



A Measure of Grace

August 2009
Volume 13, Issue 8

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds

Masturbation

An Article By Roger Jones

As I sat to write this article, I became uncomfortably aware that my original title was “Masturbation by Roger Jones.” That seemed a bit too provocative, even for me. I tried to come up with a creative and witty way to communicate the message, but I could only come up with inappropriate and/or immature euphemisms for masturbation. Those will stay in my head and not be written down here!

Let me say up front that I find masturbation to be a confusing topic. One of the questions that first comes to mind, “Is masturbation a sin?” points directly to the heart of the matter. There is much disagreement about the answer to that question. I have been hesitant to write on this topic, because there are such opposing views. Teachers and leaders whom I deeply respect have come up with different answers.

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with the issue has confused me even further. There have been times when I have felt deeply convicted regarding masturbation. With this conviction came grief, remorse, and a desire to change my behavior. But there have also been seasons when masturbation seemed like the least of my problems. At times, given the plethora of sinful options available to me, I was greatly relieved that masturbation was the only behavior I had engaged in. I have been baffled by the non-issue it has been sometimes, especially during difficult times.

Culturally speaking, masturbation is more popular than ever! It is the subject of many jokes in movies and sitcoms. There is an openness about the topic now, which is better than the dark hidden-ness of the past. Unfortunately, a cavalier attitude accompanies the humorous aspects of the issue, and many never stop to question the appropriateness of the behavior. Masturbation is encouraged by many pop psychologists as a healthy and safe way to explore one's sexuality.

My own experience with the issue has confused me even further. There have been times when I have felt deeply convicted regarding masturbation.

I recently saw an episode of *Oprah* where the "specialist of the day" was encouraging moms not only to teach their daughters how to masturbate, but also to buy them "toys" to enhance the experience. The reason: to help girls separate the good, intense sexual feelings from their good, intense feelings for boys. Girls don't need men to have an orgasm, and they will make better choices for themselves if they experience sexual pleasure alone. There is a backwards sort of logic to that, I guess. This might keep girls from getting pregnant or an STD, but what else is it teaching them?

Within the church and Christianity, the traditional view seems to be that masturbation is not a good behavior. Some go so far as to call it a sin, referencing Genesis 38 and the "sin of Onan." Onan's brother was killed before he could produce a son with his wife. According to the laws of the time, it fell to Onan to impregnate his brother's wife so that she would not be barren and dishonored.

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Vss. 9 -10 read, “*But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his, so whenever he lay with his brother’s wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to keep from producing offspring for his brother. What he did was wicked in the Lord’s sight; so he put him to death also.*” This passage is misused when used to prove the sinful nature of masturbation. Onan’s sin was his refusal to impregnate his brother’s wife. This was not masturbation, but rather *coitus interruptus*. There are, in fact, no direct references to masturbation within Scripture.

There are, however, plenty of references within Scripture about sexual immorality. The one that I think best applies to the issue of masturbation is Matthew 5:28 which reads, “*But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*” This passage speaks about sexual fantasy, which is an almost inevitable aspect of masturbation. I believe the intent behind these words also includes a woman looking lustfully at a man, a man looking lustfully at another man, or a woman looking lustfully at another woman. Jesus is clear here: sexual fantasy is the heart level equivalent of adultery.

This leads us to the next logical question, “Can a person masturbate without fantasy?” This is a question I have asked myself often. I’ve even “experimented” with the concept as well, and with some success. Over the course of an almost twenty five year struggle, I’ve been successful at separating sexual fantasy from masturbation about five times. To be clear, this is not a very good success rate; apparently, it is the fantasy that is more appealing than the act itself!

After much questioning, experience, and research, I have determined that masturbation is really not something that is good for me. It is too connected with fantasy and other addictive behaviors that I no longer want in my life. In next month’s article, I will explore my reasons for saying so further. Thank you for thinking through this issue with me!



A Parent's Story ~ Part Two

As told to Mary Heathman

As you read part two of this father's story, I continue to pray the Lord will bless you by hearing this father's heart.

When my daughter came out, I completely shut down. The grief was as though she had died physically, though I was able to hide it at work and from my extended family. My parents knew I was struggling. They were concerned about my health, knowing something was wrong, (My daughter had asked her mother and I to withhold the information from our parents.)

After this happened, I was overwhelmed and stepped down as an elder and pulled back from other Christian ministry. God has given me comfort as I related to Elijah's story after he battled the prophets of Baal. I speculated that he also went through some type of depression and pulled out of sight for three years. Yet, God redeemed even our deepest pain—he has used this time to change our hearts. We are now more able to show mercy, grace, and compassion to other people, especially people who are struggling with shame-based sin.

God led us to a ministry in Denver called Where Grace Abounds

(WGA), where we experienced a great deal of healing. We now facilitate the friends and family part of this ministry, walking alongside those who have someone they love caught up in sex-based sin. We try to model the mission of Where Grace Abounds—to demonstrate 100% Grace and 100% Truth. I am in a pretty good place at this point. God has used the ministry of WGA as an important part in my healing. And, he has continued to work in me. I am applying to Seminary to pursue a certificate program as a Chaplain.

I am learning to love my oldest daughter in new ways. It has been a struggle, as our common interests have changed a lot. But God has brought a lot of healing between my daughter and her mother. Their relationship is deeper now than it has probably ever been.

My wife and I have also had to draw boundaries and walk through very difficult situations. When our daughter decided to get married she called and invited us. We decided not to attend the wedding - we knew we could not joyfully support her because of our beliefs about marriage. However, we told her that we loved her deeply, yet our convictions were also deep, and the decision was

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very difficult. We told her it seemed as if we had to choose between our daughter and our convictions.

