

The Secret That Ruins Great Sex

By Mark Laaser

Some say it's sin. Others aren't so sure. But do you know that it can ruin your sex life.

Masturbation.

It probably wasn't the subject of your pastor's sermon last Sunday. And chances are, your dad never talked to you about it while you were growing up. But it's a painful issue for many Christian men out there.

Single men, in particular, wonder what they should do until they get married. They may even ask, "Isn't it better to masturbate and satisfy my natural desires in this way rather than some 'clearer' form of sexual sin?"

One of the challenges to answering these questions is that the secular world has been busy normalizing masturbation and dispelling negative consequences. (Though it really isn't true that you will go blind.) Many of us who have gone to counselors, even pastors, about our own masturbation habits have been told, "Don't worry about that! That's normal." It is true that the experience of masturbating is very common. Even babies touch themselves and find the experience to be pleasurable. Many adolescents stumble across the experience again when it has become orgasmic and find it both exhilarating and frightening at the same time. This is not sin, but normal curiosity.

The main challenge to answering these questions men ask is that the Bible never mentions the word masturbation. In the absence of a clear command, we should be careful that we don't heap undo condemnation where God never intended it. But there are some things that we should keep in mind.

While the Bible is not clear about masturbation, it is clear about lustful fantasy. In Matthew 5:27-28, Jesus teaches that thinking about another woman lustfully is adultery. If you're looking to justify masturbation, you're going to have to ask yourself what you think about when you do it. Bringing yourself to orgasm while thinking about anyone to whom you are not married is, according to Jesus, adultery. Thinking about some sexual scenario and achieving an orgasm to those thoughts conditions you to what sex could be like. This is dangerous in that it sets up unrealistic expectations for what sex with your wife--or future wife--should be like.

Don't be self-righteous and think, "Well, I masturbate, but I only think about my wife. That isn't adultery." Do you think about actual past experiences, or do you project into the future: "Wouldn't it be great if she would only...."? Thinking this way only sets up unrealistic expectations and dishonors your wife. Maybe in masturbating you're trying to correct frequency

or sexual practice issues you have in your marriage. You may even find that when you masturbate you are angry with your wife because she isn't available in certain ways. Unhealed anger about these issues fuels vulnerability to all forms of sexual sin. Masturbating may even deprive your wife of your sexual availability to her.

Another point to ponder is that for many, masturbating leads to a certain form of "tolerance." The tolerance effect simply means that the more you do something the more you will eventually need to do it to achieve the same effect. An alcoholic knows, for example, that when he first starts drinking, one drink may be enough to get him drunk. After weeks, months, or years, a lot more alcohol will be needed to do so. This is because God has built into our bodies the amazing ability to adjust to whatever we put into it. Our bodies will eventually return to a state of normal. If we put something foreign into it consistently enough, however, the body will adjust what it considers to be normal to a higher level.

Sexual thinking causes a chemical reaction in the brain. That is what gives us the bodily response to achieve sexual intercourse and the pleasurable feeling that goes with it. Fantasizing about sex and achieving orgasm through masturbation creates this chemical reaction. If we masturbate enough, our bodies will adjust, and we will need to do it more to achieve the same effect. I have known men, in extreme cases, who started masturbating once a month or so when they were adolescents and by the time they came to me were masturbating multiple times per day. They are addicted to the brain chemicals created when they stimulate themselves in this way.

The tolerance effect can also mean that the sexual fantasy involved in masturbating will need to become more exciting, more provocative, and/or more dangerous. You may have found that your own sexual fantasies have become more elaborate involving new types of sexual activity or a constantly changing supply of imaginary sexual partners. You may not even have realized it, but your fantasy life may have become sinful in nature.

The friction of using your own hand or some other aid to achieve masturbation may also condition you to that level of stimulation. Believe it or not, this kind of conditioning may make it less likely that you will be stimulated by vaginal intercourse. Men who get into this kind of pattern may start experiencing sexual frustrations when they are being sexual with their wives.

If you understand the effect sexual fantasy and activity has on the brain, you can also understand that many of us have used the pleasurable feelings of sex to escape unpleasant feelings. You may have noticed that the times when you have most felt like masturbating are those times when you are lonely, tired, angry, frightened or stressed out. When we use masturbation or any form of sexual activity to achieve this kind of escape, we are depriving ourselves of more fulfilling and Christ-centered answers to those feelings.

Sometimes, the very sexual fantasies we use to masturbate may create imagined situations in which we are getting comfort, touch, love and nurture from imaginary others. Outside of the brain chemistry effect, these imagined relationships may give us a false sense of comfort for our feelings. In either case we are not truly looking for ultimately satisfying answers to our problems.

If you are seeking to end a struggle with chronic and addictive masturbation, remember that you are not alone. Your struggle is something that many men have faced. Nothing separates us from the love of Christ. Find fellowship with other men with whom you can be honest about your feelings. Take a risk to be vulnerable. If you're married, work on your emotional and spiritual intimacy with your wife. You don't need to be explicit with her about your sexual fantasies or masturbation habit, but you do need to tell her how you're feeling, how much you love her, and how much you need her.

We must come to realize that God intended sex for the one-flesh union of a man and woman in marriage. Paul teaches in Ephesians 5:31-32 that this union is like the relationship of Christ to the church. Ultimately, this means that any sexual activity between a husband and wife that is selfish is not Christlike in nature. Lust is selfish. Marital sex is not for the purpose of satisfying selfish desires. If that is all we are doing, we will never be satisfied. Masturbation, likewise, is never ultimately satisfying because it falls short of the incredibly satisfying nature of a spiritual union with a wife. With any of God's laws, He is not trying to spoil our fun, just trying to point us to something more fulfilling.

Like the relationship of Christ to the church, are you willing to die for your wife? If so, will you honor her and her body? So much of our Christian journey presents us with paradox. We surrender our life to Christ and receive eternal life. If you surrender your selfish sexual desires to Christ and seek to give to your wife, you will experience sexual fulfillment as He intended. NM