

# **It's time to talk about the "M" word**

**Not the 'mother' wound, nor 'mysogyny', nor any other Living Waters jargon word, not even 'masculinity' – but..... Masturbation!**

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Not much is said about it in the Bible. It's never referred to by name. Some people use Gen 38:9-10, to infer from the Lord's displeasure when Onan spilt his seed on the ground to prevent fertilising his sister in law's womb, that He might strike us dead too if He catches us in the act! However this text clearly refers to Onan's selfishness in not providing his brother's widow with a son to continue his name, and give him descendants. It might also refer to his refusing to carry out his father's, Judah's wishes, thus not honouring the patriach. Completely different social mores and laws from a starkly different culture in a very different time. It is a long bow to draw to deduce that this text has anything to do with an ultimatum from the Godhead about the evils of masturbation!!

Theologically we can deduce that masturbation is an essentially selfish act, but then so is eating one too many cream cakes (eating any cream cakes?)! It is also hard to imagine how we might masturbate in faith. Rom 14:23 says that whatsoever is not of faith is sin. Heb 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God. And yet to wash ourselves, clean our teeth, even to have a haircut and blow dry is probably rarely done in faith by anybody. Certainly it is hard to imagine that Jesus might have, even rarely, practised it, in the light of these Scriptures and His perfect obedience. So if we want to be changed in degrees of glory into His image, or even to DWJWD (do what Jesus would do), masturbation is something we need to cease..... along with many other acts of selfishness and faithlessness.

But it seems to me that it's not the masturbation per se which needs to be addressed, but rather the thoughts, attitudes, needs and actions which underlie it. They are usually the more explicitly sinful, and the more crucial to deal with in the progression of our sanctification. Deal with these inner issues and the pressure to perform the outward act of masturbation will be considerably decreased. In His mercy, God is interested in these underlying motivations for two reasons: Firstly, our inner life, if entrenched with lust and fantasy, entangles us with considerably more damaging sin, albeit secret. Jesus said: "But I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart." (Matt 5:28)

**OFTEN MASTURBATION IS THE FINAL FRUIT OF THE HEART'S OBSESSION, AND IT IS THIS FROM WHICH JESUS WANTS TO FREE US.**

Secondly, His mercy looks towards filling the legitimate needs of our heart, which are not being met in the safe and loving ways that He has provided. Instead the lustful heart, in its craving for intimacy, desperately looks for love in destructive ways of the flesh. He so wants to pour grace into our inner loneliness and need. He knows the ways of our hearts. He knows that if we withdraw into a practice of self comfort, we actually build up walls to intimacy, which in the end, undermine our capacity to truly love. This means that we devalue the celebration of His wondrous gift of sex. God made orgasm not to be merely a physical feeling, but a communion of love. Physical union through sexual love is created to originate from our spirit, incorporating our mind, our feelings, our will and our bodies as it

gains momentum in the expression of love for our exclusive beloved. Coming from our spirit it is something which the Holy Spirit in us inspires! Jesus is as intricately involved in our sex life as He is in our evangelism! This is why Paul writes in 1 Cor 6:18-19 to flee immorality. Every other sin a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body, or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

ORGASM IS A SPIRITUAL THING PRECISELY BECAUSE IT IS THE UNION OF 2 PEOPLE, COVENANTED TO EACH OTHER FOR LIFE, SURRENDERING AND GIVING TO EACH OTHER AT THE DEEPEST LEVEL OF THEIR VERY BEINGS.

It is the gift of love which first of all consummates the marriage between husband and wife, and then, as it is passionately and tenderly expressed and explored exclusively between them, serves to bless, strengthen and deepen their relationship. And it may bring the added bonus of the gift of children! Where the act of sex is a spiritual gift of love, passion, excitement and blessing, from each spouse to the other, the ecstasy it provides is consummate beyond words. Such love can only flow in true vulnerability and selflessness when one's soul is clean of the barriers to intimacy which so easily contaminate it.

The myopic use of masturbation tends to close the soul in on itself. From an early age many children learn how to find comfort at a time of insecurity or anxiety by clutching their genitals. In adolescence this often develops into masturbation. Continually practiced, this teaches the individual to self comfort in secrecy, alone. The soul walls off. Having learned this lesson, when one encounters anxiety, insecurity, rejection or disagreement, later in life he/she often reverts to the measure first learned to cope and self comfort. At a time like this, it can be all too demanding to share inner vulnerability, or to spend the time necessary in working through communication issues within the marriage, and the fastest way for self comfort and orgasm is to turn to masturbation. Rather than building relationship and the vulnerability of love, one retreats from it. It serves to stifle love rather than enhance it. This can serve to close the soul in on itself, progressively building walls to true intimacy.

