, however vast the
differences in what people face. So all of us head astray and all of us are led astray, but the paths we take and the provocations we face vary.

Jesus comes for each and all. So the dynamic by which the sexually immoral and the sexually victimized are transformed has a core similarity, though his work unfolds by many different ministry routes. Grace is not a panacea, a single message prescribed for whatever ails you. Christ comes bringing a myriad of specific remedies that address specific persons, struggles, and troubles. He always embodies steadfast love—and all that Exodus 34:6–7 promises. But like his Proverbs, he admonishes the sexually unruly, calling for a radical U-turn. Like the psalmists, he comforts the fainthearted, offering refuge and strength. Like a prophet, he brings justice, indicting oppressors and defending victims. Like a shepherd, he guides and protects, holding on to the weak. He is patient with all whom he befriends. In other words, he meets you right where you are. And he’s always thinking about what you need to know and the next step you need to take.

Emphases of This Book
You’ve probably already noticed or sensed something a bit unusual about my approach in writing this book. Some books are written to help people who struggle with their immoral sexual impulses. Other books are written for people who struggle with the impact of sexual betrayal, molestation, and assault. But this book will intentionally look in both directions. Sin and affliction are different in kind. What you do and what happens to you
could not be more distinct. But both intertwine in the DNA of the human condition. A double helix of darkness twists through all human experience.

Most books about sexual sanctification address the problem of sin, with little more than a nod to external forces that allure or afflict. And most books about sexual victimization are not about sanctification, giving little more than a nod to our instinctive unbelief and our impulse to react wrongly when we experience grave wrongs. But sanctification is about both transgressions and afflictions, and about the continual interplay between them. This is crucial, because it is true of both Scripture and life.

Another reason this is crucial arises from two key paradoxes in Christian growth. It is a decided mark of wisdom that our sins come to afflict us, not delight us. The experience of our own sin changes, so it becomes more like self-inflicted suffering. We experience what we want and how we behave as living contradictions to who we truly are. And it is a decided mark of wisdom that the sufferings that afflict us become occasions that produce growing faith, hope, and love. The experience of our suffering changes, so it becomes integral to how God frees us from our sins and teaches us wisdom. All Scripture—whether history or prophecy, psalm or proverb, Gospel or epistle—traffics in this interplay between our choices and our circumstances. Jesus untangles both sins and miseries. So I hope you find it helpful that I attempt to keep both in view.

You probably have not noticed something a bit more subtle about this book. The majority of books on the struggle with
sexual immorality are written for men. The majority of books on the struggle with sexual victimization are written for women. And there is a partial truth in such emphases. There often is a disparity in the experiences of men and of women. And different pastoral priorities come into play when addressing two different kinds of struggles. But so far in this book, except for references to Scripture, my only use of male pronouns has been to designate my car mechanic; my only use of female pronouns has been to designate the artist who created our quilt. Of course, men and women are different. (That fact does have something to do with the topic of sex, after all!) But it is also true that sin and suffering, like faith and love, are not rigidly sex-typed. Men are not immune to molestation or rape; women are not immune to becoming sexual predators or using pornography. Men and women read the same Psalms and learn faith. Both sexes take Galatians to heart, receiving grace and expressing the fruit of the Spirit. The Great Commission tells us that the fundamental dynamics of human experience in relation to Christ’s gospel operate across every nation, tribe, tongue, and people. But we can fail to notice that grace not only crosses cultures; it also crosses male-female differences. Mercies touch the wanderings and woes of every human heart.

Here’s another significant thing about this book. It does not derive from theory. It arises from experience, my own and others’. Christ has touched the wanderings and woes of my heart. And my personal experience has been enriched and extended by thousands of candid conversations over more than forty years. I have listened carefully when people have spoken
openly about their stories, their struggles, and their convictions. Most of these conversations have been with men and women seeking help. Many of these people have been shadowed by intrusive evils they’ve experienced. The reverberations of those betrayals have made life hard. And many people are greatly troubled by their erotic impulses. Their sexual desires and behavior distress them, rather than delighting and defining them. The truth is that they have a deeper core to their identity. The object of their sexual impulses is dissonant to who they are, contradicting core values and convictions. I have listened, understood what they are saying and why, and sought to help.

I have also been enriched by many significant conversations with people I love who are not seeking help. They are convinced that their sexuality is fine the way it is. They view their erotic desires and behavior as consistent with and even central to their core identity, values, and convictions. I listen, understand what they are saying and why, disagree, and still love them.

I’ve learned a great deal from firsthand life experience and from both kinds of conversations. I hope that the fruits of that experience bless you.

Finally, this book aims for explicit, unexpurgated righteousness. Fidelity and felicity make very good companions. I hope that these chapters deliver a clear vision and much grace, comforting the disturbed and disturbing the comfortable. The gospel of Jesus Christ renews us. He engages us in his work of renewing the immoral, the predatory, and the self-indulgent. And he engages us in the work of renewing the fearful, the withdrawn, and the overwhelmed. He is making faithful men and women.
A theme runs throughout the book: “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). Notice that this sentence is not first about finding personal assurance. It communicates Paul’s confidence regarding God’s renewing work in other people, our brothers and sisters. Our Father has begun a process in you and in me that he will finish when we see Jesus Christ face-to-face. What will this lifelong process look like? How do we get from here to there? How does degradation transform into beauty? What’s the battle like? We’re somewhere in the middle, but the Spirit of life has begun a good work. And God always finishes what he begins.
“This book is not pie in the sky. It is feet on the floor. Take David’s hand and walk this road with the Lord.”

Rosaria Butterfield
author, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*

Sexuality was a part of God’s good creation from the beginning. But with sin came a world filled with sexual brokenness. Thankfully, God is always in the business of restoration.

This book offers hope for both the sexually immoral and the sexually victimized, pointing us all to the grace of Jesus Christ, who mercifully intervenes each moment in our lifelong journey toward renewal. Author David Powlison casts a vision for the key to deep transformation, better than anything the world has to offer—not just fresh resolve, not just flimsy forgiveness, not just simple formulas, but true, lasting mercy from God, who is making all things new.

“Powlison brings good news to those caught in sexual sin, and to those who have been sinned against. This book addresses sexual sin not with shame and moralizing but with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We all need to hear the message of this book.”

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DAVID POWLISON (PhD, University of Pennsylvania) is a teacher, a counselor, and the executive director of the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation. He is also the senior editor of the *Journal of Biblical Counseling* and the author of *Seeing with New Eyes; Good & Angry; and How Does Sanctification Work?*