

Solo Sex: What Does the Bible say?

During a recent seminar on sex and marriage, one of the speakers shared how he dealt with, and justified, masturbation. When he couldn't listen any longer, one attendee spoke up, "I thought as Christians we are supposed to be like Jesus."

"That's right," the speaker answered.

"Well, I don't think Jesus did that," he replied.

After several awkward moments, the speaker quietly said, "Well, we are supposed to try to be like Jesus, but we can't be perfect."

While all of us are trying hard to give our students "real world solutions," we must be careful that we don't minimize the relevancy of Scripture and the power of God. In his recent article on masturbation [Nov/Dec 2001], Dale Kaufman said, "We must help teens navigate the stormy waters of their sexuality." The question we must answer is how do we "help them navigate?" Are we lowering the standard because we think, "They are going to do it anyway, so just let them?" This article seems to be attempting to do just that.

The Bible says that man's ways seem right to him, but in the end lead to death. As leaders, we must offer students a way to lead a balanced Christian life in an unbalanced world. Promoting a freedom to masturbate does nothing to accomplish this.

Harmful Effects

Let's face it; we live in an oversexed world. Compared to when most of us were teens, there's a massive overdrive from all mediums to stimulate young people sexually.

In our advice to "guide them," should we tell our young people to "get as close as you can to the cliff, but just don't think about it?" What if we actually tried looking at what the Bible says to do with wrong thoughts? 2 Cor. 10:5 tells us to "cast down thoughts and imaginations that exalt themselves above God and take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."

What of the helpful effects of masturbation by relieving sexual tension? Research shows that just the opposite is true.

Dr. Winnifred Cutler, a leading authority in the biology of human reproduction notes that in a sexual union two individuals bond together. "This occurs not just physically, but hormonally." Other types of sexual activity, either with multiple partners or individual masturbation, are incapable of producing this type of cyclical harmony.

A sexual addiction counselor, Dr. Douglass Weiss, agrees. In a presentation he describes how sex and the brain interact.

In the center of the brain is the medial preoptic nucleus (MPN). In your brain, when you have a sexual release, your brain experiences a release of chemicals called endorphins and enkephalins. This is the highest rush in the human body. It is the same area cocaine affects; this is why cocaine is so addicting.

Because you get the highest reward for this behavior, you want to do it again. Now, here's where it's unique. When you get the reward, whatever you're looking at—it doesn't have to be real—whatever you're looking at [at sexual release] you are bonding to whatever that [object] is. So, if you have a sexual fantasy, you'll start bonding to a fantasy world. I know guys like this in their 30's or 40's because of what they did to their MPN when they were 12 or 13 years old.

God designed it so that you would bond with one person. [To men:] In a very short period of time, no matter what your wife looks like, you bond to her. She becomes your desire. And when you think about intimacy and sexuality, you think about her. If you [masturbate] and you reward yourself for going to fantasy world, then the

fantasy is going to be what you desire. You're going to see women as objects, not people. That's not God's design. God wants you to see someone as His child. As a person.ii

"Your brain doesn't know the difference," Dr. Weiss continues, "between this [object] being appropriate or inappropriate. It just knows it got the rewards. Now, if it gets good stuff [chemical rewards] attached to bad things, what will it want to do? Bad things. [Protect] your brain. This is a holy place. If you start [masturbating] and you go over into fantasy or pornography, you are going to damage your life. It affects your own sexuality."

Encouraging teens to do this actually helps to insure their bondage to sexual issues!

What Does the Bible Have to Say?

Just because the Bible doesn't use the word "masturbation," that doesn't mean it has nothing to say about the subject. Scripture clarifies the path that sin travels in each of us. "Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin." (Jam. 1:14)

In Jesus' teaching on adultery (Matt. 5:27), Dr. Jack Hayford points out that "your (predominate) hand" (as well as "your eye") which "causes you to sin" is taught by Jesus in the context of "looking at a woman with lust" and, therefore, would include the sin of masturbation. He doesn't insist that this is the only point Jesus was making, but says there is no question that the implications are present.iii

God put inside each human a "passion button" designed to give you a very passionate way of expressing your love to your spouse. The only person ever meant to touch that passion button is your spouse.

