

Sexuality Roundtable

Mart: You know, when you talk about sexuality, it's interesting isn't it? Because we're living in a society, a culture, that seems to sexualize everyone and everything. And yet we're very inhibited about talking in a healthy way about it. Right?

Larry: Do we know what a healthy way is?

Mart: Where would we start? Where would you start, Larry? As a counselor, I'm sure you see all kinds of stuff coming through the door.

Larry: I would start with looking, and this will sound strange, in my own mind at least, I would start with looking at what is the core fear in a woman's soul that results in her distorting all that she is as a woman? What is the core terror, the core fear, in a man's soul that distorts all that he does as a man? What is the core terror that results in a man being consumingly, compulsively interested in pornography? What is the core terror that results in a man's sexualizing everything and denying the man that he really is, that he's afraid he can't be?

Mart: Okay, you're jumping in there. You're talking about a core terror. And where does the terror come from? I mean, you're really you're . . . it seems like you're pulling that out of nowhere.

Larry: Well, I think I have a biblical basis for it; that as soon as I disconnect from God, which happened in the garden, then my

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identity, the core identity that I have, the core dependence that I have on God is gone. And now I'm scared I can't be what I no longer have the provisions to be. And I'm not sure if I can live then as a man, because I'm cut off from the source of all that empowers me to be all that I was created to be.

Mart: But what if I just say, "Wait a minute. Wait, I just want it." I just want to see all this stuff around me, and I feel pulled, attracted to it, inclined toward it. It's what I want. What's afraid?

Joe: It doesn't feel like terror to you.

Mart: It doesn't feel like terror, doesn't feel like . . .

Joe: Feels like pursuit.

Mart: Exactly. What I want—adventure!

Larry: And that's the problem.

Mart: Discovery.

Larry: Stay at that level of pursuit, adventure, discovery, and if all you do then is try to control that and try to handle it differently and be more Christian about it, then you're simply into sin management. You're simply into trying to manage your life to be in a more godly fashion. And I don't think you're dealing with

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your soul.

Joe: Are you saying, since you said in the garden we disconnected and felt a fear of being alone, and I think, then: So we pursued all kinds of alternatives to try to make as substitutes, idolatry, are you, at the bottom of it all, are you saying it's the reconnect with God then?

Larry: Of course.

Joe: As the . . .

Larry: And that could be said simplistically or profoundly. But yes, I think that's a profound thought. For me to reconnect with God as a man, when I feel scared, when I feel that I don't know what I'm doing in my job, when I feel uncertain about whether the next book that I write is going to sell. I mean something as somewhat trivial as that . . . when I feel a fear, there's something in me that wants to satisfy the inadequacy that I'm feeling and . . .

Joe: Like quick hits.

Larry: And a quick hit and what works best. I'll tell you, prayer doesn't work best. But not being a full man works best in the moment for me to find some way to relieve my sense of inadequacy by looking at a woman and lusting. And at that moment I feel masculine in a very illegitimate way.

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Joe: And it's a rush; there's pleasure.

Larry: Yeah, there's pleasure.

Joe: It's exciting.

Larry: Fulfillment in the moment.

Joe: Yeah, it's a playground. Really.

Larry: That's exactly right.

Joe: When I'm not succeeding at work, or I'm not succeeding in my relationship with my wife, you know, so we're really talking here about the nature of the temptation to move out of proper sexual boundaries.

Larry: Yes.

Joe: Why . . . why we . . .

Larry: That's a great way of putting it.

Mart: Okay. And let me ask you this, you talk about boundaries . . . both of you talked about the garden . . . you're tracking back the story of sexuality to Adam, to Eve. What if somebody says,

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“I’ve always wondered about that. I couldn’t figure that out. You know, you’ve got this boundary—you’re not supposed to eat the forbidden fruit—and all of a sudden they do it, and they’re covering up, they’re running. It’s like they’re afraid of their nakedness.” Now we’re talking about sexuality. What’s going on there? Why did their nakedness become an issue? Why are they covering up? And does that have anything to do with the fear that you’re talking about? The sense of terror?

