



A Measure of Grace

November 2014
Volume 18, Issue 11

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds

Masturbation

An Article By Roger Jones

Qs 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.

(Continued on page 2)

Inside this issue:

Masturbation	1
It Hurts to Heal	3
Celibacy	4
Oct at a Glance	8
Nov and Beyond	8

Where Grace Abounds
P.O. Box 18871
Denver, Colorado 80218

Office: 303/863-7757
Fax: 303/863-7769

Email:
info@wheregraceabounds.org
Website:
www.wheregraceabounds.org



(Masturbation continued from page 1)

My own experience 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.

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,

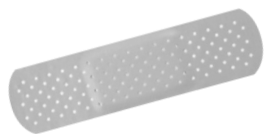
but also to buy them "toys" to enhance the experience. The reason: to help girls separate the good, intense sexual feelings from their good, intense feelings for boys. Girls don't need men to have an orgasm, and they will make better choices for themselves if they experience sexual pleasure alone. There 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?

***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.***

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. 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 impreg-

(Continued on page 6)



It Hurts to Heal

By Mary Heathman

C. S. Lewis in the forward to his book, *The Problem of Pain*, said, “I, like anyone else, would crawl through sewers to avoid pain of any kind.” Then he goes on to say how odd it felt to write a book about the benefits of pain.

In one of the WGA Foundations classes, “The Gift That No One Wants,” the presenter makes a case for the benefits of pain. It is one of our least popular sessions. It is also frequently quoted when group members share about the most valuable lessons they have learned.

In WGA meetings, the presenters are coming from many different backgrounds, teaching on a variety of topics that all relate to healing of sexual and relational brokenness. We hear about how people’s experiences with spiritual, emotional, psychological, and relational approaches have helped (or hindered) them in their pursuit of sexual and relational health.

One recurring theme causes both presenter and listener to flinch and duck for cover—the need to do the grief work. None of us wants to think much about how things often get worse before they get better, or at least seem to. The fear of painful unresolved trauma lurking below the surface of their presenting problem has driven many a man or woman

right back into their addiction, or into denial and suppression of their sexuality, rather than face the pain of what needs to be dealt with.

One of our leaders, at the orientation meeting for newcomers each month, will always say, “We aren’t interested in healing that lasts months, or even years, but in healing that lasts decades, for a lifetime.” Every time I hear him say that, I think of the truth of the statement. The kind of healing that lasts decades is the kind that doesn’t leave anything buried to rise up and poison future relationships with God, others or oneself. In order to achieve such a level of healing, people submit themselves to a thorough and intensive spiritual cleansing, emotional overhaul, and renovation of relationships and styles of relating.

Healing hurts, and at WGA we don’t pretend that it doesn’t. There is definitely pain involved, often excruciating pain. But as I learned years ago and share with others when they ask, “In this life, we don’t get to choose between pain and no pain. Life is difficult and painful. We can medicate pain for a time, but it comes back with a vengeance, requiring more and more of our drug of choice to escape its claws.”

No, we don’t choose between pain

(Continued on page 7)

#Chastityw/truth&grace

Intimacy and Celibacy (insert audible groan here)

By Scott Kingry

The best definition of celibacy, I think, is the definition of Thomas Aquinas. Thomas calls celibacy a vacancy for God. To be a celibate means to be empty for God, to be free and open for his presence, to be available for his service.... I think that celibacy can never be considered as a special prerogative of a few members of the people of God. Celibacy, in its deepest sense of creating and protecting emptiness for God, is an essential part of all forms of Christian life: marriage, friendship, single life, and community life.... Every relationship carries within its center a holy vacancy, a space that is for the first Love, God alone.

Henri Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*.

Celibacy? No sex—for hours, seasons or decades?!? This is not a very popular concept in a sex-saturated, sexually addicted culture, for sure. It is not even a popular concept within Christian culture. Merely uttering the word elicits a series of eye-rolls and groans. Whether we're speaking to a youth group, college or adult Sunday school class, we can sense the wheels turning as each listener frantically tries to figure out how to escape such a dreadful death sentence. It truly is the gift no one wants. Yet, since we're human and not sexual robots, it's just a simple reality sometimes. And since God has specified definite boundaries around sexual intimacy, we as Christians have to wrestle with this reality. It affects married and single folks alike, but in different ways.

