

DEDICATION

These compiled writings on body acceptance—discovered through an incarnational view of human nature—are consecrated to the Incarnate God, our Creator, who evaluated our naked bodies as “*very good*.”

THE INCARNATE GOD

The Second in the Trinity,
Creator of all realms that be,
Stepped into ours, without His might,
Partook of our humanity;
Remaining still the great I AM,
Became that Seed of Abraham
Who’d end the darkness of our night
As both the Lion and the Lamb.

The Lion and the Lamb are one!
Of God and man, the promised Son
Redeemed us from damnation’s plight—
From sins that left our souls undone.
By death and empty tomb, our Lord
Brought law and grace into accord
And He, as Way, Truth, Life and Light,
Has human destiny restored.

That cosmic flesh He dared to take
Our King will nevermore forsake
But by its nature shall invite
The Bride to marry Him and make
A wedding royal and divine:
One Flesh enthroned to realign
His ancient plan that would unite
Creation under Adam’s line.

— *David L. Hatton, 4/6/2015*
(from *Poems Between Here and Beyond* © 2016)

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The Christian hope of salvation isn’t to become like angels of the spiritual world, but to remain true humans, eternally at home in fleshly bodies of cosmic dust, reigning forever in a restored physical universe beside the God-Man, the Divine-Human King over both worlds, because His own glorified human body of resurrected earthly flesh<sup>1</sup> points to the eternal destiny of our own. (DLH)

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(Excerpt from *Meeting at the River*)

For many readers and for many reasons, this book will be enthralling, enlightening, and exasperating. It will enthrall those who’ve longed for a closer connection to the skin they live in, but who always felt such a desire less than spiritually acceptable. It will enlighten most people to historical, Biblical, cross-cultural, and psycho-social facts about the phenomenon of nonsexual human nakedness, which certain taboos never before allowed them to learn. But this book will exasperate those whose reaction to its arguments will be like mine was—one of resistance. Some may get angry enough to slam it shut and throw it against a wall. When I finally admitted that its arguments matched the undeniable realities of my experience, I threw both of them against an old and illogical wall in my mind, and *great was the fall of it!*

— from the Preface  
 (quoted here because its words  
 clearly fit this book as well)

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PREFACE: Nudity Is No Big Deal

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey work of the stars,
 And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,
 And the tree-toad is a chef-d’oeuvre for the highest,
 And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,
 And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery,
 And the cow crunching with depress’d head surpasses any statue,
 And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels.

— Walt Whitman, from Part 31 of “*Song of Myself*”

To preface my preface, there are no better words than these of Whitman. Although he did not excel in Biblically moral vision, he read creation better than most theologians and stuck to his text better than most preachers. Here, he hit the nail on the head.

Next to many of life’s larger issues, nakedness seems petty, blown far out of proportion to its true nature. That often happens, when humans get intimidated or bored by their limited view of life’s *big picture*. They tend to create imaginary worlds from trivialities. It never brings them fulfillment, but they keep doing it.

God may be less concerned about nude bodies than about leaves, tree-toads, blackberry vines and mice. If so, a wayward focus on nudity means that too much fantasy is being read *into* it. But if Walt Whitman was right, not enough reality is being read *out of* it. A frank, honest, and close-up investigation of human nakedness never confirms our unrealistic fantasies. But it can surprisingly reveal just how much of nudity’s significance we have overlooked.

The seashore gives you a limited view of the ocean, because your gaze is cut short by the horizon. Even so, the visible vastness is still mind-blowing. Dip your finger into a tide pool, letting the brine drip onto an open palm. The drop may appear infinitesimally tiny next to the mass of ocean water in sight. Yet, under magnification, that small droplet is itself another ocean, teeming with worlds of life. Aided by electron microscopy, a closer inspection shows that the structural and organizational complexity of just one single-celled amoeba in that drop dwarfs that of any major metropolitan city.

When I taught childbirth preparation classes, I often inserted pastoral insights into my assigned curriculum. I once pointed out how much more time we spend in preparing for the hours it takes to birth a baby than in learning how to handle the years of raising one. Yet, as I continued assisting with this comparatively short episode in the perinatal process, the extent of what I perceived expanded. The number of mysteries I met in helping moms birth and breastfeed babies never stopped growing. Until my retirement, I was still gathering more details about this brief maternal time-segment.

Dealing with nude bodies is part of almost all nursing. But in my L&D work, I watched how strongly challenged the popular fantasies about nudity were, when pitted against the mundane naturalness of what I routinely saw. In that contest between opposing perceptions, realism defeated vain imagination. To a near-unanimous society, its defeat is too intimidating or too boring to be welcomed. Yet, to me, the victory of reality became a prophetic message that confronts the social majority’s reluctance to forsake its world of pretending.