Larry: Yeah. What was happening in Genesis 1:27 when God, apparently the three of them, got together, “Let us make man in our humankind in our image, male and female.”

Mart: You’re talking about the triunity of God, God in His godhead.

Larry: The triunity of God. That the community of God decided to make people; and when He made people, humankind, He made them male and female. What did He have in mind? Well, with not getting into it in any kind of depth, the word *male* there literally is an ancient near-Eastern word that has the idea of somebody who remembers what’s true and moves into life on the basis of what’s true. That’s the real meaning of the word *male*. That I remember and I move. When my kid is a mess, I remember God and move into his life, as opposed to, “I can’t handle it, kid, I’m going to go play golf.” Do I remember the truth and move accordingly?

The word for *female* is one who has been opened. One

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who invites another into herself. That's what the word *female* means. Now when I'm called as a man to move, and I'm not sure I have the resources to move, then I'm scared that I'm not full in my masculinity. So I look for substitute pleasures to make me feel masculine, and then I sexualize everything. Or as a woman, if I feel that if I invite you into me, you'll discover no beauty, because I have no beauty for you to enjoy. There's nothing about me that you could want, so I close up. I no longer invite you, and I get tough. And I handle life, and to heck with you, and then I flaunt my sexuality or hide everything about me that's feminine and out of my terror I desexualize, I depersonalize, or I oversexualize.

Mart: Okay, so why did they cover themselves up? Okay, that's very interesting that you're saying that the original meaning, the ideas, the concepts behind male and female are bad.

Larry: Shame. They cover themselves up because of shame. Because now . . .

Joe: What's the difference, Larry, in before the fall, there was no shame? What . . .

Mart: They were naked, right? Yeah.

Larry: They were connected to God. They knew who they were as a man and a woman. And he would turn toward his wife and

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just the joy of being a full man, talking to his full woman, it was pleasurable. There was no inappropriate sexualization, and had there been 10 other women around . . .

Mart: But they weren't even aware that they were naked at that point. Right?

Joe: Well, I don't . . . I . . .

Larry: I'm going to struggle with that one.

Mart: Didn't it say afterwards they were aware of their nakedness? And they covered up?

Joe: So do you think Adam never saw the naked beauty of his wife?

Mart: Maybe it was just natural?

Joe: Yeah. I think that's the better way to say it.

Larry: There was no self-consciousness about their nakedness. There was an awareness of their nakedness, yeah.

Mart: Okay. So what happened? What happened then that caused them to run, to cover up?

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Larry: The reason there was no fear in their nakedness was they knew that they fully exposed . . . they had all that they needed to accomplish their calling in life.

Mart: All of that was just natural to them?

Larry: All of that was just natural. It was just there, because they were walking with God every evening. They were bearing His image. They were in paradise, and then, when paradise ended, they were kicked out of the garden, no longer connected with God. Now when the resources are cut off, now when the bank account, the checking account is zero, and I've got to go pay a bill, I feel ashamed. I feel naked, and then I'm very ashamed that I don't have what it takes to be a man. And I have to handle that somehow, so I handle that by getting an illegitimate sense of masculinity, either by making a lot of money, or hanging out with the guys at a golf club and just talking about my golf game, or looking at some women and making some comments about their, you know, "Hey, these are good looking . . ." you know, all that kind of thing. And I start feeling like a man, but that's not manhood. That's not moving into life, women included, on the basis of what's true about God. But I'm scared I don't have it, so I compensate by doing all these other things.

Joe: And I think it's interesting too that there were no boundaries before the fall.

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Larry: No need for them.

Joe: No need for them. The boundary . . . God in His . . . knowing that our misuse and exaggeration of, and whatever word we want to put in, of our sexuality would be destructive ultimately. God never gave us a law because He wanted to take the fun out of living. He always knew that . . .

Larry: That's a great point.