One of the most disturbing things about Kaufman's article is the debasing of our sexuality by reducing it to a mere biological function. Sexuality is far more than that. Our sexuality was designed by God with a purpose. The "one flesh" experience in Scripture is continually written of in the context of a sacrament and is called a "mystery" (Eph. 5:1-4). Self-stimulation is the antithesis of the design and "mystery" of the sacramental one-flesh union.

"Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." (Heb. 13:4) The Greek word translated "fornicators" or "fornication" is "Pornea", and would have been understood at the time as "any sexual behavior, thought or deed, outside of the sacramental act between a husband and wife." Self-stimulation leading to an orgasm certainly defiles the marriage bed.

The article argues that one can actually masturbate without lusting. Although the notion seems preposterous to a person who has common sense, it appears that there are those who've managed to convince themselves of this. It was also suggested that as long as people "set their mind on the things above" they can masturbate freely and glorify God. Could this mean that we can do any sin we want to with our body as long as we meditate on God while we are doing it? Certainly not!

James 1:13-16 tells us that sin is the result of a process that starts in our minds. Thank God that there's a way out of all sin! (1 Cor. 10:13) Paul teaches our teens to "flee the evil desires of youth." (2 Ti. 2:22) Anything that draws someone towards immorality should send us running. The goal in the Christian life isn't to see how much temptation we can take without actually sinning. "A wise person sees trouble coming and avoids it." (Pr. 14:8) When young people feel the temptation to masturbate they need to run to God.

"Don't think of ways to indulge your evil desires," (Rom. 13:14) Instead, let's discover the power that God has given every believer "to say 'no' to ungodliness and worldly passions?" (Titus 2:12)

Self-Control

Some may wonder why we go through puberty between the ages of 11 and 13, but don't marry until our 20s.

Pastor Ted Haggard says, "God gives us the opportunity to learn self-discipline, so our marriages can be strong and healthy—trustworthy in the marriage relationship."

If young people can't control sexual impulses before marriage, why would they be able to control themselves after they're married? There's nothing about a wedding that automatically grants self-control.

In his article, Mr. Kaufman speaks of young boys as "powerless" to deal with the sexual pressures. If we have the power to say "no" to a particular behavior we are in fact exercising "self-control." There's nothing morally wrong with the struggle to be pure, and we must never abandon that struggle.

Scripture is full of admonitions to be people of self-control; it's even one of the fruits of the spirit (Gal 5:22-23). God expects us to use the power he has given us with the Holy Spirit to control our bodies and our minds.

How to Help a Teen Deal with It

The young people must know they have a leader who can teach them how to live godly lives, not merely try to relieve them of guilt. They might feel "powerless," but we need to show them that God has given them power over sin.

The first key is to build a foundation of purity by teaching the purpose for the passion button as an expression of love to their future spouses. Give them a love for purity that isn't just a bunch of rules but a virtue to be cherished.

We must also teach them that self-discipline is like a muscle, if they work it out now they'll be able to utilize it for the rest of their life.

Jeanne Mayo, veteran youth pastor of 32-year, believes that one of the most destructive lies concerning masturbation is what she terms "The Ladder Mentality." Young men and women sincerely desiring to walk in freedom often picture holiness as a very tall ladder. Each time the person "makes it" through another day overcoming in this area, they see themselves "making it another step up the ladder." But should they stumble, they often feel that they have "fallen all the way to the bottom of the ladder." Thus the journey to mental purity becomes so discouraging and hopeless that they give up. Great freedom comes when young adults realize that one "mess up" doesn't cancel out all of their efforts up to that point. The primary mental focus here needs to be direction, not perfection.

In the fight for mental purity, young people must realize that their most powerful sexual organ will always be their brain. That is why the Scripture tells us to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." (Rom. 12:2) You can give them Scriptures referenced in this article to memorize along with Job 31:1, Ps. 101:3 and Pr. 5. By meditating on Scripture they will be loaded with ammo to help them win the war with temptation.

I know of many young people who have done these things and now live in total freedom from masturbation. They're preparing to have a fantastic intimacy one day with their spouse. As leaders, we must let the principles in Scripture be the standard that we use to teach our young people.

This generation needs leaders of a high standard who teach them that it's possible to live this way and who will show them how. Let's be those leaders.

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