



What about Masturbation?

The Bible doesn't mention masturbation. But before you decide that "no news is good news," I would ask you to think about this: The Bible doesn't mention arson, child abuse, drug-trafficking, forgery, pornography, or vandalism either. Does that give you free reign to sell cocaine on the corner or demolish your hotel room when you're on vacation?

The Lord gives us guiding or life principles that require us to constantly test everything, including the Scriptures and our own hearts. That's because God wants you to meet with Him daily to wrestle with life issues. Masturbation raises a lot of life issues.

I want you to make a decision for yourself about whether or when masturbation is healthy or potentially harmful. Let's start the discussion about a few of the life issues it raises, so you can wrestle with them further in your own conversations with God.

Is Masturbation a Form of Adultery?

One of the main Bible verses used to support the notion that masturbation might be sinful is this: "You have heard that it was

said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."¹⁶⁰ It's time for you to examine your thought life as a prelude to or during masturbation.

This isn't saying you can never have any sexual thoughts. Remember the time when you were 16 years old and you spent hours rehearsing your first kiss? An innocent, barely sexual thought like that is not tinged with lust. Fond memories of having sex with your wife and enjoying the afterglow are fine, too. Marital sex is condoned by God. The real danger lies in giving our minds permission to engage in lust.

Lust can be a monster that gets out of control. If you think about it, when a man habitually invents fantasies about women in sexual ways, he trains himself to dehumanize people by stealing their images as visual aides for his own self-centered use.¹⁶¹ He effectively treats the imaginary women as unpaid prostitutes.¹⁶²

This was me. I was constantly looking for opportunities to engage in lust. At every corner I looked both ways hoping for a pretty woman to stare at. I made it a practice of storing up images throughout the day so I could use them to fuel a nightly routine of sexual fantasies culminating in masturbation. Of course, I rationalized it by pretending that the imaginary women in such fantasies were willing, consenting adults who were pleased to fulfill my every fantasy. I also convinced myself that there was no harm in indulging these fantasies, because there was no real person involved.

The *lust* was the problem. Masturbation was a convenient means of expressing and sustaining it. This is exactly the type of lust Christ warned us about.

Consider Ryan, a 17-year-old senior in high school. Although many of his friends regularly emailed or texted each other

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pornographic pictures or websites, Ryan didn't join in. He had made a purity vow, so he was careful with his eyes. He had built many good practices into his life, such as reading the Bible daily, going to church on Sundays, and attending Fellowship of Christian Athletes meetings every week. But despite his good intentions, Ryan's adolescent hormones were in overdrive. His convictions meant that he couldn't have sex until he was married. That could be years away! Meanwhile, he woke with an erection many mornings and had to take a long cold shower to ignore it without incident. At least once a week his hormones kicked in and he would dwell on sex. No matter what he did, the clock was ticking. At times, the physical need for release overcame him and he succumbed to masturbation.

Most of us have been there. And considering the developmental phase of adolescent boys and girls, it's harder to determine whether or when Ryan and other teens cross the line of sexual integrity when they masturbate.

What we do know is that lust often begins with your eyes. You may have heard it said that your eyes are the gateway to your soul. I agree. You can tell so much about a person by looking them in the eyes. Your eyes express your emotions and tell the world how you feel.

But the eyes also influence who you are and what you do. The Bible states it this way:

*The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.*¹⁶³

Whatever you allow in through your eyes finds its way into the mind. If you look upon sexual images every day, you'll end up dwelling on them and causing your heart to start yearning.

Whenever I had undressed women with my eyes, the images were so enticing that I wanted to replay the images again and again. Like a porn video, I soon started adding the flimsiest story lines: A well-dressed woman in a business suit would stroll past me with apparent indifference, but in my fantasy, when she reached the corner, she glanced back ... making it clear she wanted to have sex. My heart began wanting—no; my heart began *lusting* for sex. It was just a matter of time before my body was desperate for sexual release.

In fact, as soon as the fantasy started I knew I would later masturbate. That was the whole point. It was part of the ritual. Because of the sexualization of our culture, I was constantly surrounded by unnaturally beautiful, seductive women, often scantily dressed and leering at me provocatively from movie posters, magazine covers, soap commercials, ads for everything from socks to lingerie. Any one of those images might stick in my mind and turn into the titillating fantasy of a woman—any one of them—who saw me and lingered, just long enough to touch my arm, to loosen her blouse, to slip me her phone number or to pull me into the stairwell for a quick tryst.