Joe: . . . that it's a destructive pattern. So then He established the boundaries. Read the book of Leviticus, read through the New Testament. He needed to give us boundaries. And I think in this very sexualized environment in which we live globally, actually, is that we need to define the boundaries as God's gift to us to keep our sexuality in an arena where it can be right and good and guilt-free, fear-free. Of course, there are personal issues that we need to deal, but one of the steps is to define the boundaries.

Mart: Okay, so let's . . .

Joe: What are they really? And what are they not?

Mart: So let's say, Joe and Larry, now I'm going to come into your . . . I'm going to come to you pastor, okay, and now you're president of a Christian university, but you have pastoral . . . you've helped young people and students. And, Larry, I'm sure

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you're working, so I walk through your door and I've had an affair that my wife doesn't know about. I'm into a same-sex relationship. I've got this burning problem with pornography, and you know what, I'm lying about all of it. But I'm also having trouble with my wife and I'm also acknowledging, yeah, she's on to me. I don't know what to do. So I think I can come to a pastor. I think I can come to . . . what . . . where would you . . . what would you try to . . . how would you help me? Boundaries, I've broken all of them.

Joe: That's an interesting statement: "Boundaries, I've broken all of them." I think some of us have a clear sense of the boundaries. I'm not sure in this new generation—I work with college students, which I love this generation. I love being with college students. When they get it, they're passionate about God and Christ. They're alive. They're idealistic. You know, I need them because I'm getting old and crusty, you know, but they've grown up in a culture that has really blurred the boundaries. Where there are excuses for all of these things, and so I've met . . . keep going back to let's . . . Are we sure we understand God's gift of the boundaries? Now a lot of people say, "I know pornography's wrong." But then they may blur the boundaries by saying, "Yes, but, you know, David had a lot of wives; Solomon had a lot of wives. God didn't seem to have a problem with that," which is a whole other issue by itself. Or "God knows that I'm a man. I've got these hormones; I'm not getting it from my wife and it's very innocent," you know, all the . . . so even if you recognize the

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boundaries, you've got to do something with all the excuses as well. And I realize that I'm talking on the performance level. That much of these performance issues grow out of far deeper issues in our lives, in our hearts. But you can't divorce the two.

Larry: No.

Joe: The two are very important and I would want to just make sure we understood what's excusable, what's not excusable. Is there repentance . . .

Larry: Is there a way that God has called us to live?

Joe: Yes, and there's a line here where effect . . . repentance must be a part of it. I have been wrong; I humble myself, and . . .

Mart: And then a person comes to you and says, "And that's what I'm counting on. I believe God is a forgiving God, a loving God, a patient God. If it weren't for that I'd take my life. But I'm still kind of messed up. I know something . . . I don't know what to do. I don't know where to turn."

Larry: And my question would be, building on what Joe said, because the notion of "let's be clear that there are boundaries that are really opportunities, they're not restrictions." I mean they are restrictions in one sense. I don't want you to do this, but it's always because God has pleasure in mind. God's the

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one committed to pleasure, not Satan. And so when He erects boundaries, it's really for pleasure. So I think the point Joe was making is incredibly important, and he's saying it's a performance level, and it is. But then he also intimated that as people say, "Yeah, but Solomon had all of the wives," and all that, all that now starts getting into the internal world where the person has found some self-justification. Some way to make excuses for what they way down deep know is breaking their conscience. And then I start looking at those excuses, not just to beat them up; not just to say, you're making excuses, stop it. That's not what I would do. I would want to look at all the—let me sound like a psychologist for a minute—I'd like to look at all the dynamics that are involved in that self-justifying behavior. And that's where I get back to the fear issues. You tell me that you can't help this pornography. You've had an affair. You're marriage is a wreck. And I'd be very clear on the boundaries issues because that's the Scripture's teaching, but the Scripture also then talks about, let's examine your heart. Let's see what's really going on inside of you. And that's where the category that I bring to bear is your masculinity. I believe you've got a deficient awareness and enjoyment of your masculinity. And because you're scared you don't have what it takes to be a man, maybe with all kinds of reasons, maybe you're homosexually molested as a kid. Maybe your dad never was engaged with you. I'd look at all these wounds of the past to understand that currently there's not a sense of adequacy. I struggle with this. Every man in the world does. You know, we're sitting here having a conversation.

