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# It's All About Me

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The Problem with Masturbation

Winston T. Smith



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It's normal; everybody does it."

"It's a harmless escape. Nobody's getting hurt."

These are some of the first things that may come to your mind if you are someone who indulges in sexual fantasies or masturbates. And while it certainly is "normal" in the sense that almost everyone struggles with this type of sexual sin to some degree, it is *not* harmless.

Ask Christie<sup>1</sup> who just found out that her husband has been looking at pornography on the Internet for months. She feels betrayed, deeply hurt, and wonders how she'll ever trust him again. And she can't help wondering what's wrong with her. If her husband chooses to look at other women, then she must be lacking something.

Ask Robert who realizes now that every minute he spent escaping into his fantasy world was a minute he didn't spend building healthy relationships with his wife and children. He treated them more like inconveniences—interruptions to the life of comfort and ease he wanted—than family. He

tuned out the stressful demands of family life and found escape in sexual fantasy and pornography. Now he is estranged from his children, and his marriage is in shambles.

### **How Sexual Escapes Harm Relationships**

To understand how sexual escapes harm your relationships, take a moment to examine your fantasies as more than imaginary movie clips. When we take apart your fantasy world what do we see? First of all, notice this simple fact: your fantasies are about more than sex; they are about *relationships*. That is, sex is more than a physical act; it is something that you do with a person, not an object. Your fantasies are populated with people (some of whom I'll bet you know).

For a moment look beyond the sex acts and explore these fantasy relationships in nonsexual terms. How would you describe their attitudes? How are they relating to you?

Don't just answer, "They are enjoying themselves," or "They are giving me pleasure." Let me ask you

to be a little more honest. In most cases people are fawning over you. You are the center of attention in a world where no one cares about anything but you. You are in a world where the people who normally ignore you cannot seem to resist you. You are in a world where people who don't even know you mindlessly turn away from marital fidelity and all other moral and social norms to be with you.

Am I getting close? Perhaps your fantasies take an even darker turn. Maybe your fantasies aren't about being liked at all, but about power and control. Your fantasies become a playground for anger and frustration, and you enjoy the thought of degrading others or making them cringe before you.

### **Playing God with Other People**

In the secret places of your mind, where you have free reign to live in a world with the kinds of relationships you desire most, what do your relationships look like? In relational terms, sexual fantasies are a world where you practice selfishness and manipulation. Would you

honestly describe any of this as love? No matter how widely your fantasies may vary, in every instance you play god with people. You reduce those made in the image of the true God to mindless robots who serve your whims.

“OK, so I’m a selfish uncaring person in my fantasies. So who’s being hurt?” you might ask. But remember Robert? His sexual escapes hurt himself and others because his relationships were negatively affected. You may not have noticed it yet, but the way you practice relationships in your heart will not stay safely contained. The violations of love that become the habit of your mind will inevitably find their way into the real world. That habit will contaminate all of your relationships, and in all likelihood it already has.

That doesn’t mean you will have an affair, molest children, or become a rapist, though sexual fantasy can certainly fuel those temptations. What’s more likely is that the same self-focus, pleasure seeking, and escapist attitudes that rule your sexual fantasies will infect your marriage and friendships.

Rather than learning to work through the tough moments of relationships, you will become more and more likely to seek momentary escapes. Daily irritations become reasons to tune out others and visit the secret world you've created in your mind. Perhaps, without realizing it, you will begin to export the habits of your lust (comfort, convenience, pleasure on demand, etc.) into the real world.

### **A Biblical Warning**

We shouldn't be surprised then that the Bible warns us about making overly neat distinctions between what happens in our minds or hearts and what happens in our lives. In Matthew 5:27–28 Jesus warns, “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.” Jesus knows that we often take dangerous comfort in believing that the hidden sins of the heart are harmless.

Similarly, Proverbs 27:19 tells us, “As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man.”