

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 5: Sexuality and spirituality

Scripture makes connections between spiritual life and sexual relationships, with both positive and negative examples. These connections illustrate the love and faithfulness of God, and sometimes the faithlessness of people. These connections also set before us God's will for faithful, sacrificial love in our human relationships.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

Read Hosea 2:2–8

Notes on the text:

- The Old Testament prophets used language of sexual adultery and unfaithfulness to describe the unfaithfulness of the people of Israel to the God who had saved them and provided for them
- Hosea was even told to use his own experience of an unfaithful wife to expose the spiritual unfaithfulness of the people.

Discuss:

- In what way is wickedness an act of adultery against God?
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Read Isaiah 54:1-8

Note on the text:

- The Old Testament could also use the language of sensuous love to describe the longing of God to restore his people, and hold his people close to him.
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Discuss:

- In what way is the love of God for his people like the love of a husband for his wife?
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SEXUALITY AS SACRED GIFT

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

- How is Christian life described? (v11)
 - What are the actions of God that change your life?
 - What do these verses tell you about the change in your identity when you become a Christian?
 - What do you understand by 'inherit the kingdom of God'? (v9,v10)
 - How can your way of life contradict your Christian identity?
 - What are some of the sins that deny you a place in the kingdom of God?
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Notes on the text:

- 1 Corinthians 6 belongs to a section of Paul's letter that emphasizes that Christian life is different to non-Christian life, because when God brings you into his kingdom, your life must change.
 - sexual sins are given a prominent place in his list of vices.
 - there are two references to homosexual sins ('male prostitutes, homosexual offenders' v 10 NIV), but there is considerable debate over exactly what behaviours are condemned here, and whether the words used refer to all homosexual behaviour or to specific homosexual actions. You may like to compare translations.
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Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-13

- How is the catchcry 'Everything is permissible for me' echoed in today's society?
 - What is Paul's answer to our human desire for freedom?
 - What does he mean: 'The body is meant for the Lord and the Lord for the body'?
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Read 1 Corinthians 6:14-20

- How does Christ's resurrection shape our attitudes to our bodies and our physical behaviour?
 - What does Paul mean: 'Your bodies are members of Christ himself' (v15)?
 - What is the contrast between sexual union and union with Christ? (vv16-17)
 - In what sense is sexual sin different to other sin? (v18)
 - How does Christian sexual behaviour reflect the sanctification of God's Spirit? (v19)
 - How does Christian sexual behaviour reflect the Lordship of Christ (vv19-20).
 - What sexual attitudes, relationships and behaviours 'honour God with your body' (v20)?
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Note on the text:

- these verses give a bold and powerful link between sexuality and spirituality, both condemning sexual behaviour that contradicts Christian spirituality, and encouraging a sexuality that expresses Christian sanctity.

THE GOSPEL LIFE

Read 1 Timothy 1:8–11

- According to these verses, what is a Christian's motivation for avoiding sin? (vv10–11)
 - What is a Christian's motivation for seeking to live a holy life?
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Notes on the text:

- This passage speaks of the purpose of God's Law in condemning sin, because sin is 'contrary to the Gospel' (v11)
- It includes a list of sins that corresponds approximately to the Ten Commandments. The naming of 'perverts' (v10 NIV) is probably referring to some form of homosexual behaviour.

COVERED BY GOD'S GRACE

Read Romans 7:14–25

- Why is there such a conflict in the life of a Christian?
 - Can you identify with the frustration expressed by Paul?
 - Does this frustration apply in particular to a desire to be sexually pure in spite of our human lust?
 - Is this spiritual frustration likely to apply in a particular way to those whose sexual orientation is homosexual and who are seeking to live a life that is pure?
 - What is Paul's answer to our frustration as we seek to choose what is good?
 - How can the church best care for all people who are struggling in their life, including those struggling with issues of sexuality?
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PRAYER THOUGHTS

- thanks for the relationship that God forms with us as his people, and for the human relationships that reflect the love of God
- care for those who are struggling with sexual sin, and searching for their sexual identity
- repentance for denying our life as God's people through sins of lust, and faith to continually return to the grace that is ours in Christ Jesus
- wisdom to choose a life style that reflects our calling as people of God

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) (CTICR) esp pp19–20 on principles of Biblical interpretation, pp32–35 on sanctified life, and p40–42 on pastoral care of homosexuals.