

## **Masturbation**

In popular mythology masturbation is a healthy release of pent-up sexual drives: it's better to masturbate than commit adultery. Some people talk of it as the lesser of two evils: it is better to masturbate than find release in extra-marital sex.

The Bible does not explicitly talk about masturbation. Christians throughout the centuries have condemned it. Only in recent years have some Christians said it is legitimate. Perhaps Christians in the past were influenced by negative views of sexuality, but then perhaps today we're influenced by sub-biblical secular psychologies.

Because the Bible does not address masturbation explicitly, we should be cautious about giving a blanket condemnation. But consider the following.

First, it is all but impossible to disconnect masturbation from inappropriate sexual fantasies – especially in a sex-saturated culture. It is a sin to have sex with someone other than your spouse even if that sex only takes place in your mind. The fact is masturbation is all but impossible without sexual fantasies and these are nearly always going to be sinful sexual fantasies.

Second, masturbation does not relieve sexual tension; it fuels it. Sexual temptation is not dissipated through sexual activity, except on the most short-term basis. Instead sexual activity such as masturbation makes sexual temptation come back sooner and stronger. This is one reason why people think they can't stop masturbating. They get caught in a vicious cycle of desire and the temporary release of masturbating which is in fact reinforcing.

Masturbation increases temptation, sustains unhelpful patterns of thinking and creates habits of thought. Every act of masturbation increases the hold of lust over your life. It's not solving anything. It's making the problem worse.

Third, masturbation does not involve the self-giving that is integral to sexual intercourse. Masturbation is a self-serving expression of sex outside of the covenant of marriage.

Masturbation is therefore fraught with danger. To use biblical terminology: "Everything is permissible for me" – but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me" – but I will not be mastered by anything.' (1 Corinthians 6:12)

So ask yourself the following questions:

- Does my masturbation involve inappropriate sexual fantasies?
- Am I in control of my masturbation or am I mastered by my masturbation?
- Is my masturbation beneficial? Does it strengthen or weaken my marriage (or future marriage)?
- Is my masturbation something I can do to the glory of God?

With these criteria in mind, I think masturbation can be a godly activity when, for example, it is mutual masturbation in marriage when intercourse is not possible or as part of fertility treatment when its goal is not self-gratification. Masturbation in these contexts can be a bonding activity between a married couple without sinful fantasies. But I doubt there are many other circumstances in which it is pure, helpful, marriage-strengthening and God-glorifying.

You may have been masturbating for years. It may have become the normal way for you to relieve tension, boredom or stress. Life without it seems inconceivable. It's hold on your life seems complete. But I have found with that many men can stop and often very quickly and relatively easily. Once they are determined to stop the virtuous cycle kicks in. Every act of resistance strengthens their resolve for next time. Once they are persuaded that life without masturbation is better than life with masturbation then they find they can kick into a virtuous cycle. Holiness becomes reinforcing. There are no quick fixes. But habits of thought can be realigned just as habits of action can be.