So, if nudity is really *no big deal* amid other apparently more urgent, eternally meaningful concerns, why explore its mundane reality? This book answers that question by echoing the above illustrations. Yes, bare bodies seem to be a minor issue among major ones. But a closer look at nudity’s seeming triviality reveals the huge matter of *body acceptance*, which legitimately demands the same kind of attention we owe to those more crucial concerns.

If my tone sounds too confident, I will temper it with a humble confession. In all honesty, I balked at this job. I wanted to evade preaching “a prophetic message” that included naked bodies. Laying my case before God, I protested. “Why should I fight a futile battle against such a stubborn status quo? Aren’t there more productive ways to spend my time and energy?” But God held me to my pledge to Him years earlier, quoted from the prophet Isaiah: “*Here I am, send me.*” After my reluctant prayer of complaint, I heard His firm response as clearly as any I’d ever received: “*Why do you think I put you in L&D and showed you what I have? Now, get on with it!*” Since that insistent episode of guidance, I’ve tried faithfully to obey. Putting this book together was an ongoing part of that obedience.

— David L. Hatton, October, 2017

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INTRODUCTION

“*Who Told You That You Were Naked?*” —One of our Creator’s questions in Genesis 3:11

Nudity has escaped its prison. We tried diligently to keep our children from looking at it, but now, it’s visible everywhere. Because of cyber-communication, it can be viewed 24-7.

If today’s school textbooks aren’t explicit enough, kids find it in nude selfies on smart phones or watch it in public statements of protest. It’s paraded down city streets wrapped only in thin air or with thin layers of body paint. It’s seen pedaling for miles in World Naked Bike Ride events or in huge crowds of volunteers posing naked for fine art photographic shoots. Some stumble onto clothing optional beaches of nude sunbathers or discover skinny-dipping with friends at remote swimming holes. We are powerless to undo what they glean there. Through simple, natural, nonsexual, social nudity, our years of precautionary training have been forever unraveled.

As a cultural norm, *body shame* has lost its popularity and is looking less and less healthy all the time. One thing is certain: it kept us for years from seeing anything intentional in the divine quote heading this introduction. But God never wastes His words. He rhetorically posed this question right after Satan deceptively sabotaged *body acceptance* in human self-understanding.

Personally, even after years of serious Bible study, I missed the clear ramifications in God’s rhetorical query. But for more than a decade now, I’ve been reflecting on them deeply. This anthology compiles most of those reflections in the form of stand-alone essays, poems, epigrams and other writings. They sprang mainly from two activities: 1) examining the implications of humanity’s naked embodiment of the Creator’s “*image,*” and 2) finding solutions to the social problems cultivated by our obsession with body shame.

I once thought and taught that humans had God’s “*likeness*” only in our will, intellect and emotions, never bodily. But this idea discounted the *physicality* of humanness. It also overlooked God’s plan to reveal Himself through our gender-distinguishable bodies.

Most Bible teachers emphasize the psychological ways we image our Maker. While these are only implied in Scripture, the very first words directly describing God’s “*image*” are “*male and female*” (**Gen 1:27-28a**)²—physiological terms. By inattentiveness to these bodily, gender-distinctive aspects in the Bible’s initial description, we’ve effectively missed seeing “the elephant in the room.”

Why do we ignore this *sexual* dimension in how we reflect our Creator’s nature? God pronounced “*very good*,” when He used our gender-specific design to make a visible portrayal of His “*likeness*.” Yet God’s own evaluation hasn’t eliminated our shame-ridden teachings about it. If our intention was to promote *holiness*, it backfired. Shame about our bodies falls short of a *whole-person* spirituality. It also erodes the church’s credibility, stirring up a storm of criticism, whenever we attempt to discuss human sexuality.

This book confronts our misplaced trust in body shame as a Christian approach to nudity. In my novelette *Meeting at the River*, I narrated my own journey from body shame to body acceptance, filling endnotes and appendices with research and insights. This work significantly expands the supplemental material in that book. But why have I added to that fictional effort these further nonfiction reflections on body acceptance? My novelette’s detailed answer can be briefly restated: *I was surprised by the naked truth*.

Most of us grew up with body shame, embarrassed by our own nudity and shy around that of others. Some had these reactions religiously reinforced, as though God Himself invented and ordained them. But treating the body as “decent” only when dressed, and “obscene” when naked, slanders the moral purity of the Maker’s handiwork. Also, calling bare anatomy “lewd” turns the mere state of nudity into a sexual event. While such a religious designation is erroneous, its corrupting social influence has been unavoidable.