It harms the spirit as well because it precludes drawing comfort from God, satisfying one's need in the flesh. Further, because the act of love is an all encompassing act: spirit, soul (heart, mind, will) and body, masturbation tends not to confine itself to merely comforting the troubles of the soul. It tends to draw in the mind, and need stimulation through the senses. Thus the brain becomes entrenched in fantasy, the eyes with lust, and the soul with breaking boundaries which others have set by wearing clothes. (To be sure, sometimes the chosen clothes encourage the breaking of boundaries, but that becomes a self discipline issue in the protection of our own soul.) It is these very stimulations to masturbation which Jesus specifically calls sin.

So these are the strongholds in our flesh which we need first to address if we're ever going to deal with the final outcome of masturbation. In the salt (sexual addicts learning trust) groups that Living Waters run we emphasise the need to deal first with the triggers, the inner thought life, and the actions which accompany masturbation. This is where the real sin, the damage to one's own spirit and soul, to one's marriage and capacity to openly relate to others is done.

The irony is that masturbation, though its usually a sole act, impinges on others' lives dramatically. The sinful and selfish acts which stimulate masturbation can range from being acutely abusive to mildly damaging. Exhibitionism & voyeurism

openly violate others' boundaries and damage them. Pornography takes advantage of the brokenness and degradation of models and actors. Lust mentally undresses targets, often alerting their intuitive sense to being gawked at. Even if it doesn't it's an uninvited invasion of privacy. Fantasy requires a mental fiction involving others, using a sinister control in the imagination.

And there's another way in which it sins against others: it deprives them of open relationship and communication. The habit of masturbation within marriage deprives the spouse of much of the energy of love. Where masturbation is a continually practiced self comforter, it actually deprives friends and family from being a source of comfort and the recipients of communication from an open soul. Habitual masturbation walls off the soul as it creates a stronghold of introverted self solace and self communion. To simply stop masturbating, for the one so used to it, is a tough call. For the younger it is easier to learn not to develop the habit. For the hardened practitioner it's a matter of unravelling those deep practices that are entrenched in the soul.

This is a process because our sexuality, emanating from our spirit, as it does, is in essence a significant part of who we are, of our very sense of self. The faithful spouse sees him or her self as exclusively committed, and not available. The celibate sees her or himself as consecrated, and likewise not available. Relying on a false premise, the homosexual sees him or herself as having been born that way, and proud of it. The immoral person has a low view of self. And the habitual masturbator a sense of emotional isolation, being used to the self comfort of deep needs in an isolated secret ritual.

Though married people will not elaborate details of their love life they are able to affirm the mutual joy that it brings and be open about its centrality to their lives. Not so for the masturbator, who withdraws into his own closet of self comfort. The process towards freedom is to learn to identify the triggers and feelings which arouse the need for sexual stimulation, to seek God to meet those needs and to help develop life enhancing ways in which they can also be met through healthy communication with others. It may be to learn the principles of truly interactive communication. It will certainly be to learn to change habitual responses to emotional needs from the self comfort of masturbation, breaking free from bondage and being able to possess one's own vessel in sanctification and honour. (1 Thess 4:4)

Jesus, who knows our weaknesses, has all the power we need to negotiate such a liberating change in our lives. In the pain of withdrawal we can learn to view His Cross and to receive unto ourselves the abundant grace for healing and inner fulfilment which flows so freely from there. We can learn to find ourselves secure and significant in Him, where His beautiful presence in our inner being comforts our need and directs our sexual energy towards philial love and life giving activity with others until, and if, we covenant with a loved one in marriage. Where we may be married it is to learn to be more vulnerable with our partner, to be intentional about creating intimacy again and to seek healing where our relationship has broken down. As it is a process of change, there may be some falls along the way. That is not a thing to be burdened with guilt about, but like eating one too many cream cakes or looking at someone with jealousy, it is simply a sin to be confessed, an opportunity to receive fresh grace from Jesus and a new impartation of strength to resist next time. A course like Living Waters or 'salt' may be a safe place in the church where you can find support. Alternatively a counsellor may be able to help you with the emotional issues. May the Grace of Jesus be richly with you.