Veronica Johnson, a speaker at a recent Thursday night meeting, challenged us with this question: "Where am I finding life—in my *sexuality* or in *God*?" It's not surprising that legitimate sexual fulfillment can be powerful and feel life-giving. As it should, there's nothing more heady and tingling than to be desired, to feel wanted by someone, to have fun being flirtatious and having it reciprocated. Even so, we can all pursue healthier sexuality; we can make better choices, suffer fewer consequences, and define better boundaries. It seems God is calling us to higher levels in this arena. Finding our life in Him through intimacy, purity, fidelity, chastity and peace takes us deeper internally.

I remember studying these words: "**chastity**" (a commitment to having sex in its proper place), "**fidelity**" (a continuing faithfulness to an obligation, trust or duty) and "**celibacy**" (the voluntary or involuntary choice not to have sexual relations/intimacy) and coming to some startling conclusions. Instead of 3 separate things, compartmentalized by relational status, all, I realized, are experienced by the single and married alike. Chastity for married folks is to keep sexual/emotional intimacy within the bounds of their marriage, even when someone younger, hotter or just plain more understanding saunters by. Of course, there will be seasons of celibacy within every marriage; some by choice, some not, some for noble spiritual causes and some for general grouchiness or other reasons.

(Continued on page 5)

(Intimacy continued from page 4)

We've got to survive the dry times too. Fidelity, ongoing faithful devotion, is for the Lord first and foremost and then for ones spouse. As Henri Nouwen so aptly puts it, marriage isn't an end in itself—it's enveloped within a bigger relationship.

Celibacy is an important part of marriage. This is not simply because married couples may have to live separated from each other for long periods of time. Nor is it because they need to abstain from sexual relations because of physical, mental or spiritual reasons. It is rather that the intimacy of marriage itself is an intimacy that is based on the common participation in a love greater than the love that two people can offer each other.

So it would seem that even for married people, creating and protecting a space for God, both as a couple and individually, is important. This sounds difficult, and I personally would like to hear from married people.

Singleness is something I do know about firsthand and have forever. As with that of married folks, my fidelity is also first and foremost to the Lord (which has its difficult moments when someone younger, hotter and just plain more understanding saunters by). And if I'm living chastely as a single person, that means living celibately until such a time as my relational status changes. Now I think all of us can stomach celibacy for a season, but what happens if my relational status never changes? What is it that I'm actually foregoing and surrendering to God? What was God's intent and design for sex in the first place?

The most obvious purpose for sex, of course, is procreation. So there will be no little Scotties or Scottinas running around, and that feels like a loss (though when I hear my married friends talking about the rigors of child raising, I'm not always sorry J). But a big thing I'm surrendering is the union with another person and the pleasure of sexual intimacy. God has wired our bodies for pleasure. Science tells us our sexual equipment has more nerve endings than any other parts of our body. The big payoff is orgasm—pretty potent stuff. But it's not just about the physical intimacy in sex; it's also about the emotional and relational aspects that are equally powerful. To a heart that's starving, sharing life with someone, feeling valued, affirmed, desired, wanted and sharing pleasure with someone can feel off the charts—wow! It is a huge loss even to contemplate never having those experiences. No amount of hugs can compete. There's a loneliness that prevails when one is faced with deep, unmet longings. It's why I get just a little cranky when someone in the church says something like, "Hey, good luck with that celibacy thing for the next several decades," yet offers virtually no support. "Thumbs up!--be warm, be fed—hope that works out for ya!"

For those who struggle with same-sex attraction and are trying to live according to their Christian values this can be an even deeper and painful issue. If I'm attracted to my own gender and don't have any inclination towards the opposite one, it seems as though I'm left without any options. Celibacy can feel like an involuntary, forced, dead-end curse. This is understandable and legitimate as are the accompanying emotions that must be processed. It's taken me decades to

(Continued on page 6)

(Intimacy continued from page 5)

get to a relatively peaceful place about it, but with every milestone birthday, still the wrestling and grieving continue. I think validating these emotions and whether or not the option of celibacy feels voluntary or involuntary is a good place to at least start the conversation. Still, rather than just complaining and griping about the way singles are treated in the church, culture and the world, I'd like to be part of the solution.