Healthcare work confronted my allegiance to these ideas and to the religious taboos behind them. As an RN, I was befuddled. *Why didn’t seeing naked female bodies arouse the sexual lust preachers warned me about?* These normal, routine encounters with nudity provided a realism that contradicted and eventually deprogrammed my years of body-shame indoctrination.

Minds that jump from false assumptions inevitably land in false conclusions. Houses built on sand collapse. A wise reconstruction means locating firm ground and forsaking the blueprints offered by unwise builders who chose to build on faulty foundations. Wisdom can raise up more stable structures by rebuilding on bedrock.

My nursing job presented *naked truth* as solid ground for a wholesome, God-honoring perspective on gender-distinguishable anatomy. For me, the physical body itself—in its ordinary, natural state—became a tested premise for arriving at the logical, healthy and morally sound philosophy of body acceptance.

Finding Adam afraid of his nudity, God asked, “*Who told you that you were naked?*” This second of three rhetorical questions was as instructional as the others. Did God ask it to expose a wicked fear-monger’s scheme? Was He highlighting the novelty of a human aversion to nudity? Or, was our Creator warning Adam (and us) not to accept definitions of His reality from fallen angels? Maybe all of these were His goals. But this middle, perhaps *central*, question pinpointed a culprit behind this new, foreign viewpoint. God’s query might be meaningfully interpreted as “*Did that liar distort the attitude I gave you about the goodness of your bare skin?*”

Satan’s corrupting viewpoint thrives today. By rejecting God’s guidance, the first humans forsook a natural response to their bodies. Yet historical, cultural and personal testimony proves their response to be reversible, because body shame is a *learned* attitude. However, wherever the devil’s original deceit is cultivated, this unnatural, unhealthy self-concept proliferates. Its widespread success is sorely evident in the body objectification, body-image dysfunctions, sexual exploitation, and gender confusion flourishing in the modern world.

The ravaging fires of these social problems are fueled by a shameful view of the body. Trying to extinguish their blaze by reinforcing that view only fans the flames. Traditional wisdom in this area is bankrupt. Bodily self-deprecation, pornography, human trafficking, sexual perversions, and more, all sprout, grow and bear fruit from the toxic seeds of body shame. Today we reap a poisoned harvest

mistakenly sown far and wide with zealous social effort.

Hospital nudity may have led me out of body shame, but the creational, incarnational theology of the Bible led me into body acceptance. My pen has been passionately prophetic in denouncing the former and declaring the latter—as this collection testifies—but gaining an open-minded hearing is much harder work.

My target audience, the Christian community, usually treats the naked body as a *taboo*. I can certainly appreciate why an attempt to correct the religious status quo will irritate some believers. Having learned body shame from my own parents and from many pulpits, I myself ended up confidently teaching its standards. I, too, became upset when I heard the voices of an unfamiliar minority challenging the truth of my long-held truisms.

A less serious irritation to some readers may be my repetitions. I’ve tried rephrasing or removing frequently repeated illustrations, quotes, allusions, and citations. But in a gathering of separate, stand-alone writings, a rehearsal of certain material is either essential or unavoidable. Also, some things *do* bear repeating, to help make healthy new ideas stick, or to get unhealthy old ones unstuck.

I’ve loosely arranged this scrapbook-like collection into general, sometimes overlapping categories: 1) *preliminary considerations*, 2) *cultural concerns*, 3) *the porn problem*, 4) *theological issues*, and 5) *an appeal to the church*. The last section is actually an extensive doctrinal essay calling for reformation in the thinking of the church. Some may wish to start by reading it first, because it introduces most of the material in the other sections. But, approaching it as a conclusive review will clarify and strengthen its call for action.

Being convinced that body acceptance is the Creator’s will, I hope to change the minds of some and reinforce the thinking of others. I have tried to be honest with the facts gathered and faithful in handling the insights gained from them. I hope they will evoke the same fidelity in my readers. If even half of what I’m sharing here proves rationally convincing or spiritually convicting, it may inspire this prayer: “*Father, if I’m wrong in how I see and treat the naked body, forgive me. Teach me to see the body as You do.*”

Whether this book hits or misses its mark, I pray its readers will strive, as I have, to make Jesus and God’s Word the foundation of their lives and logic. After all, that’s what will matter in the end, when all our words and ideas, and the secret thoughts and private motives behind them, stand “*naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*” (Heb 4:13, ESV)

Endnotes:

1. The word *flesh* in Scripture has a variety of meanings: *physical* (the body), *metaphysical* (the soul), and *ethical* (the moral will). Most theologians realize that Paul’s exceptional use of it for an ethical purpose was analogical, not literal. Throughout this book, I use it for its physical or literal meaning: *the body*.
2. Starting on p. 229, all Scripture verses and passages cited are listed in order from Genesis to Revelation, and fully quoted there, unless quoted in the text.