That's why I ask men what they looked at or dwelt upon in the days or hours leading up to masturbation. It's important to find out the condition of a man's eyes and heart before he masturbated. If he was filling his eyes and mind with sexual ideas all day, that activity prompted his need to masturbate. And stopping that activity is the best way for him to intervene in time to avoid giving way to masturbation.

It's not just your imagination: Our culture does engulf us with constant sexual stimuli. "Sex sells" has been the motto of advertising from its inception. As far back as 1871, Pearl Tobacco used naked women to sell tobacco. A few years later, when Duke & Sons became the leading cigarette brand by inserting trading

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cards with sexually provocative starlets in every pack, it was clear that sex could sell just about anything.

So you are not alone in finding this barrage of sexual images stimulating. That's an almost universal reaction. But if you want to be a Proven Man in a daily relationship with God instead, you have to put Him first.

When men tell me they have masturbated in secret in the stalls of public restrooms or the privacy of their own showers as a result of a barrage of sexual images they couldn't avoid, I reassure them and help them map out a game plan. You may not be able to avoid provocative images entirely. Women are everywhere. Ads selling products via sex are everywhere. But you can interrupt the urge to dwell on the images or let them morph into fantasies that quickly raise the urge for release. It's much harder to resist masturbation once it has gotten to that point.

Assuming your desire to serve God as an integrity driven Proven Man is genuine, you will make your life much easier if you nip your urges in the bud. If you come across yet another movie ad with that same hot starlet who seems to keep cropping up everywhere, look away. Change the subject in your mind.

Even if an attractive woman in the elevator brushes up against you deliberately, why not stare at the ground or start a chirpy conversation in a tone so far removed from sex that it squelches the idea for both of you on the spot. Whatever you do, don't entertain the invitation to focus on lust.

Of course, in addition to these strategies, be sure to start an interesting conversation with God. Ask for His help. Turn your focus to Him, not to selfish thoughts.

Make it your constant strategy to avoid the natural tendency to linger over potentially sexual encounters. You are a Proven Man. And again, you're not alone.

Every Proven Man in America is struggling with exactly the same barrage of sexual stimuli that you are. When all else fails, remember: If they can do it, so can you.

Is Masturbation a Form of Coveting?

Anything that diverts you away from God is wrong. To me, that explains why masturbation is not even addressed in the Bible. The Lord ultimately wants you to live a daily Proven life in wholehearted devotion to Him. That's the ultimate goal. Nothing else—certainly not a distracting focus on avoiding masturbation—should interrupt your communion with Him.

The Bible does list other sexual sins to avoid, but masturbation isn't in the list. It could be because it is not always brought on by sexual stimuli. Orgasm relaxes every muscle in your body and restores your peace of mind. Lust is not always the motivation. That's why we must also test our actions and attitudes by other categories.

When you're under stress, you may feel an urge to masturbate as a relief. Maybe you are angry for being wrongfully accused or overlooked for a promotion. A frequent trigger for a husband to turn to masturbation is a fight with his wife. Tension, anger, frustration, or any feeling that something is unfair often gives way to masturbation. Because it's fun and entertaining, it can also be used as a response to simply feeling tired, bored or lonely. But simply being driven by a non-sexual motive doesn't end the masturbation sin inquiry.

The Tenth Commandment says "do not covet,"¹⁶⁴ which means not to envy or longingly desire something which belongs to another. It's all about craving something you don't have. Yet, not every desire is sinful. It's not wrong to desire a job, car, or a spouse. But, your heart can quickly start to covet. When you go there, it doesn't take much to add masturbation into the mix. Why is that?

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As you wrestle with God about whether coveting is part of the reason why you turn to masturbation, consider what Oswald Chambers said: “The core of all sin is the belief that God is not good.” Often, when a man turns to masturbation, he is really telling God that He’s wrong or that He made a mistake. Instead of waiting for God to take care of things, the man is acting on his own behalf and meeting his own needs. It may sound like one of these petulant statements:

God is holding out something good from me, so I need to get it myself.

God was wrong in saying sex is for marriage only, so I can masturbate.

God doesn’t understand my needs, so I must take care of myself.

God gave me the wrong spouse!

God gave me too high a sex drive, so I have to masturbate.

I can do a better job running my own life than God.

Failing to believe that God is good and can be trusted with your life can give rise to a perceived need for fantasy or the release of masturbation. For some, they don’t trust that God alone can meet their true needs.¹⁶⁵ Others stopped believing that God actually provides a way out of temptation¹⁶⁶ or they cannot accept that He can keep them from falling as they turn to and trust Him.¹⁶⁷ Frequently, those who chase fantasy are deciding for themselves what is right and coveting after things that God did not intend for them—guided only by their own human desires.

