

YOU ARE NOT
ALONE

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ALONE**

**Biblical Counsel for Women
Struggling with Masturbation**

———— Molly Bertles ————

Molly has given us a very accessible counseling contribution. She invites the counselee as well as the counselor into the conversation. She gives solid guideposts and definitive terms along the way and is careful to make sure the reader is never lost. It's not just a 'don't do that' book; she gives practical theology that the sufferer can employ immediately. Furthermore, she does a beautiful job of getting to the origins of masturbation to help catch it at the root cause. Lastly, my favorite section is Molly's treatment of shame. In that early section of the book, she wraps believers in God's robe of righteousness and helps them rejoice in God's removal of shame. I believe it will bring comfort and rest to the struggling reader, and encourage a strong finish and perseverance.

CANDANCE DUNSTON, ACBC Certified Counselor

Over the last few years of leading a ministry focused on freedom from pornography, I have received many messages from women asking for help with sexual sin. This book is the answer. This resource is warm, biblical, clear about sin, and unapologetic about the gospel. Molly helps women see God's beautiful design for sexuality and then offers a pathway to change that is rooted in His love for sinners. She courageously shares her testimony, and I am confident that her readers will be inspired and helped by her story. I'm thrilled to recommend *You Are Not Alone*.

JACOB VALK, Filmmaker, Executive Director of Into The Light Ministries.

This book is timely—actually it's past time! Many women are battling in silence and this book is helpful, biblical, and encouraging. I appreciate the structured approach of first thinking about sexuality and the process of growth in general, and, then, applying that to female masturbation. Actually, I found the thought process clear and accessible, and will be using this as I help women, even where masturbation might not be their struggle. This book explains biblically how to change and the foundation of the gospel in ways that I believe will help many women. I especially appreciated the variety of resource recommendations in the back. Each woman may need more help in a particular aspect, depending on her unique circumstances. The list gives options to pursue a topic more deeply. I'm so thankful to have this resource to share with women. It will give them help and hope!

JANET AUCOIN, ACBC Certified Counselor, Director of Women's Ministry at Faith Church, Host of Joyful Journey Podcast

Molly has written an excellent book on a problem that is rarely talked about. She tackles a struggle that leaves women feeling broken and hopeless. This is about her own journey to freedom and the wonderful grace of God that is available to others who seek to be rescued and redeemed from this ensnaring and controlling sin. Her words are honest, compassionate, but, most of all, they are Christ-centered, biblical, and practical. Molly encourages women to find real hope that can only be found in Jesus Christ and in His powerful Word. He stands ready to help! She compassionately details God's beautiful design for sexuality and why masturbation is not part of that design. Molly lays out biblically sound and practical counsel on how to overcome this sin that leads to shame and guilt. I highly recommend this great resource!

*BEVERLY MOORE, ACBC Certified Counselor and Co-author of *In the Aftermath: Past the Pain of Childhood Sexual Abuse**

This book is exactly what I needed but couldn't find in college. When I was actively trying to fight temptation on my own, finding resources for female masturbation and pornography was nigh on impossible, which in turn made me feel even more isolated and ashamed with my struggle. Not only does this book clearly define the gospel and how it applies to sin, but it also discusses the difference between male and female masturbation, and that difference explains why the resources I did manage to find in college were rarely helpful to my specific struggle. If I could travel back in time and hand this book to my younger self, I would without hesitation!

FORMER COUNSELEE/ANONYMOUS

What is the one struggle that most people face, but no one talks about? Masturbation. Compound that with the fact that people expect men to struggle, but not women. This is why *You Are Not Alone* is such a vital book for the church and God's daughters. Molly's personal testimony of struggle and victory is woven throughout this biblically rich, clear, and practical resource. Many girls and women suffering in silence—with confusion, questions, and shame—will find this book to be full of compassion, understanding, answers, and practical guidance that always leads the reader to her deepest need and friend, Jesus Christ.

MARK SANDERS, President of Harvest USA

As a biblical counselor, I counsel women who have struggled intensely with this issue. In this book, Molly is transparent and honest about her own struggle. So many women have been duped by our culture into believing their practice of masturbation is normal, harmless, and no big deal. Chapter by chapter, Molly lays brick after brick in building a solid foundation from Scripture that debunks the lies of our culture. She is compassionate, and yet forthright, in offering solutions and solid biblical truth along with specific practical help. It is refreshing to have a resource that is so well organized and biblical. It demonstrates a clear path forward and gives hope. This is a book which is sorely needed and will help many.