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Am I adequate for this? Do I know what I'm doing?

Mart: Let's try it here once. Okay, you're raising a lot of issues. Let me role-play with you.

Larry: Okay.

Mart: Let me say, you want me to come to terms with my heart. Well, I'll tell you, counselor—talking about the boundaries and what I should to do and not to do and that I haven't done—and I just say, I'm not like that. I mean, I know people who are like that. I know people who love God, who stay clean, and are faithful to their wives, but you know, not me. I'm not like that. If I want to be honest about my heart, that's not me.

Larry: Then I'd like to know your story. My next sentence would not be, "Oh, but it is you. You're a Christian. If you know Jesus, you have it in your heart." All of that would be true, but that's not where I'd go next. I'd want to say, "Well, then tell me how you came to be who you are. I'd love to know your story. Tell me about your parents. Tell me about your background. Tell me about what you feel when you're with your wife. Tell me about where you have felt most disappointed with your wife. Tell me when you feel least adequate. Tell me where you feel most adequate." I'd begin exploring your story. I'd begin looking at your present primary relationships, your wife, your kids, your friends. I'd look at your past primary relationships, your parents, obviously, your

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school teachers, your pastor, or youth pastor as a kid if you were in a church.

Mart: Okay, now I'm getting it. Let me as you, Joe, representing the people of the Book, the people of faith, a pastoral . . .

Larry: But don't contrast me with people of the Book. Because this is by the Book.

Mart: But are you . . . so are you comfortable then with what Larry would do?

Joe: Absolutely, because we're all people of a journey, and moments in the journey impact us, divert us, redirect us. You know there's just . . . it's just true. What happened to me at a certain point in my childhood affects the way I am today.

Larry: Provides no excuses for it.

Joe: Exactly.

Larry: But it influences it. And I want to bring to bear the understanding of the influence, not to give you more basis for excuse making. I don't want to do that.

Joe: So it is valid to understand why is the guy who lives next door, who isn't a follower of Christ, totally adverse to any

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personal involvement in pornography, wouldn't even think about doing it. And you as a follower of Christ are so susceptible to it.

Mart: Consumed by it.

Joe: And consumed by it. Well it's not . . . it's because there's something happening down deep inside you that drives that. And that's why I said earlier: I think it's two things. I think it's the performance issues that we have to clarify, and I can't emphasize this enough: My generation, the boundaries were clear. The boundaries were sometimes inconsistent because, you know, this . . . it was okay . . . this boundary was more serious. If you were gay, you know, you were far more out of bounds than if you had an affair. You know, so I'm very out on that kind of inconsistency, but I think today I'm not sure that this generation growing up has clarify on the boundaries.

Mart: Okay . . . okay, I think you're right. So let me come into your door again, okay, and I'm saying, well, you know, I hear what you're saying, but you're not talking about my world. You're not only talking about me, don't you know the guys I hang around with? You don't think they're involved with . . . you don't think they're on the side running around on their wives, looking at pornography. You don't think my friends have same-sex relationships? Let me tell you.

