

# 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 2: Sexuality and homosexuality

In Study 1 we looked at passages that showed how sexuality is given in God's act of creating human beings. Sexuality is an important part of sharing life at the deepest level, and of passing on new life through God's gift of continuing creation.

An important aspect of sexuality is the desire for intimacy with another person. For the majority of people this sexual desire is a desire for intimacy with a person of the opposite gender (heterosexual). For a minority this sexual desire is a desire for intimacy with a person of the same gender (homosexual).

This study presents Biblical statements and examples that relate to homosexuality, and seeks to lead participants to reflect on their attitude to homosexuality.

### EXAMPLES OF INTIMACY BETWEEN MEN

**1 Samuel 19 - 20** describes the relationship between David and Jonathon, perhaps the most famous friendship in the Bible for its strength and loyalty.

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Look especially at 19:1; 20:7; 20:41–42.

- How is this friendship expressed?
  - How does the expression of intimacy in friendship vary from one culture to another?
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Note on the text:

- there is no suggestion of a sexual relationship, but a deep emotional bond which is also expressed physically.

### Read John 13:21-25

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Discuss:

- How do you understand this relationship?
  - How is it different to the relationship between Jesus and his other disciples?
  - Are we too afraid of expressing physical affection, especially between men?
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Notes on the text:

- In the Gospel of John, the writer refers five times to 'the disciple Jesus loved' – probably a reference to John, the Gospel writer.
- the position of this disciple is literally 'reclining against Jesus' breast' (v23) and 'leaning against Jesus' chest' (v25). Compare translations.
- again there is no suggestion of a sexual relationship, but a deep emotional bond which is also expressed physically.

## OLD TESTAMENT STORIES ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

The Old Testament gives two graphic accounts of homosexual abuse. You may like to read these accounts for yourself:

- **Genesis 19:1-29** tells how the men of Sodom wanted to seize and sexually abuse the angelic visitors who were guests of Lot.
- **Judges 19:1-28** tells how the men of Gibeah wanted to sexually abuse the Levite travelling through their town. He was protected by his host, but his concubine was raped and died from their violence.

Notes on the texts:

- The threatened abuse in Genesis 19 is the final act of wickedness that brings God's deadly punishment onto the city of Sodom.
- A disturbing element of the story is the willingness of Lot to sacrifice his daughters to the lust of the men in order to protect his guests.
- In Judges 19 a woman is again sacrificed to protect the man.
- This 'lewd and disgraceful act' (Judges 20:6) provokes the moral outrage of the rest of the nation.
- The story continues to tell how the Levite dismembered the body of the concubine and used this act to call his nation to avenge the crime against the town of Gibeah and the whole tribe of Benjamin. (Judges 19:29 - 20:48)
- In these two stories wicked men threaten homosexual violence to intimidate and humiliate their intended victims. The lessons of these stories therefore relate specifically to homosexual violence, and to sexual violence in all forms.
- In both stories women were offered up to protect men. This suggests that at that time homosexual abuse against men was considered more serious than the sexual abuse of women.

## OLD TESTAMENT LAWS ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

### Read Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13

Notes on the texts:

- The Israelites as God's chosen people were called to a standard of sexual morality that was different to other nations (Leviticus 18:1-4)
  - God prohibits certain actions to maintain holiness in the lives of the people. The actions that are prohibited all represent offences against relationships that express the order that God has created and protected.
  - In this context homosexual relations between men are condemned as an offence against the created order of relations between man and woman.
  - The punishments listed in Leviticus 20 are intended to preserve the holiness of the people (Leviticus 20:7-8). The most serious offences were punished by death, which punished the offender and preserved the community from the offence.
  - Homosexual intercourse was condemned as one such offence.
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Discuss:

- Should the Christian community insist on standards of sexual morality that are different to the standards of the wider society? What are important differences in sexual morality today?
  - How do the commands of holiness of the Old Testament relate to God's call to live in grace in the exhortations of the New Testament? (More on this in Study 5)
  - Do you understand homosexual actions to be offences against God's order of creation?
  - Do you consider that there are some forms of homosexual relationship that may be within God's will for human relationship and behaviour? (there will be further discussion on this question in Studies 3 and 4)
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## NEW TESTAMENT RESPONSES TO HOMOSEXUALITY

### Read Romans 1:24–27

Notes on the text:

- Romans 1:18-32 is the most comprehensive description of human sinfulness in the New Testament, leading towards the most comprehensive description of God's work of justification.
  - Within this picture, homosexual acts and lusts are listed as evidence of corrupted human nature.
  - Human depravity is both the rebellion against God and God's judgment against sin.
  - This is the only Biblical passage that mentions both male and female homosexual acts.
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Discuss:

- What acts and attitudes today most blatantly convince you of human sinfulness?
  - What sexual acts and attitudes do you find most distressing?
  - God's judgment is not an excuse for us to become judgmental, but a reason for us to examine our own lives and attitudes and come to repentance. (See Romans 2:1–4).
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## PRAYER THOUGHTS

- thanks for the joy of sharing life in all of our relationships
- care for all who are sexually abused, and for those who are abusive
- repentance for sexual hurt that we have caused by thoughts, words and actions.
- honesty in acknowledging our own sexual desires and wisdom to express our sexuality in God-pleasing ways.

*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) p15, pp17-40 (CTICR) See especially pp18-19 on sexual orientation and pp 19-21 on interpreting the relevant Biblical passages and pp 22- 36 for a much wider discussion of the key texts.*