Soon after Dan got married, his wife began withdrawing sexually. She had been sexually abused as a child and painful

memories haunted her each time her husband approached her sexually. Sadly, Dan's wife limited sex to once every three months. Surely, if any man had a good reason to masturbate it was Dan. Because his wife was unbending, his pastor gave Dan permission to masturbate—*as long as he only thought about his wife*.

When I met Dan, it had been a year since he was given the green light to masturbate. I asked him if he was glad he masturbated. He sadly looked me in the eyes and said, "No." He explained that it really made no physical difference beyond the act itself. He quickly added that masturbation only fueled a desire for sex. He began craving it more and more. He took his eyes off the Lord and became increasingly discontent with a marriage that had forced him to masturbate alone, rather than enjoying a normal sex life with his wife. He began resenting his wife, eventually even hating her.

It took awhile, but Dan himself made a choice to stop masturbating. Instead he focused on clinging even harder each day to the Lord. Even though his situation did not change much, Dan is more content and at peace now than he was in the year he masturbated.

What Does Your Conscience Say?

God has provided you with a compass to guide you in determining whether masturbation violates your own sexual integrity: Your conscience. It grieves God when your conscience is screaming for you not to do something and you choose to do it anyway. If you cannot do something with a clear conscience, you sin by doing it.¹⁶⁸

Many psychologists suggest that the guilt you feel after masturbating is nothing more than the result of societal pressure. They claim that if your parents or church leaders didn't tell you that masturbation was wrong, you wouldn't feel guilty. This isn't

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totally true. The Holy Spirit also convicts a believer's heart and soul, which often leads to feelings of guilt or shame.

When Larry was eleven, his mom found pornography on his computer. She told him it was dirty and evil. She ordered him to stop looking at it. Larry was mortified and made sure his mom would never find it again. Larry kept looking at the photos and masturbating, but after that time, Larry always felt shame when he masturbated. He vowed to keep it a secret to his grave.

A few years later, Larry's mom read an article about masturbation and casually told him that she believed that masturbation was just something kids did before they got married. At first, Larry felt a sense of relief. His mom was basically telling him that it was okay to masturbate. That night Larry was glad to go to bed early so he could masturbate. In fact, he began masturbating every day.

Yet even though his mom had given her blessing, Larry never fully felt peace. It was like he was putting on "God blinders" each time he began his masturbation ritual, but that didn't stop him. Ultimately, masturbation was a regular part of his life, a practice he carried forward into marriage.

Merely because someone else tells you something is not a sin doesn't mean you can shut off your conscience so you can engage in that activity. Don't keep searching for someone to tickle your ears with what you want to hear.¹⁶⁹ Ask God to speak to you. The Lord has lots to say to those who want to turn to, listen to, and obey Him.¹⁷⁰

There is a danger, however, in solely measuring sin by whether you think something is sin. Just because you don't feel guilty doesn't mean that something is not sinful.

In fact, the Bible says we can deceive ourselves through repeatedly ignoring His warnings and giving ourselves over to the lust of the world.¹⁷¹ Besides, you simply cannot ignore the elements of

lust or coveting, which are sins that must be repented or they will create a dividing wall between you and the Lord.

Another Thing to Consider

Another issue comes not from the Bible, but from the hearts of women. Most women don't want their husbands (or boyfriends) masturbating.

If this is an issue for her and you keep it up anyway, it may mean you have to *lie* to your wife or girlfriend in order to masturbate. Whatever you think about masturbation, it's clear that lying or cheating is not a recipe for a healthy relationship.

Women know all too well that self-sex (which is really what masturbation means) is more about "sex" than "intimacy," and women long for intimacy. They're rightfully afraid that they can never measure up to your sexual fantasies and they worry even more when you are treating sex simply as sex.

Things also get blurry when "sex" is viewed solely as a physical activity. If that were all there was to it, sex need not be reserved just for marriage.

Let's face it, sexual acts feel good in a wide variety of settings—with or without intimacy. However, God did design sexual activities as a function of marriage.

Sex can be far more than a good feeling between two consenting adults. In marriage, sex can be a unifying experience that joins a couple as one in spirit.¹⁷² This intimate expression of love involves and solidifies a total commitment unique to a marriage where divorce or giving of oneself to another is prohibited. You're to be permanently joined and totally committed to your mate in the deepest bonds of intimacy, highlighted by sexual intimacy. As you accept this, you'll better see how masturbation often fights against the ideal of sexual intimacy between spouses.

