

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 3: Sexuality and singleness

A significant percentage of people in our society and our churches are single. This study gives the opportunity to talk about their needs, their opportunities, and the support that can best help them.

Single people include those who are single their whole life, those who are single but who may marry in the future, those who have been married but who are now single through death or divorce. Single people include single parents.

We want to study single life style in terms of God's plan for service and fulfilment.

CHOOSING A SINGLE LIFE

Read Matthew 19:10–12

Notes on the text:

- After Jesus speaks about God's will for marriage and God's will against divorce, the disciples ask Jesus whether it is better to stay single. These verses are the only verses in the Gospel where Jesus speaks specifically about a single lifestyle.
- Jesus speaks of 'eunuchs', a word that usually refers to those who are physically unable to have sexual relations. But here he uses the word to also refer to those who chose a celibate life.

Discuss:

- What is Jesus saying about a life that is single and celibate?
 - In your own experience why are some people single?
 - What are some attitudes towards those who are single?
 - Who can you think of who was 'single for the sake of the kingdom of heaven'? (v11)
 - In what way could being single be an opportunity to serve in God's kingdom? (cf Luke 18:28–30)
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ACCEPTING A SINGLE LIFE

Look at 1 Corinthians 7

Notes on the text:

- In this chapter Paul responds to a statement or question that has been put to him by the Christians of Corinth: 'Is it good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman?' (v1).
 - In his response he points out the joys and the challenges of married life, and of single celibate life, all within the framework of God's purposes.
 - We will look at his statements about single life in this study. (We will return to this chapter and look at his statements about married life in Study 4).
 - Paul's advice is coloured by his expectation that Christ's second coming would be soon (vv24, 26, 29, 31)
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From your reading of these verses:

- What is the danger of a single life? (v2)
 - How does Paul allow for personal differences in respect of sexuality? What are the particular gifts he refers to? (vv6–7)
 - How does Paul describe natural sexual desire? What does he advise as the way to respond to this sexual desire? (vv8–9)
 - How does the belief that time on this earth will be short change attitudes to marriage and single life? (vv25–31)
 - What is the special opportunity available to someone who is single? (vv32–35)
 - How does Paul allow for personal choice about getting married or remaining single? (vv36–38). What is Paul's personal choice? (vv39–40)
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LIFESTYLE CHOICES

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1–8

Note on the text:

- The instructions in this passage apply to men and women, 'brothers and sisters'.
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Discuss:

- What sort of behaviour does not fit the holy, sanctified life of a Christian?
 - What sort of sexual behaviour does fit the holy sanctified life of a Christian?
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Enlarge on your consideration of these texts to discuss:

- What are the needs and pressures of single people?
- What are the opportunities of single people in Christian service?
- How can the church best support single people?
- Do the words of God, 'it is not good for the man to be alone' (Genesis 2:18), apply also to those who have had a broken marriage?

Now consider in particular those with a homosexual orientation:

- Does a single lifestyle provide the answer to God's will for those with a homosexual orientation?
- Do the words of God, 'it is not good for the man to be alone' (Genesis 2:18), apply also to those who have a homosexual orientation?
- How can we acknowledge the sexual desire of those with a homosexual inclination?
- Do those who are homosexual have choices about their lifestyle?
- How can the church best support and care for those who have a homosexual orientation?

PRAYER THOUGHTS

- thanks for opportunities to serve God in a single lifestyle
- care for those who are looking for intimacy, who are seeking a partner, who are lonely, who face the challenges of parenthood alone
- repentance for making false judgements about people according to their lifestyle or position in life
- wisdom to make good, God-pleasing decisions in choosing a lifestyle, and responding to the opportunities and lack of opportunities we are given.