So, one of my frequent soapboxes to jump on is "**no one has it easy.**" There

are joys and trials that come with being either single or married. That's why I love Henri Nouwen's quotation on the deeper essence of celibacy—creating, maintaining and protecting an emptiness for God. It's easy to make anything an idol in our lives, whether it is a spouse, our sexuality, money, relationships, ambition, or our reputations. If we let it, this space of vacancy can provide opportunities for intimacy. So what deep and rich intimacy is available to me as a single person? We'll explore that more in my next article—stay tuned!

(Masturbation continued from page 2)

nate 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!

(Article reprinted from *A Measure of Grace*, August 2009)

(*It Hurts to Heal* continued from page 3)

and no pain. Our choice is between two different kinds of pain. One kind is slow growing like [some] cancer and cumulative, consisting of the pain of unresolved issues, unconfessed sin, unforgiveness or unrecognized disappointment and grief—all ignorable for a season, even many seasons with ever-increasing effort. This is pain that kills us from the inside out if it is allowed to have its way.

The other kind of pain is admittedly sharper, less easily ignored, insistent, and constantly in the forefront. This pain is surgical. In the hands of the Holy Spirit it probes to our core issues, exposing our sin, opening old wounds that have closed improperly and festered. As we place ourselves into this spiritual surgery process, the

Warning! Buried Grief

Fifty years ago industrialists thought they could just bury toxic waste and it would go away. We have since learned it doesn't just go away. It makes trouble. It leaks into the water table, contaminates crops, and kills animals. Buried grief does the same thing. Raw time doesn't heal a thing. Buried pain leaks into our emotional system and wreaks havoc there. It distorts our perceptions of life, and it taints our relationships. That contamination happens subconsciously.

Bill Hybels, "A Better Kind of Grieving," *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 108.

Holy Spirit heals us from the inside out.

I believe the choice between the killing kind of pain and the surgical kind is the same sort of choice the Lord gives us when He says, "I lay before you this day, life and death. Choose life!"

I am often asked, "How long will it take?" I dread the question, because I know the longing behind it. I still ask the question myself; I wish I knew the answer. I would surely not keep it a secret, if I did. I know that it won't last forever, but we aren't promised it won't take a lifetime.

But we are promised that we don't have to go through it alone. The Lord Himself will never leave nor forsake us. And there are many brothers and sisters in Christ who walk the healing path and are glad to have our company. WGA group members are one band of fellow sojourners helping each other work out our issues. We don't avoid the hard work; we know healing hurts. But we also know there is life to be lived and joy in the journey as we travel along! I pray that every seeker finds such a community of people committed to becoming all that God created us to be, and finds there the ultimate antidote to pain, the mystery of life—Christ in us the hope of Glory! Lord, may it be so!

(Article reprinted from *A Measure of Grace*, July 2006)



October In Review

October 17-19: WGA Leadership Retreat

October 19th: WGA participated in a missions event at Cherry Creek Presbyterian Church.

October 19th: WGA was presented during a missions announcement at Denver Friends Church.

November And Beyond

November 8th: Family and Friends Gathering.

November 15th: WGA is presenting at Tree of Life Church.

November 20th: Monthly Orientation Meeting required for participation in WGA's Thursday Night Group—invite a friend!

December 6th: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the needs of the ministry.

WGA All-Night Prayer Meeting

**November 21st
9:00 pm – 6:00am
Please contact the WGA office if you
would like more information
303-863-7757
info@wheregraceabounds.org**

Thursday Night Group

**October 2nd: 31 people
October 9th: 29 people
October 16th: 36 people
October 23rd: 28 people
October 30th: 29 people**

Orientation meeting: 3 new people

WGA Staff

Roger Jones
Executive Director

Scott Kingry
Program Director

Mary Heathman
Founding Director

Steve Huston
Chaplain/Church Liaison

Jill Huston
Family & Friends Coordinator

A Measure of Grace
is edited by
Elodie Ballantine Emig

*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
Copyright 2014