

# DIY sex – sinful or not?

Marolin Watson applies biblical principles

**S**exual pleasure is a gift from God – yes really! Although there are probably not many Christians today who have a problem with that.

Just as the pleasure of eating ensures the survival of the individual, so the pleasure of sexual intercourse ensures the survival of the species. And just as we don't eat only what is necessary to ensure our survival, so we don't engage in sexual activity only when we want to reproduce.

Yet in his wisdom and for our good, God has set particular boundaries around the enjoyment of sex, as well as with eating and drinking. Gluttony and drunkenness are condemned,<sup>1</sup> and so is sex outside of the context of a committed relationship between a man and a woman.<sup>2</sup> Polygamy appears to have been tolerated by God in Old Testament times, but it is not God's ideal and this is recognised by the gospel writers.<sup>3</sup>

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But it's not just pleasure that drives us to eat and drink – it is the discomfort we feel when hungry or thirsty – the 'stick' to pleasure's 'carrot'. Likewise, the sex drive, when denied its natural expression, can become a problem. When we pretend it's not a force to be reckoned with and suppress it, it can lead to behaviour that we neither desire nor understand.

If people vary in their appetite for food and drink, so does the strength of the sex drive – almost overpowering in some individuals and practically non-existent in others.

So what is the man or woman with a 'normal' to high sex drive to do if there is no prospect of a committed relationship in their future? In the case of Christian women, there simply aren't enough Christian men to go round. Same-sex attraction that won't go away despite much prayer is another reason why someone may not feel able to enter into a God-sanctioned relationship that will meet their sexual needs.

Even in marriage, one partner sometimes loses interest or becomes incapable because of psychological, emotional, or physical problems, leaving the other partner feeling deprived and frustrated. Even in sexually active relationships, men do not always realise that their partner may need extra stimulation to achieve the satisfaction that comes more easily to them.

Although celebrating celibacy himself, Paul acknowledges the strength and legitimacy of the sex drive when he writes, in 1 Corinthians 7:5 'Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer.

Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.' And Jesus too, in his teaching on divorce in Matthew 19, which causes his disciples to conclude that it's better not to marry, acknowledges that celibacy is a gift not given to all.

We may feel uncomfortable talking about masturbation (which is why I use the term 'DIY sex') and you certainly won't hear many sermons about it. Even non-Christians find it a difficult subject to talk about, though nearly everyone engages in it at times.



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The Bible has a lot to say about sex and is not squeamish about describing various sexual activities, both prohibited and permitted. Yet it has nothing at all to say about doing it yourself. Does this mean it's perfectly fine – a legitimate way to dissipate sexual tension when no other avenue presents itself? The Bible has nothing to say about gambling either, yet we recognise it can become a harmful addiction, though there may be nothing wrong with the occasional flutter or participation in a lottery.

When the Bible is silent on any particular topic, we can draw on general principles to help us guide our attitudes and actions. What Paul writes in his first letter to the

Corinthians is particularly apt: "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, CSB)

DIY sex becomes a particular problem when it is obsessive or accompanied

by the use of

pornography. As well as introducing fantasies of another person (warned against by Jesus in Matthew 5:28), pornography degrades and demeans this God-given gift, making it impossible for some

to enjoy 'normal' sexual relations. For those in a relationship, it can become a lazy way of meeting their own needs without bothering to meet the needs of their partner.

Paul puts it best when talking about the believer's freedom: 'So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.' (1 Corinthians 10:31)

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being mastered by them

But what does it mean to do everything "for the glory of God"? This could in itself become a strait-jacket if we don't unpack it a little. As Christians, we do many things for our own pleasure and entertainment. It is difficult to see, for example, how going on a nice holiday abroad, eating at an expensive restaurant, or driving the latest model car contributes to God's glory, and yet many Christians of all persuasions (who can afford them!) do these things without a qualm.

A good corrective to any tendency to be legalistic is found in 1 Timothy 6:17 where Paul encourages wealthy Christians not to put their hope in their possessions, but in God 'who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment' – including sex.

As always, it is a question of balance – meeting legitimate needs without being mastered by them. ■

REFERENCES

1. Proverbs 23:20-21
2. 1 Corinthians 7:2
3. Matthew 19:1-12