Singles Face Big Challenges

My heart aches especially for the single man waiting for marriage. It's hard to live in this sex-based body without masturbating. Nearly every Christian man has masturbated. A large portion of men masturbate daily, weekly or monthly.

Yet what is the biggest lie of Satan to single men? *Your struggle with sex will go away when you get married, so you may as well masturbate now to hold you over.*

In truth, it doesn't go away. The patterns you develop as a single man carry over into marriage. Both Tim and I continued to masturbate regularly during marriage. In fact, 60 percent of Christian men continue to regularly masturbate into marriage.

The bigger issue is how masturbation affects your relationship with the Lord. If you know it's sinful for you and keep doing it, you'll be caught up in a downward spiral that leads you ever further away from the Lord. As you feel guilt and shame, you hide and may even try to medicate yourself with the very thing that caused the shame by escaping into fantasy and masturbation.

Stan and Missy were dating during college. Most dates ended up with passionate kissing and groping. After Stan got back to his apartment, his hormone levels were so high he would masturbate to relieve the pressure. He would either replay in his mind the evening or try to empty his mind just to get the release. Stan figured that it was better this way than to press Missy for sex.

Clearly masturbation wasn't the main issue for Stan. He was fueled by his hormones. He knew Missy wanted to remain a virgin, but he didn't want to wait. Eventually, Stan pressed Missy to second base. Within a few weeks he rounded third base. Then one night he crossed home plate.

Stan's masturbation hadn't protected Missy's virginity, nor had it quenched the sexual fire in Stan. Masturbation was just one

stop along the way. Stan stoked his urges by constantly thinking about and pursuing sexual activities with Missy. Had he stopped those thoughts before they rushed to a fever pitch, he may have been able to go without sex for years until they were able to walk down the altar together, a sanctified couple in God's eyes.

What about Married Men?

Sometimes men ask me, "Surely, it's okay for a married man to go into a room by himself to think about his wife as he masturbates, right?"

Let me ask this: Are you really thinking about your wife?

First of all, I know how easy it is to claim you are thinking about your wife, but I can tell you: God knows the difference.

Secondly, the woman in your mind as you masturbate may be cast in the image of your wife, but isn't it really a pseudo wife—the wife you wish you had instead of the one who is not in the mood? Isn't she an imaginary version of your wife—the wife you didn't bother pursuing for sexual intimacy for any number of reasons?

The chances are that you're engaging in self-sex and justifying it because you can conjure up a visual image of her, tailored to meet your own needs and desires without hesitation. That makes it hard to argue that you really are thinking about your wife.

The other potential problem may be that as a married man masturbating instead of having sex with your wife is that, when you pursue self-sex, you often rob your wife of your sexual energy. If you cannot fulfill your intimacy duties as a husband because you have been masturbating, it will not matter to her whether you have been imagining having sex with her or not. You have been going for immediate gratification, rather than waiting to include her. If her true needs are still unmet, it will be clear that you have been putting your own needs first, not hers. Consider that.

Decision Time

It's now up to you to wrestle with the topic of masturbation.

There's no doubt that masturbation is addictive and habit forming, but also feels good and releases tension. It certainly teeters on the edge of lust and only you know if it crosses that line. You also are the one to weigh whether guilt and shame associated with it causes you to hide from God or if it keeps areas of your heart off limits from a wife or future wife.

Talk to the Lord about it. He wants to hear from you.

How Can You Stop Masturbating?

The truth is that it's hard to stop masturbating! In fact, you're not strong enough to win this battle on your own. You need God's grace and power.¹⁷³

It will likely be the biggest battle you face.

Just how big of a trial will it be? It reminds me of the verse: "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood."¹⁷⁴ In other words, resisting to the point of shedding blood is the type of strength you need. Don't shy away from this or another trial. God said that trials are useful for developing perseverance and perfecting you.¹⁷⁵ In fact, you'll need perseverance in marriage too!

You'll probably have times where you stumble. But you can be victorious.

