

Sexuality: Gift and Challenge

In these studies we seek to

- appreciate sexuality as a gift of God and to affirm God's gift of marriage
- grapple with issues of how to express sexuality in God-pleasing ways
- respond to issues and practices of homosexuality
- place our own attitudes under the challenges of Scripture

For mature adults

These studies invite groups to discuss significant and sensitive issues. It is important that group members have the opportunity to reveal and discuss as much or as little personal information and opinion as they choose. It is also important that all group members show the highest respect in their comments to and about others.

Study 1: Sexuality as God's good gift

THE GIFT IN CREATION

Read Genesis 1:26–28

What do these verses tell you about:

- the value of male and female?
- the relationship between men and women?
- the purpose of this relationship?
- the role of sexuality in God's creation?

Notes on the text:

- These verses are from the 'First Creation Account' which describes God's work of creation in universal terms
- Hebrew *Adam* is used here, not as a personal name, nor even to refer to a male person, but as the noun for human beings in general. (*Let us make humankind ... v26*) - an inclusive language translation may be helpful here.
- humankind includes male and female, both made in the image of God (v27)
- male and female share the blessing of procreation (v28)
- We will return to these texts for a discussion on marriage in Study 4

Read Genesis 2:7,18–25

What do these verses tell you about:

- the importance of human relationships?
 - the purpose of male and female?
 - the closeness in origin and nature of man and woman?
 - the shared life of marriage, and the sexual expression of the unity of man and woman
 - the beauty of sexuality?
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Notes on the text:

- These verses are from the 'Second Creation Account' which describes God's work of creation in personal terms
- Hebrew Adam is used here for the man, ie for the first man or the representative man. It becomes a personal name from Genesis 3:20, and till then is better translated as the man. Ishah is the word for woman, and the personal name Eve is also introduced only in Genesis 3:20.
- In v 23 the word for man is Ish and the word for woman is Ishah.
- The word helper does not imply an inferior position, but the context shows that the woman is a companion who will share the life and work of the man.
- Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24 to show that the shared life of marriage is part of God's original plan for humankind.

THE GIFT SPOILED

Read Genesis 3:6–11 & 3:21

What do these verses tell you about:

- the consequences of sin on the relationship between man and woman and their attitude to themselves?
 - God's care for sinful people?
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Read Genesis 3:16

What does this verse tell you about:

- tension in the relationship between man and woman?
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Notes on the text:

- This verse is from the story of the human fall into sin which continues the 'Second Creation Account'
- This passage contrasts life, including sexuality, as it was created and willed by God, and as it is corrupted through sin. God's words of judgement describe how all aspects of life are affected by human sinfulness, and God's actions and promises show that God continues to care for people in their sinful state.

THE JOY OF INTIMACY

Read Genesis 4:1

Note on the text:

- the word used to describe the intimacy between Adam and Eve is literally knew – Adam knew his wife Eve, and she conceived ... You may like to compare translations here.
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Discuss:

- What does this choice of word tell you about the nature of sexual intimacy?
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Read Song of Songs 1

- Describe the atmosphere of these verses
 - How do the voices of this passage express sexual desire and longing?
 - Why, do you think, is a song of love and desire included in Scripture?
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Notes on the text:

- The whole of Song of Songs is a love poem, a dialogue between two lovers, possibly between a prince and his royal bride. You may like to read the whole book for yourself.
- While the circumstances of this relationship are unknown, the language is rich and passionate, and while the images may seem foreign, the depth of emotion is unmistakable.

SUMMARY

A definition of sexuality

- the desire to connect intimately with another person;
 - the expression of such intimacy - emotional, physical and spiritual
 - the relationship in which such intimacy is shared.
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Discuss:

- From your reflections on the passages in this study, what have you learned about sexuality in God's plan for human life?
 - What are some positive attitudes to sexuality you notice in our contemporary society?
 - What are some negative attitudes to sexuality you notice in our contemporary society?
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PRAYER THOUGHTS

- thanks for the gifts of life, the joy of sexuality, the gifts of male and female
- care for the sacred gift of sexuality, and for each person, created in the image of God.
- repentance for the sinfulness that we own, and the sins that we commit against God and against the people God has given us
- wisdom to face the challenges of sexuality in our own lives and to address human brokenness caused by sin.

This series of studies was commissioned by the LCA College of Bishops to lead members of the Lutheran Church into a Biblically-based discussion of the issues of sexuality and homosexuality. Studies were prepared by Pastor Jim Pietsch. Further Reading: Human sexuality: three key issues (Background paper) p3-6 (CTICR)