SUSAN BLAKE, ACBC Certified Counselor

Shame is one of sin's most powerful weapons. It assures us that no one strays like we do and that we are too dirty, even for God to love. But Christ took our shame and calls us into relationship with others who can help us fight the most shameful sins. *You Are Not Alone* helps daughters of God battle an increasingly prevalent secret sin with the power of the risen Christ.

GARRETT KELL, Pastor Del Ray Baptist Church, Author of Pure in Heart: Sexual Sin and the Promises of God

You Are Not Alone
Biblical Counsel for Women Struggling with Masturbation

Molly Bertles

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Harvest USA is a nonprofit made up of a community of people who are passionate about the gospel of Jesus Christ and believe that it is good news for those struggling with sexual sin. With over 40 years of experience, we are dedicated to helping men, women, and families impacted by sexual sin and to providing resources that equip churches to be places of hope and healing for sexual strugglers.

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Dedication

To Joel, my patient husband—this book would not exist without you. And to my kids, who were my biggest cheerleaders.

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Names

Names used for characters in the body of the book have been changed in order to ensure the anonymity of each person mentioned.

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AND TO MY LITTLEST TWO, though I can't use your names here. You have been such blessings to our family these past few

years. I could never have imagined what God had in store for us, and I thank Him every day that you're part of it. Your silliness and joy add so much to our home.

And above all, I am thankful to the Lord for sustaining me through seminary, health challenges, and writing a book with five young kids. I have seen Him work in countless ways throughout this project—particularly in providing the right people at the right time. He has redeemed what I once saw as the most shameful part of my story, and He has been faithful every step of the way. I pray this book brings glory to His name and helps free women from bondage to sexual sin.

To The Reader

I am writing this book because masturbation is something I struggled with for years, and no one knew. I was a “good Christian girl.” I went to a Christian school and was involved in my church and youth group. But nobody knew about the sin that had enslaved me. This book is the resource I wish had been available for me. It is written for women who want to please God and find freedom from masturbation, but don’t know how. I pray this book will teach, encourage, convict, and, ultimately, lead to real and lasting change. Sin thrives in the darkness. I pray this book will be a resource to help those struggling with it to move into the light.

Preface

My Story

If you had known me in high school, you probably would have thought I was a pretty good kid. I went to a Christian school; my dad was a mission's pastor; I did not participate in any "obvious" sins: drinking, smoking, or partying. I was involved in my church, attended every Sunday, and was a leader in my youth group. During my senior year, I was debating between taking a gap year after graduation to do foreign missions or going to Moody Bible Institute. Everyone around me thought I was spiritually mature, growing in my faith, and a good Christian girl. But I had a secret. I struggled with masturbation, and had on and off for years. I was terrified of anyone finding out. I thought if people knew about it, they would think differently of me. I thought that the only reason people thought I was "good" was because they did not know about my struggle. I thought this was something only guys struggled with. I had no idea what the Bible said about this topic, and the few times I was brave enough to google "masturbation," I only found Christian resources aimed toward men. I distinctly remember being in a leaders' meeting for my high school youth group, and someone announced that the next series would be on pornography and masturbation. I was so relieved to finally hear about this topic being addressed in a church context! Then, the leader said, "But that will just be for the guys. The girls will have a series

about anxiety.” Subtext: “This is not something girls struggle with.” I thought I was the only girl in the world who did this, and these comments confirmed my feeling that I should never tell anyone.

This struggle affected me in a lot of different ways. I felt so much shame and, as a result, extremely isolated. I felt as though I could not tell others, or they would think I was weird or uniquely sinful. It affected my view of God; I had a very performance-based relationship with Him. I thought that He was happy when I was doing well with my struggle, and mad at me when I was masturbating more frequently. I kept promising that I would never do it again, only to fall back into it. Then I felt bad that not only was I sinning again, but also that I had lied to God about it too! I kept trying to stop but that just seemed impossible. I googled “What does the Bible say about masturbation?,” only to find that the word was not in the Bible. I tried to convince myself, since the word *masturbation* was not in the Bible, that God was all right with it. But I always felt guilty, dirty, and ashamed. I kept it to myself and struggled through middle school, high school, and part of my gap year, feeling that I was living a double life that no one should ever find out about.

