

Myyyyy Preciousssss...

The soul warping effects of masturbation... and how to live without it. by Mike Genung

The following is an early version of Chapter 6 of *The Road to Grace; Finding True Freedom from the Bondage of Sexual Addiction*. (No commercial reprints without permission, please.)

Note: this chapter is written from a man's perspective, and I know that women struggle with masturbation as well. The principles shown here apply either way.

One of the most fascinating characters in the Lord of the Rings movies is Gollum. Like Frodo, Gollum is a hobbit whose original name was Sméagol. Hobbits are stout people with elf-like faces who stand half the height of men; they enjoy good company with hearty beer in the local pubs, as did Sméagol... until he saw "the one ring to rule them all."

In his book "The Two Towers," Tolkien describes the origin of the ring:

"And much of the strength and will of Sauron passed into that One Ring; for the power of the Elven Rings was very great, and that which should govern them must be a thing of surpassing potency; and Sauron forged it in the Mountain of Fire in the Land of Shadow. And while he wore the One Ring he could perceive all the things that were done by means of the lesser rings, and he could see and govern the very thoughts of those that wore them."

Sauron was the evil dark lord who sought to rule all of middle earth, and it was the One Ring that changed Smeagol's life.

When "The Return of the King" opens we see Sméagol as a young adult, river fishing in a boat with his cousin Deagol. A big fish hits Deagol's line and pulls him into the river; he spots the shimmering gold ring at the bottom of the riverbed, grabs it, and quickly

surfaces. Sméagol sees the ring in Deagol's hand, is immediately entranced by it, and asks his cousin to give him the ring "for his birthday present". But when Deagol refuses, the two friends fight over it, and Sméagol strangles his cousin to death.

Obsessed with the ring, Smeagol leaves everything he knows and retreats alone to the Misty Mountains. His new home is now a dark, cold, damp cave, quite a departure from the warm cottage normal Hobbits live in. But none of this matters now; the ring is Sméagol's comfort and friend, his most precious possession.

Blinded by obsession, Sméagol couldn't see how the ring was changing him. In his isolation he turns "outside in" and his personality splits in half; in the movie we see Smeagol talking and fighting with himself as often as he does with Frodo and Sam. He gives up beer, a thing unheard of for a hobbit, and lives on raw fish. He shrivels up physically, losing most of his teeth and all but a few strands of his hair. His voice becomes a raspy hiss and he rarely smiles, except when caressing his "precious." The warped half of Smeagol's personality overtakes him, and he becomes Gollum, a name earned from the hard swallowing noises he makes.

Like Gollum, today there are many who obsess about a different kind of precious. They discover masturbation in their youth, and it's something they must have so they retreat often to isolation to be alone with the precious. They don't see what it's doing to them until later when they sense there's something wrong...

In his 1994 book "The Sexual Man", Dr. Archibald Hart surveyed some 600 Christian men on the subject of masturbation. Of the married men who responded, 61% said they masturbated, with 82% saying they did it once a week. 96% of single men under the age of 20 admitted to a masturbation habit.

Since so many Christian men are having sex with themselves you'd think they liked doing it, but in Dr. Hart's survey only 23% gave "enjoyment" as a reason for doing it. The

rest said "from habit," "because of their sex drive," "they were addicted to it," or from "lack of an outlet for sex" as the reason they engaged in masturbation.

In a weird twist, only 13% said they thought masturbation was a normal act, yet 97% said they didn't feel guilty about it. (Gollum's split personality comes to mind here.) How could this be? From experience I know my conscience is seared when I do something repeatedly that I don't feel good about. Could it be there are many men who would rather do without self-sex but don't know how to stop?

Yet, if so many normal Christian men are having sex with themselves is it really hurting anything? Is masturbation just a harmless act of physical release?

As we know from cigarette smoking and overeating, to know whether something is harmful we must look at how it affects the user and those around him. Of course, for spiritual guidance we always look to God's word. In this chapter we'll do both, beginning with the effects of masturbation.

From my teenage years until I was 36, self sex was a part of my life (I got married at age 26). Like the others who responded to Dr. Hart's survey I don't think I could have said enjoyment was why I did it; the emotional hangover lasts much longer than the pleasure, sometimes for days. When the act was over there was always a strong sense that something was missing.

Sex is about connection and communication, spirit-to-spirit communion with the person we love. When I masturbated there was no other person, so an emotional misfire took place. Instead of bonding with another in warmth, intimacy and love, I was haunted by loneliness, isolation and shame.

There isn't anything about masturbation that fits. When I tried to disconnect the spiritual from the physical, telling myself I needed masturbation just for physical release, I still felt empty afterwards. The spiritual component of sex can't be separated from the

physical.

Masturbation messed up my marriage bed. I didn't struggle with premature ejaculation, but I could have pleased my wife a lot longer than I did (today after not having masturbated since 1998 it's different). It's no accident when sex between husband and wife is a short story; it's what the husband trains himself to do when he masturbates.