Larry: And granted that Joe's not naïve as a pastor, I'm not naïve

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as a counselor. We know that. I know that. I don't believe that there . . . that almost everybody is doing just great. I think that the guy next door, sometimes your pastor, sometimes the elder in your church, sometimes your next door neighbor that's the best guy in the world, he's got his struggles. There are folks that don't have the same struggles, that don't struggle with homosexuality or pornography, but a whole lot of people do. Let's just . . . think that is a given. I know that. Joe knows that. You know that. Now the question is: All right, what on earth is going wrong in our society that sexualization has become so dominant and so perverted? And I think that the superficial answers have a place in terms of all the media, all the movies that, you know, what used to be something you would never even think would occur in a movie, now occurs in a PG movie and we think it's routine. What I would never had dreamed of seeing on television when I was 20 years old, I can see every day now at age 60 without cable. And so there's all things of that nature that are huge, but then you've got to get down to the root. And we can get simplistic and say, "Well people are turning away from God." Well, that's true. It can be a truism and said shallow and simplistically, but it's true. But the real issue then, I think, and I know I'm hammering and in beating a dead horse here maybe, but what I would want to know about you and about all of the people that are involved in all of these things, I'd want to say there's a crisis in masculinity and a crisis in femininity, and I think that's a huge topic that I don't think women have a deep enjoyment of the beauty that God has put in their deeply feminine souls; and I don't believe men have

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a confidence in the deep strength and courage that He has put in their masculine souls and therefore, because there's a terror that they don't have the resources to function as men and women, they're illegitimately without justification compensating, hiding that terror, hiding their inadequacy by strutting their stuff and driving their fancy cars that they can't afford and joining country clubs they can't afford, and then sneaking off to the porn shop or whatever else they're doing. And it's all a compensation for the terror, which doesn't justify it, but it gives you some directions to go in dealing with it.

Joe: And unfortunately then our world . . . this has been the easy way out for our world. That's why it's just so prevalent. I mean it's the easy quick fix, quick hit. The consequences are devastating. I think what it does: It moves us into a singular pursuit of material. When I'm tempted to look at a woman and lust after her, it's a very physical, it's a material thing. It's dehumanizing to her, for sure. But it's also a material thing. I'm basically saying that my world is a material world. Period. There's nothing of Spirit. There's nothing of soul.

Larry: Nothing of personhood.

Joe: Nothing of personhood, nothing of inner beauty, nothing of character. It's all about material. So it's not just sexual, but it's the car, my zip code, it's my boats, it's my whatever that somehow material world is going to bring me that pleasure.

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Mart: Now you're coming close now to casting a vision, sort of a dream for something better. How would you do that?

Larry: Let me tell you about a gentleman that came to see me with homosexual struggles. And as he was looking at other guys in ways that turned a guy into a material—as Joe is using the term—a material opportunity for me to enjoy a certain kind of pleasure. And my response is: “This is not God’s design.” He says to me, “I hate the fact that I’m drawn to men; I don’t know what to do about it.” And we spent probably a year together. And in the course of that year, we did explore his story. We did explore how when he was a little boy a lot of shameful events—I could tell you some very sordid stories—some shameful events happened where he became terrified that if ever I were to try to move with the courage of manhood, with the strength of manhood, I would fail. And so now he’s enjoying the pleasures of manhood without having to exercise the depths of manhood. And as he began to become aware of that and began to move in specific ways to reveal the manhood that God has put within him . . . I never forget the most exciting day. He came into my office, and he was in his 30s as I recall, and he acted like a little kid at Christmas. He said, “You won’t believe what happened. I was dating this woman, and when I put my arm around her, I found myself wanting to. What’s happening?” And my sentence is: “The release of who you truly are as a Christian is beginning to emerge, because you’ve chosen to move in lots of specific

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ways over the last year toward the expression of your manhood, fighting your fear in trust of God.” But that didn’t become clear until we had spent a year talking about his story.

Mart: So whether we’re talking about approaching this, Larry, opening up, going deeper or, Joe, as a . . .

Larry: Or both.

Mart: . . . or both, but it has to be both doesn’t it? And I’m thinking Joe, we . . . the Bible can help us. The story of the Scriptures can help us to come to terms with what God Himself can do.

Joe: See, the story of Scripture advises my story. We all have a story. I am the way I am for the most part because of my journey and all that’s happened in that. And Jesus comes along and brings us His story to trans . . . to release us, to liberate us, to give us what the pleasure that He desires. Now I think it’s—for those of us who are followers of Christ and who bless the boundaries and celebrate the boundaries and seek to live righteously—there’s another pressure in terms of the sexuality in our culture is how do we deal with a culture that is so far out of bounds. And I think the issue that’s becoming the greatest struggle is the openness of same-sex relationships in our culture.

