

A Letter to Christian Teenage Guys

by Brent Hobbs

To My Little Brother in Christ,

I write this letter to you because I wish someone had written it to me when I was your age. I write this letter as someone who struggled with the things that you are now going through, and as someone who still struggles with them in many ways.

As I was growing up in the youth group at church, I was known as a leader, as someone who “had it together,” or someone who didn’t really struggle with all that “bad stuff” like getting drunk or doing drugs or having sex. At least that was how I thought that other people looked at me. I was probably right for the most part. But deep down inside, there was something that I wished I could get rid of. Something that I never told anybody about (at least none of the Christians I knew) and I hoped nobody knew about. I felt horrible for it and the guilt just wouldn’t go away. I tried and tried to stop but it seemed like I just couldn’t control myself. At this point you may have already guessed what I am talking about, even if you wouldn’t admit it out loud. I masturbated. For one thing, I just knew that I was the only guy that did it and I didn’t even know what would happen if somebody found out. As I got older, I heard guys at school and on my sports teams joking about it so I figured that I wasn’t the only one who did it. But I still thought that Christian guys never did it, or at least they shouldn’t. I felt like God was not and could not be happy with me until I stopped masturbating.

Often times in church the preacher or youth speaker would call for everyone to lay down “that one sin” that was in our lives and commit to God that we would stop sinning in that way. Well of course the first thing that *always* came to mind was masturbation. I knew that I needed to go down to the front of church and give that over to God and promise to never do it again. I can’t count the number of times I visited the altar during a church service or prayed in my room that I would never do that again. But without fail, in a few days or maybe a week, it would happen again. The process would begin all over again. I didn’t know what to do. I could keep all of the “rules” that a good Christian was supposed to live by. Except this one. No matter how hard I tried, I could never kick the habit and the guilt I felt was enormous.

To make matters even worse, I started feeling so bad about what I did that I figured it didn’t matter if I took it a step or two farther. After all, I was already sinning, I might as well enjoy it while it happened. I started looking at pornography, first on the scrambled cable channels and then on the Internet. I figured if God was already mad at me for masturbating, he wouldn’t be that much more upset if I looked at porn.

I never heard masturbation talked about from church or my parents. I only remember hearing the word mentioned twice in church. One was by a Sunday School teacher who one day mentioned in passing that masturbation was just as bad as having sex with your girlfriend, the only difference was that it was “sex with yourself.” The other time I heard the word was when my youth minister told us that quitting masturbation was a part of signing a True Love Waits card. I still remember signing the card that night and making yet another promise to myself that I was really going to stop this time. That promise lasted about a week.

I just knew that God was not happy with me, that he would not use me as a Christian, that I had to stop this if I was going into the ministry, and that I just had to quit if I was going to be a good Christian like I wanted to be. I wish I had known then what I realize now and I write this letter in the hopes that it might spare you some of the guilt and misunderstandings that I had at your age.

Here are some of the things that I realize now that I wish I had known back then. One is that all guys masturbate. Even Christian guys. Even guys that are strong Christians. You are not alone in this. A lot of guys feel like they are the only ones struggling with the issue. Well if that describes you, I've got news for you: You are not alone! Another important thing that I realized is that masturbation is not an unpardonable sin. God still uses people that masturbate, just like he uses people that struggle with other things. In fact, now I have serious questions as to whether or not it is even a sin at all. I believe that if I stay away from pornography and excessive fantasies while I do it, it is probably not a sin. Some people disagree with me on this and they are free to do so, but I believe masturbation, used in the right way, can be a legitimate form of self-control for single guys.

What do I mean by used in the right way? I mean that looking at pornography while I do it, or before I do it, is not an option. I mean that I do not allow myself to dwell on thoughts that might occur while I masturbate. I mean that the reason I do it is because after a few days of abstaining from masturbation, my thoughts go crazy and I can't think of anything but sex and masturbation lets me return back to "normal" life again. I use it for self-control purposes. God designed the male body to have a sexual release about every three days. For teenage guys it is probably more often than that. I think that masturbation is a legitimate way to deal with these issues. Now I should be careful here because some people believe that masturbation is a sin and that you should try and stop altogether. I don't know what the answer is for sure because the Bible doesn't tell us. But this is what I do know for sure: If and when you do masturbate, it is much better to do it without pornography and excessive fantasies than with them.

For one thing, if you do look at porn or dwell on a thought you know you shouldn't, then it does become a sin. No question about it, you have crossed the line if these things take place. But there is, I think, another reason to avoid these things, especially pornography.

I already said that in middle school and high school my thought was that if I was going to sin by masturbating, then it couldn't be that much worse to go ahead and look at porn. Boy was I wrong. Years later I was still battling an addiction to pornography that started because I looked at a little of it when I was 13 or 14. I was not able to begin to overcome my addiction until my junior year in college when, by the grace of God, I deleted over 3 Gigabytes of pornographic movies and pictures off of my computer. I say that I began to overcome my addiction because it took me a long time after that to be able to kick the habit completely. Even though I have been able to avoid this problem for about six months now, I am still sometimes tempted to go back to it. By God's grace I will be able to avoid it from now on, but these are the effects of being addicted to something.

I hope that this letter helps you as you make your way through your teenage years. As you can guess, it's not easy to talk about some of this stuff; but I am convinced that someone needs to. I don't want you to go through the same feelings of guilt and shame and isolation that I felt because nobody had the courage to be honest with me about the subject. I want you to realize that God loves you and still wants to use you regardless of any of this stuff you may have been involved with in the past. My plea to you is that you stay away from the pornography and try not to dwell on thoughts that you shouldn't. But most of all please don't allow feelings of guilt to control your life and keep you from living for God and becoming the man he wants you to be.

Love to you in Christ Jesus,



Brent