The man who masturbates robs his wife of himself. She wants emotional and physical intimacy, not just a rush to the finish line. She wants to know him, and for him to hold her, commune with her and cherish her, not use her like a plaything. She wants to enjoy his company, like two best friends having a good meal.

Masturbation stunted my emotional growth. Opening up with my wife on a deeper level got harder as time went on, to the point where it felt like I was running from her at times. I'd spent so much time in isolation that I felt trapped inside; yet I was the one holding myself hostage.

Like Gollum, I was blind to what my precious was doing to me. I was self and sex obsessed, driven by urges. If I couldn't have my precious I got angry, anxious or depressed. Sex was my god, comfort and love; the source of life.

I think the worst part was the separation from the Lord I experienced when I made a few seconds of pleasure my source of life and acceptance. I knew Jesus had living water that could fill my soul, but I "drank from myself" instead (sounds a little sick doesn't it?) I grieved the Lord with my choice to make self sex my comfort.

Of course, the other obvious problem with masturbation is that many men use it with pornography, and/or they run sexual fantasies in their mind during the act. From Jesus' words in Matthew 5:28 we know this is sin, mixing self-sex with lust.

Let's turn our attention to God's word now and see what He might say about masturbation. What I hear the most from other Christians about masturbation is it's ok "because it's not in the Bible." But, if "thou shalt not" is the standard for whether

something is sin or not then we can light up a joint because there is no "thou shalt not smoke pot" in the Bible.

"Hey wait a minute!" you say. "It's obvious smoking marijuana is a sin because of the verses in the Bible prohibiting drunkenness, and smoking pot clearly violates this principle in God's word!"

I agree; we need to look at the principles in God's word as well as the Thou Shalt Nots. Let's examine a few of those principles.

Principle #1: The only time when sex is sanctioned in God's word is in the context of a marriage between one man and one woman. In Genesis 2 we read "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh". Note the "two becoming one" emphasis - that connection- communion thing again.

In Hebrews 13:4 we read:

Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Here again, the marriage bed is the sole context given for God sanctioned sex.

Now, carefully read this verse:

Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am (single). However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

1 Corinthians 7:7-9

If masturbation was a viable outlet for expressing sexual burning, wouldn't God

have had Paul write something like this: "But if they do not have self-control, let them masturbate or marry; for it is better to have sex with self or marry than to burn with passion?" Masturbation is never mentioned as a legitimate means for fulfilling sexual desire in God's word; marriage is the only outlet given. Or, put another way, masturbation isn't in the Bible.

The one man/one woman connection is developed again in the following verses:

Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "The two shall become one flesh." But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the sexually 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? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 6:13,15-20

Note how "the body... is for the Lord," "your bodies are member of Christ," "But the one who join himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him," and "your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit," are weaved in with the prohibitions against immoral sex, highlighting the importance of spirit to spirit communion. As God's children we are one spirit with Him and He lives in the temple of our bodies. We'll come back to this.

Principle #2: Masturbation is never offered as a way to deal with depression or find comfort.

When Elijah fell into depression after Jezebel vowed to kill him we don't read "and Elijah the prophet of the Lord masturbated to comfort himself." Sex with self isn't our comfort, instead -

Principle #3: We are to receive our comfort from Christ

...Who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

2 Corinthians 1:4

Principle #4: We are to be the master of our bodies and their accompanying urges; we don't allow our flesh to rule over us.

But I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

I Corinthians 9:27

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

1 Peter 2:11

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, *but I will not be mastered by anything.*

1 Corinthians 6:12

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual

immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion like the Gentiles who do not know God...

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5

We are to “discipline our bodies and make them our slaves,” “know how to possess our bodies in sanctification and honor,” and we’re not to be “mastered by anything.” We are to control our fleshly impulses, not be led by them. We are to be men with strong hearts; men of courage who can stand firm in the storms and temptations of life. If we can't say no to pleasure, it reveals a soft, vulnerable spot in our character, which the forces of darkness will exploit until we deal with it.

Our culture bombards us with messages like, “if it feels good, do it now,” and, “you deserve a break today.” If you’re sexually aroused, hey just feed the impulse, it won’t hurt anything. Go ahead... have sex with yourself or anyone you want. God’s way and our culture’s message are at war with each other. The world tells us to obey our urges while God tells us to master and control them. It’s Instant Gratification vs. Self Discipline; a passive man weakened from pleasure vs. a strong man of character who can say no; “It’s all about me” vs. “I will have sex with no one but my wife;” Softheart vs. Braveheart.

Let’s stack up the scales for and against masturbation and see which one holds the most weight:

The bad and the ugly:

No connection with another
Loneliness
Shame
Robs wife emotionally and physically
Places wedge between God and self
Promotes instant gratification mentality

The good:

It feels good for a few seconds
Can have orgasm on demand
Can do it alone
Don’t need to please your wife
No more lack of sex outlet problem
Won’t lose hair and teeth like Gollum

Promotes "It's all about me"

Can feed sex obsession

Violates marriage alone principle

Violates comfort from Christ principle

Violates mastery of flesh principle

Softens the character

Is used as a counterfeit substitute for love

The scale's a little heavy on the left, don't you think?

