

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 4: Sexuality and life together

Because people are sexual creatures they seek relationships where they can share an intimate bond with a partner. Marriage recognises and protects such a relationship.

In this study we look at relationships, especially marriage, in terms of God's plan for service and fulfilment.

THE GIFT OF MARRIAGE

Review Genesis 1:26–28 & Genesis 2:18–25

We have already seen marriage in God's plan for human life according to God's act of creation. God created man and woman as sexual beings, to share life and to create life (Study 1). In giving man and woman to one another, God established marriage.

Discuss:

- What do you see as the purpose of marriage, according to God's will, but also relating to your own observation?
 - What blessings and fulfilments are given through marriage? Consider social effects as well as personal effects.
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Read Matthew 19:3–9

Notes on the text:

- This conversation is one of a series of attempts by the Pharisees to find fault with Jesus with legal arguments,
 - Jesus is not content with legal arguments but highlights divine principles.
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What does this text tell you about:

- God's will for marriage and the preservation of marriage?
 - God's will to provide for people also when marriages fail?
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FULFILMENT THROUGH MARRIAGE

Turn back to 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 married life in this study. (We looked at the statements about single life in Study 3).
 - Paul's advice is coloured by his expectation that Christ's second coming would be soon (vv24, 26, 29, 31).
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What do these verses tell you about:

- the right use and the wrong use of sexuality? (v2,v9)
 - sexual intimacy as deep personal sharing and serving? (v3–4)
 - sexual intimacy and sexual self-control? (v5)
 - shared Christian faith within a marriage? (v5)
 - honouring and preserving marriage? (v10)
 - the challenge of marriage where faith is not shared? (vv12–16)
 - everyday demands of marriage, and the need to focus also on 'the Lord's affairs'? (vv26–35)
 - freedom of choice in marriage (vv36–38)
 - marriage and re-marriage? (vv39–40)
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ROLES WITHIN MARRIAGE

Read Ephesians 5:21–33

- In what sense does Paul compare the relationship between husband and wife to the relationship between Christ and the church?
 - How does this Christ-centred understanding transform the meaning of marriage and the attitude to living a married life?
 - How is the traditional role of husband transformed?
 - How is the traditional role of wife transformed?
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THE CHOICES OF OTHERS

Christians today have different attitudes and behaviour in regard to sexuality and marriage. Some Christians insist that a couple should share sexual intimacy only within a legal public marriage. Some Christians believe that a couple can share sexual intimacy also in a de-facto marriage, before a legal marriage or outside a legal marriage, claiming that their personal commitment and Christian love make such a relationship acceptable.

- What is your attitude to sexual intimacy in relationships outside legal marriage?
 - Do you believe that this is an issue where you can respect genuine differences among Christians?
 - How does your position and practice affect other Christians?
 - How can you encourage the God-given fullness of marriage among those who do not appreciate it?
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Christians have a number of different attitudes and behaviours regarding homosexual relationships. Some Christians believe that all homosexual relationships and all forms of homosexual intimacy are wrong.

Some Christians believe that homosexuals also have a God-given need for intimacy, and that this can be shared in some form in a homosexual friendship.

Some Christians believe that homosexuals have the need and the right to have their relationship recognized and protected as a civil union or marriage.

- What is your attitude to homosexual relationships?
 - Do you believe that this is an issue where you can respect genuine differences among Christians?
 - How does your position and practice affect other Christians?
 - How can you encourage the understanding that marriage is deeper than any same-sex relationship?
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At the time of writing, New Zealand has legalised marriage between two people of the same sex. In Australia such a law is being discussed and promoted by some.

- In what measure could a homosexual relationship be considered to fulfil God's will for marriage?
 - In what respect is a homosexual relationship unable to fulfil God's will for marriage?
 - How should Christians respond to those who are in a homosexual relationship and who may have entered a same-sex marriage?
 - How should the Christian church respond if same-sex marriage is legalised?
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PRAYER THOUGHTS

- thanks for love and intimacy, and the relationships in which they are shared
- care for those whose relationships are difficult
- repentance for hurting those who are closest, and for judging those who are not understood
- wisdom to best support God's gift of marriage

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: the key issues (Background paper) pp5–10, pp15, 17, 18–20 (CTICR), esp pp8–9 on de-facto marriage and same-sex marriage.