After high school, I decided to do a mission trip to the Philippines. That time of my life was hard for several reasons. I was intensely homesick and did not have a community. Also, I continued to struggle with masturbation. I struggled with lustful thoughts too, and battled my thought life with respect to masturbation. I decided to go home early. After three months in the Philippines, I moved back home. I had started dating my then boyfriend, now husband, before I left. Once I was home, we had a talk about sexual sin and past relationships. I could tell that the relationship was getting serious, so I confessed this struggle to him. He responded well, and God was extremely gracious. The act of telling him, along with a relationship I thought was heading toward marriage, allowed me to finally find some victory and freedom from this sin.

I distinctly remember thinking after our conversation, “Ok, I had to tell him, but I am never speaking about this with anyone ever again for the rest of my life.” Because I had finally confessed

my sin, I thought that after we got married, it would all be in the past. But I continued to struggle with shame from past sin. Finally, in college, I received biblical counseling. For the first time, I truly understood how the gospel applied to my sin and shame. I understood total forgiveness in Christ and how His righteousness was given to me. I understood that, to quote the words of *A Gospel Primer*, “When I sin, God’s grace abounds to me all the more as He graciously maintains my justified status as described above.”¹ Even though I had grown up in a Christian home, I had never really understood the gospel. But now, during my college years, I finally understood the freedom that comes from the knowledge that even my righteous acts are like dirty rags (Isa. 64:6), that I am “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24). I saw that my status with God was not dependent on my actions, but on Christ’s. It was truly one of the most liberating times of my life, and so much of the shame from my past sins was taken away in that moment.

After we got married, I thought the combination of marriage and biblical counseling would make everything better. I did not think there would be any lingering effects from my struggle with masturbation. But, even after counseling, I struggled with sex in marriage. It was painful for the first several years. After talking with doctors and finding out that there was nothing wrong with us physically, we went to our church for marriage counseling. In the first session, the counselor discovered that I still felt shame because of the fact that I had masturbated before marriage. So, we really studied God’s design for sex. She talked about how sex was pure, holy, and could be worship to God. She suggested playing worship music while having sex. This seemed totally crazy to me. I thought sex and God were on two vastly different ends of the spectrum! But continuing to apply the gospel to my past and growing in understanding of God’s design for sex really helped us to solve our intimacy problems. I was so thankful that God worked through His church to help us!

Since then, I have been involved in several churches. While discipling women, I have been very open with them and shared

my testimony with them. Over the years, many women have come and told me that they were struggling with masturbation. Many said that I was the first person to whom they had spoken about this. Then, I started my Master's degree in Biblical Counseling and wrote my thesis on how the Bible helps women who struggle with masturbation. In preparation for my thesis and to help me better understand the topic, I interviewed ten women who struggled with masturbation, different biblical counselors, and experts in the field. Since completing my thesis, I have written this book. My prayer is that it will help women who struggle like I did, by showing them God's good design for sex, how masturbation is a distortion of that design, how the gospel applies to their sin and shame, and that change is possible!

When I think of how patient and kind God has been to me, I think of Genesis 50:20 where Joseph talks to his brothers and says to them, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." What Satan and my flesh intended for evil, what I said I would never talk about again, is now a part of my story that God has redeemed! Instead of feeling shame and isolation, I can use it to help others. I also think of John 10:10: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." What once was such a shameful part of my story is now something that God has redeemed, and I am not trying to hide it from others! I pray that, as you read this, you will feel less alone and more hopeful that God's Spirit can work in you to lead you to lasting freedom from this struggle.

If you are reading this and you struggle with masturbation, I am so glad you have this book! When I was searching for resources as a teenager, all I could find were resources written for men. I knew what I was doing was wrong, and I wanted to know what God thought about it, but I did not know how to find answers. It is so important for you to know that you are not alone! You are not uniquely sinful. You are not weird or manly. The gospel message is that Christ came to save us from all sin, including this one. The Bible has the answers to sin and suffering in this world. If you are reading this to help someone else who is struggling, I pray that

this gives insight into an often neglected, but extremely prevalent, issue. My prayer is that God will use this to free women from entangling sin and shame so that they can walk in the freedom of truly understanding their position in Christ.