Maybe you're reading this and thinking, "OK, I want live without masturbation, but how do I stop? I've tried before and the urges always overwhelm me."

1. First, let's be honest: this won't be easy, especially if masturbation is an ingrained habit. Dealing with our sexuality doesn't mean we deny it, stuff it, or put on a phony Good Christian Who Never Gets Horny act. We *do* have these desires, and it's not always easy to say no.

2. When sexual desire hits, remember that sex is about *connection with another*; you are one spirit with the Lord and He dwells in your temple, and He waits for you to come to Him. Instead of misfiring with masturbation, boldly approach Abba at the Throne of Grace for His strength and comfort (Hebrews 4:16). Look at His face and expose the struggle in your flesh to Him. Drink deeply of His Living water and soak in His presence.

3. The first few months are always the toughest and there will be times when you need help to make it. (You are involved with a group or have at least one accountability partner by now, right?) When you're overwhelmed, get on the phone with a brother as quickly as possible and ask him to pray with you. I've been the recipient of many phone calls like this, and the temptations are always cut down to size after we pray together.

4. Be aware of situations going on behind the scenes that add to the battle, such as an inordinate amount of stress, unconfessed sin, or an unresolved relationship (perhaps with your spouse.) Do what you need to do now to resolve these issues.

5. Don't let failure get you down; learn from your mistakes and move on. Failure is a teacher; learn from it, make adjustments and keep going. The forces of darkness love to pound us with thoughts of despair and hopelessness; don't buy into it.

6. Remember that sex is not life; Jesus is (I am the way, the truth and the life. John 14:6). You don't need sex. Solo ejaculation is a quick shot of pleasure that will leave you miserable, empty and lonelier than you were before. Sex isn't love, it's the expression of love to your spouse. Put sex in its proper perspective.

7. Physical fitness plays a big part in the battle. You should be vigorously exercising several times a week, and I don't mean walking around the block. Personally I like to work out with weights; it's a great stress reliever and I sleep better. If I don't work out for a few days I feel like a full can of coke that's been shaken and ready to explode. Eating too many comfort foods (ice cream, sweets, packaged foods) is using food for pleasure and will feed the instant gratification mentality you're trying to silence.

8. Your character will grow stronger every time you say no to instant gratification. Be persistent and never say die; in time you will become the master of your body.

9. Every marriage goes through an occasional period of time where sex dries up. My wife has been pregnant 3 times since 1999, and after the fifth month of pregnancy she doesn't want sex. It's uncomfortable for her and she's self-conscious about her appearance. Counting her recovery time from three C-sections this means I've had about 21 months of celibacy in the past 5 years. I had three choices as to how I could have dealt

with this:

A. Masturbate. No way, precious.

B. I could have pulled out 1st Corinthians 7:5 (that stop depriving one another verse) and hit her with a manipulative guilt trip. We still wouldn't have had sex and I would have driven us further apart; I would have been stuck in resentment for what I couldn't have, and she would have resented me for not seeing her situation with an understanding heart. We both lose.

C. I could have chosen death:

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her..."

Ephesians 5:25

Jesus is saying we must be willing to die for our wives just as He died for us. In marriage there will be times when we need to allow our right to sex to be crucified for a little while. Just as Jesus approached Jerusalem determined to die, so there are times where we must choose death so our spouses can live.

Death is painful, and putting what we want up on the cross is neither easy nor pleasant. To sleep next to the one woman in the universe I could have sex with and hold back for a period of months was a struggle. There were times where I found myself pulling away from her emotionally and I had to remind myself that (1) our marriage wasn't just about sex, (2) Michelle was my best friend, and (3) she was going through a lot of physical discomfort being pregnant. My clay pot weakness kept me on my knees drawing strength from the Lord, and I shared my struggles with my brothers who would bless me by praying for my wife and me.

As all things come to an end so did our period of marital celibacy. When it did end I was able to come back to my wife with confidence, knowing I had not been setting our marriage up for more problems by masturbating (and it would have opened me up to the temptation to use porn to "spice it up").

Understand, I am not saying a wife should purposely withhold sex from her husband, and he should passively say "ok" if she does this. Marriage is the fireplace where the flames of sexual desire should be fanned into a glorious bonfire; they should never be snuffed out. The point is there will be times when your wife will go through emotional hardships, such as grieving a loss or encountering physical difficulties and you will both be blessed if you show her grace, understanding, and love instead of demanding your due.

Picture a church filled with an army of powerful men who say no to instant gratification and self-centered pleasure; they are warriors with strong hearts who stand firm in the culture of lust and, through the cracks of their weakness allow God's grace to shine through them to others. They model strength, transparency and integrity to their families and love their wives as Christ called them to. This is the high standard we are challenged to aspire to.

Or, you could hobble around hissing "the precioussss... I needs the precioussss..."

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