At the time, I did not know if our decision would end our relationship with her or not, and I struggled at every wedding we attended for several years after this. I still have the same convictions and do not regret the decision I made—I believe I practiced Grace and Truth.

About two years ago we had to draw another important boundary. Our daughter gave an ultimatum to her mother telling her that unless we accepted and embraced her life-style that our relationship with her would be over. This brought about another season of great sorrow and questioning. We spent a lot of time praying and seeking the counsel of others. My wife wrote back to her expressing her great love for her and that we desired to have a relationship with our daughter. She also reminded our daughter of our convictions regarding homosexual behavior.

Our message to our daughter was that we were not requiring her to change her convictions or life-style in order to stay in relationship with us, so we did not understand why our daughter was requiring us to change our convictions in order to remain in relationship. My wife said that she would let our daughter "choose" as to whether she wanted to have a relationship with us and that we would

still love her no matter what her choice was.

It was a very difficult letter for a mother to mail - she didn't know if she would ever hear from our daughter again. Fortunately, God has used the letter as a powerful catalyst in our relationships. Mother and daughter now have a deep relationship, though they have been through very painful times. I am also seeing some softening in my daughter, especially in her relationship with God. She is not where I would like her to be, but I am thankful for the direction.

In the meantime, God has changed me a lot over the last four years. I have deep love for individuals I meet at Where Grace Abounds who are struggling or have struggled with homosexuality. I love my daughter deeply and pray for her daily asking God to soften her heart.

Please pray—and as you pray for homosexuals, also pray for parents and families. The parents of homosexuals, especially Christian parents, may be completely overwhelmed as we were.



Captivity: Then and Now

By Ed Nurge



Two questions related to sexuality trouble me: 1. Why doesn't the church get it—that there will always be a wide variety of sexual struggles and strugglers? 2. Why don't I get it—that no matter how much I've learned or grown or healed or changed, problems remain? Both questions were on my mind last year when God interrupted with, "You think you're so bad? Look at My people Israel."

But instead of the usual focus on wilderness wandering or the misdeeds of Saul and many other Israelite kings, God wanted me to look at the captivity in Babylon – as a good backdrop for my own broken sexuality, where I too maximize my problems and minimize God's promises. I often think I am the worst sinner because of what I feel, and I've often dismissed God's promises as rose-colored-glasses that need to be smashed. The Pentecostal church I grew up in frequently took God's promises out of context and applied them to everything, without real concern for hurting people.

So, as I'm learning slowly, ***God's love and promises can be applied to all of human sin, including my own.*** I especially have needed to understand from Israel's history that all human beings can experience reconciliation to God and others. This is what I realized for the first time when I looked closely at captivity: God not only promised that Israel would leave captivity, return to their land, and be given a circumcised heart to love God as they should, but has extended those same promises to me too! I've broken these down to three ongoing, difficult processes.

1. Leaving Captivity: Recognizing that broken sexuality put us "in captivity" and only God can help – using people, events, feelings, thoughts, etc. – to push us toward healing. Like the downward spiral shown in Romans 1, we usually know we're trapped only as we circle the drain. Captivity's allure is the comfort of the known, as opposed to the "uneasy unknown" God challenges me to enter. My head knows God offers great rewards but my heart resists by turning to what it knows best – captiv-

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ity.

2. *Regaining Humanity:* Unlike Israel, I don't have a land to come home to but I need to return to my "true self." Being created from earth, made in God's image, with His breath giving me life, I see my humanity as I reach out to others in love. Jesus Christ's incarnation gives dignity to my humanity that I didn't think was there. For me, I refused to embrace my sexuality as part of my humanity, since I was more concerned with pain management, avoiding huge emotional and relational problems, dealing with symbolic confusion, along with fallout from physical and sexual abuse. I've been forced to see myself as human, not a monster, but also to deal with others and God as they are instead of as I want them to be. This brings more pain, vulnerability, humility and self-sacrifice than I think I can take – since real love feels to me much weaker, poorer, lonelier, more afraid and abandoned than the "fake sexuality" allowed me to pretend I was.

3. *Loving God:* While regaining humanity by caring for others in small ways, my love for God increased as I saw Him working out my healing and restoration at His pace, in His way. This led to be-

ing thankful for what He did and the possibility of seeing others and myself in a more accurate, loving manner. God forces me, in learning to love Him and people in community, to believe His rewards will fully restore my frail humanity and sexuality into something real, joyful, and wonderful. Meanwhile, my heart and mind struggle to accept that I'm not meant to experience the "perpetual Lent" of broken sexuality here on Earth, and that redemption isn't only for the heavenly Easter.





July At a Glance

July 8th: WGA presented at Friends middle school camp

July 15th: WGA presented at Friends senior high camp

July 27th-31st: Mary spoke at Bear Trap Ranch Retreat

Thursday Night Group

July 2nd: 34 people

July 9th: 36 people

July 16th: 35 people

July 23rd: 40 people

July 30th: 28 people

Orientation meeting: 2 new people

August And Beyond

September 5th: Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 7:00—9:00 am at the WGA offices

September 15th: WGA Pastor Training Event

September 25: Roger speaking at HIV CareLink volunteer training

November 17th: WGA Pastor Training Event

October 9-11th: WGA Leadership Retreat

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Where Grace Abounds
exists to guide and support
men and women who seek to
understand sexuality and
relationship, and to inspire
all people to know and
personally appropriate
God's plan for their
sexuality and relationships.

Printed in the USA
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