As you face your battles, remember this: God is interested in a daily relationship with you. He wants you to understand that you are a created being (whom He loves) and that you're dependent upon Him. In this process, the Lord wants to train you in many things—things that will transform you more and more into a Proven Man.¹⁷⁶ For instance; He wants you to learn to control your body¹⁷⁷ and to learn self-control.¹⁷⁸

The Lord also wants you to learn the art of fleeing from temptation and sin.¹⁷⁹ It's a valuable lesson that will perfect your life. In the area of masturbation, one of the first things you will need to do is to flee by not allowing inputs, such as pornography or second looks. You'll also need to end your fantasy life and stop thinking of ways to gratify the worldly passions.¹⁸⁰ That means not dwelling on sex. It also means avoiding or abstaining from triggers that lead to masturbation.¹⁸¹

In addition, the Lord wants you to renew your mind.¹⁸² You've already seen too much of the world. It's time to fix your eyes on the Lord. Part of renewing your mind is protecting your eyes. In short, although the hardest, the first option is often the best one—to eliminate outside sexual stimulus so that the hormones can dissipate instead of using masturbation as the release. Combine this with purposing to include all six aspects of the PROVEN acronym and you'll soon be living a Proven life.

Actions You Might Take

Although there are no set steps or programs to follow, if you want to stop it's important that you begin by making a *heart shift*. You must take the focus off yourself and your circumstances and put it on the Lord. That's the key. It begins with a firm commitment to the Lord. It also requires a commitment that masturbation is *not an option*, period. It also means resolving to do *whatever it takes* to fulfill that commitment. Only then will you taste lasting victory.

You also need to become a doer, not merely a hearer of God's word.¹⁸³ We suggest that you work through our companion *Study* named, *The 12-Week Study to a PROVEN Path to Sexual Integrity*. You'll need the 12 weeks it takes to go through it partly because it takes four weeks to end a habit and four weeks to replace it with

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a new one. The main reason for using the *Study*, however, is that you need specific training in the area of sexual integrity, such as how to put into place practical measures, including the three Rs for dealing with temptations.

Finally, it's important to attend a sexual integrity support group or otherwise enlist a networking partner. You simply cannot win this battle on your own.

A Word of Caution about Guilt and Shame

I wish we were talking face-to-face so you would see my heart. In support groups, I am gentle and understanding when a man mentions that he has masturbated during the week.

I don't judge a man who masturbates nor do I hold it against him. I encourage and comfort those who struggle just as the Lord comforts instead of condemns me when I have setbacks. I also keep bringing the issue back to the need for living out a daily Proven life. Again, God is interested in a daily relationship with you, not merely that you cut out a certain sin.

Please hear me; I don't intend to make you feel guilt or shame. I know that guilt and shame doesn't bring you closer to God, but will lead you away in a downward spiral.

Ironically, when a person feels guilty about masturbation, he wants to hide. The most common escape mechanism is fantasy and masturbation, which fuels more guilt or shame, leading to more hiding in masturbation, and so on. Therefore, to shame you would defeat the very purpose of this book and my ministry.

I was addicted to masturbation for 20 years. It nearly cost me everything. It was also the hardest thing in the world for me to give up. I want to spare you the pain and missed opportunities occurring while you hide in a make believe world centered upon fantasy or masturbation.

There is a spiritual battle raging around and over you. The devil is your enemy. He will do anything to keep you steeped in guilt and shame so that you don't enjoy intimacy with the Lord. Don't allow him to keep you a bench warming Christian by believing any of his lies.

The good news is that the Lord loves you unconditionally. God's love is not dependent upon how often you do or don't masturbate or commit a sin. He wants your daily friendship. He wants you to discuss your struggles with Him. He wants you to turn to Him in everything. God is in the business of redeeming and restoring, not rejecting anyone who comes to Him.

Every moment you shrink away in self-condemnation or guilt you're playing into the hand of Satan. The devil wants you hiding outside of God's camp and thinking you're unworthy. But that's not God's way, nor the way of a Proven Man.

Please don't live a defeated life by beating yourself up if you masturbate. Reread Chapter 8 in this book discussing *setbacks*—noting that we all experience them and that they don't remove your Proven Men stamp.

Stay in the game. Keep running back to the Lord and keep referring back to the PROVEN acronym to remind you on how to live and whom to live for:

Passionately for God,
Repentant in spirit,
Open and honest,
Victorious in living,
Eternal in perspective, and
Networked with other *Proven Men*.

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Finally, remember that the mark of a Proven Man is not the absence of masturbation, but how you respond anytime you have a setback. God's love for you (or your worth) is not based upon whether or when you last masturbated.

This Article is a reprint from an Appendix to our book, *Proven Men: A Proven Path to Sexual Integrity; Help with Pornography, Masturbation or Sex Addiction from a Biblical Perspective*. If you found it helpful, plan to pass it on to someone else and refer him to our website at: www.ProvenMen.org