Larry: That’s a big one.

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Joe: And the whole gay agenda. More than ever I'm having parents coming to me and saying, "My son has come out of the closet. He's openly gay. And he wants to bring his partner to our Thanksgiving dinner. What should I do?" See I think those issues, my, you know, "my best friend is openly gay," how do I as a follower of Christ respond to that? If they're not followers of Christ, you respond differently than if they're your brother or sister in Christ. But I'm just saying, the sexualization of our culture has made it very challenging to celebrate the biblical boundaries and to know how to navigate through it. So now that I've posed the issue, I'll let you guys decide.

Larry: Well, let me say a word about that. The whole gay issue, I believe that the Scriptures are very clear that homosexuality is not God's design. That it's a perversion of masculinity and femininity. I believe that. And I believe as you stated earlier that adultery is not a lesser sin and we shouldn't target the gay sin as the big one, everything else is less. Every sin—gossip, overeating—they're all in the same category of needing Christ's forgiveness, or we're not going to be forgiven.

But in talking about the gay culture, "Do I let my son bring his partner home for Thanksgiving?" Back to what you said earlier, and this can walk a fine line, I don't want to compromise in my position that homosexuality is not God's design, but nor do I want to compromise on my position that that gentleman who is engaged in homosexual behavior bears the image of God and has

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value as an image bearer and there's a person who's doing wrong things, but there's a person—I want to respond to the person more than I want to respond to his sinfulness. I would likely invite that couple to my home for Thanksgiving, and I would not make the point being that, “Well, you're here under duress.” I would make the point that you're coming to this family as a person. We know that what you're doing, you know that those against, and if you interpret our acceptance of you as an authorization of what you're doing, you're missing our point. But what you are wanting to hear, what I want you to hear is that we value you as person and we can love you as a person the same way the Lord loved the prostitutes.

Joe: Okay, let's say, Larry, that I . . . that . . . and, actually I agree with what you're saying, but let's say I come to you and say, “I could do that but our grandchildren are there, and they're going to . . .” what impact would that have on these little kids that are watching this take place?

Larry: How wonderful to speak to your grandkids at whatever level that they can understand, if they're 5 years old, if they're 10 year old, whatever level, how wonderful to speak to your grandkids and say, “Let me explain what your grandfather's doing. Let me explain what your mom's doing here. What they're doing we believe is wrong. We want you to understand that. But you're going to be doing some wrong things too in the course of your life. You might cheat on a test, and maybe you already did.

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And when I discover that you cheated on your test, you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to love you. Now that might . . . I might spank you. There might be some discipline involved, but you're going to be a loved child no matter what you do, because nothing you can do can make me love you less or make me love you more. And that's how I feel toward this person who is engaging in behavior that goes against God's will." I would have that discussion with my grandkids.

Mart: So really what you've done then is we've come back to the beginning here, we're looking at people not as objects to be sexualized, we're not dehumanizing, but as persons created in the image of God who need to be loved, who need to be reconciled to God.

Larry: Who are terrified, who can discover the resources of God within them to be men, to be women, and that's a long, slow journey. I'm still on that journey. I have asked my wife, in front of crowds of people at seminars, I've said, "When do you find me least masculine? When do you find me most masculine?" And she has asked me the same question, "When do you find me most feminine, least feminine?" And we have talked about those kinds of topics because when I'm most masculine, and she's most feminine, that's when my sexual temptations and my tendency to sexualize has less power. The degree to which I'm masculine, particularly with my wife, the degree to which I understand what masculinity is and live that out, to that degree there's a weakness

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to the sexual temptation. It's not overcome, but it's still there, but it's weaker because I'm living out my masculinity. The terror no longer has me in its grip.

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