



Counseling Teenagers About Masturbation

By Brad Bigney

Jeremy sat slouched in the chair across from me as he attempted to find the right words to describe his struggle. His sagging spirit and angry outbursts had created alarm with his parents, who insisted he meet with me. A cloud of guilt and despair hovered in the atmosphere of my office. His eyes were cast to the floor, and his posture signaled that he'd long ago given up any hope of winning the battle.

After lovingly prodding and gently questioning him, I discovered that this young teenager was battling with masturbation. Feeling defeated, Jeremy began to doubt if there really was an all-powerful God who hears prayer. Where was God? Why was the temptation still so overwhelming? He'd begged God to deliver him from this temptation, but his repeated failures had left him frustrated and skeptical.

How would you counsel Jeremy? Would you laugh out loud and brush it off as nothing to be concerned about? Would you tell him to accept masturbation as God's gift to the single man? Absolutely not! A godly counselor would begin by telling Jeremy the truth. Although masturbation is not specifically mentioned, an honest study of Scripture reveals the wrongness of it. (See *Why Masturbation is Sin*)

Jeremy needs to be told that although it is wrong, it is not an unpardonable sin! With his feet firmly planted on truth, one can now give him hope. He should be reminded that the fight against sin is one that every believer shares. He should also be assured that God has not abandoned him but has provided a "way out" (I Corinthians 10:13) that the two of you will seek together.

Having firmly established truth in his young mind, now it is time to give him some practical steps which will help him restructure his life. You must help him to see that it will require more than a few minor alterations to cut something as powerful as lust and masturbation out of his life. It will require "radical amputation." (Matthew 5:29-30) Warn him that if he attempts to simply keep it at bay, then his efforts are doomed from the start. A few questions will help Jeremy think through what he can do to protect himself from temptation in the future: When is he usually tempted to masturbate? What are the events leading up to the temptation? Who are the people or places that stir the temptation most? He will probably need to "amputate" some people, places, idle time, and certain media intake from his life. Ask Jeremy to prayerfully consider this principle and then bring you a written list of the changes he needs to make in his life to break the habit of masturbation. You can assist in making it practical and attainable, and then hold him accountable to the new structure.

Another effective tool to use for Jeremy is a burning "Yes!" Too often our counsel to someone struggling in sin is littered with "No's" throughout, but we fail to give him anything new to

replace the sin. The Bible doesn't just command us to stop sinning but tells us to replace it with godliness. (II Timothy 2:22) It would be wise to give reading assignments (biblical and extra-biblical) that will stoke the flame in Jeremy's heart to know God in a greater way. Encourage him to establish and maintain a regular, vibrant devotional life. Help him to see the importance of meditating on some of the Psalms that extol the pleasures found in God. (Psalms 34, 36, 37, 42, 61, 62) Unless Jeremy begins to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8), he will keep returning to the same trough he's been eating from. Awaken his spiritual taste buds to the glory and wonder of knowing and reveling in God's presence. Then, hopefully, when that next temptation comes, he will stop and think, "Why would I sacrifice the satisfaction found in God for the cotton candy pleasures of the world?" As John Piper writes, "We must stock our minds with the superior promises and pleasures of Jesus."

Next, challenge Jeremy to start investing his life in other people. Nothing defeats a self-centered lifestyle like doing some good work that will benefit others. This kind of selfless service will destroy the tendency to isolate, will draw him closer to God, and will help him escape the prison of self. Help him to implement Romans 12:11: "*Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.*"

Finally, you should be prepared for a path of progress that has high's and low's. Don't expect Jeremy to rocket right out of this after your first meeting. Remember, old habits die hard, and sin of any stripe won't go down without a fight! Be patient with him, but watch his attitude. Is he stubborn and rebellious, resisting all your counsel or dragging his heels? Is he weak and uninformed? Does he look like he's faint-hearted? Ask God to give you discernment about his heart. His condition doesn't change the truth or principles of God's Word, but it's certainly a factor as to how to apply that Word to his life. The Bible does not take a "one-size-fits-all" approach to the problems people face. As First Thessalonians 5:14 tells us, "*Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the faint-hearted, hold on to the weak, be patient with all.*"

As soul physicians we must pray for discernment to apply the ointment of His Word to the right spot, in the right measure, and in the right way. We are exhorted to restore Jeremy and others "*in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*" (Galatians 6:1) If we wield the "double-edged sword" with gentleness and love, we can anticipate great success in our efforts to help teenagers overcome the habit of masturbation.

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