



NAVIGATING THE ISSUES OF HUMAN SEXUALITY AS A CHRISTIAN

A Bible study

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Introduction for study leaders

As a leader, you might have some concerns about leading this study as sexuality is not the most comfortable subject for us to talk about. It is, however, an important subject which should be talked about amongst Christians. Sexuality is probably one of the most prevalent topics of conversation in our culture, and because our culture endorses values that are very different from Christian values, we should consider engaging in the conversation. If we are not talking about sexuality, our church members will be listening to the answers given by everyone else. If Christian voices are absent from the conversation, where do we turn to for answers?

This Bible study is designed to help people to have informed discussions based upon God's word. It is most suitable to be used in a small group setting and each session is designed to take around 90 minutes.

We live in a very emotive culture and have the privilege of being in a position to promote Christ's way. It is hoped that this can then help people to explore their feelings in line with what the Bible says, and to ask themselves, "why do I feel this way and how do my feelings fit in with my faith?"

Sexuality is a very broad subject and the Bible teaches and illustrates a great deal about our sexual behaviour, much of which may not be directly covered in this study. What these sessions will seek to do is to develop our understanding of God's perfect design for our human sexuality, with specific consideration of marriage, sexual immorality and homosexuality.

For the purpose of this study we will be considering human sexuality as the way people experience and express themselves sexually. This means looking at someone's sexual orientation, meaning their pattern of sexual interest in either the opposite or the same sex. Through this, we recognise that there are physical and emotional aspects of sexuality, and these are expressed as feelings as well as physical manifestations of love in all its guises.

The topic of sexuality can cause heated debate and sometimes division, and this will need to be managed carefully. As group leader, it is not your role to convict anyone of what is right or wrong, rather to facilitate the discussion and help people to discuss the questions in this book as they look at what the Bible teaches. This study relies upon us fully trusting in the Bible as God's revelation, his inspired word to us and presupposes that Christians undertaking the study acknowledge the Bible as the primary and final authority for our faith and the way we are to live our lives. As Christians it has always been important that we look to the Bible for our guidance.

Establishing the validity of the Bible as a moral guide is not the purpose of this study. If this is something that you feel will be challenging within your group, it may be worth spending one week prior to commencing the study looking at passages such as 2 Timothy 3:16. Recognition of biblical authority reinforces the fact that, as Christians, our goal is not to produce new codes of behaviour or morality to fit in with today's society, but to empower and equip Christians to remain faithful to biblical principles no matter how far they vary from societal norms.

The purpose of this study is to encourage people to engage in conversations about sexuality within a Christian framework. We live in a world that treats sexuality as an idol, it is promoted and celebrated in our culture as a central facet of our identity, and as such, we need to make time and space to understand God's purposes for our sexuality. On completion of this study it is hoped that the participants will recognise God as a holy and just God, and that they will recognise how personal emotions and compassions can tempt us to lower his standards for our sexuality.



We will look at the human journey from Creation and wholeness, through the fall, to our brokenness and from our brokenness, to the promise of full transformation because of Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection. This study encourages participants to recognise the significance of marriage in all its beauty, to give singleness the prominence it deserves and to understand how our sacrifice is rewarded. We will consider our temptations and how all temptations can become reasons to draw closer to God.

There are leaders notes at the back of this book which can be used to help you as you prepare and deliver this study.

STUDY 1

God's perfect design for marriage, Genesis 1 & 2

SETTING THE SCENE

God knew it was not good for man to be alone. He therefore gave Adam a helper, Eve. In Adam and Eve, he created both male and female and blessed their union. God created Adam from the dust of the ground, and he was given dominion over the garden of Eden, and all the created beings on earth. But he was alone, and God saw that this was not good, so he created the perfect partner for him. He didn't create another Adam from the dust of the ground, rather he saw the need to take part of Adam, his rib, and create Eve. And for that reason, they were seen to be perfect companions, both uniquely carrying the image of God, two sides of the same coin, perfectly designed as one whole.

This was part of God's intended purpose for humanity; man and woman co-labouring together, to enjoy the fruits of the earth, to procreate and fill the earth. God's perfect plan in which we should never have experienced any form of sin or temptation. This is how it would have remained had Adam and Eve not disobeyed God.



For us to fully understand God's will for our lives, we only need to look back at that time before sin, noticing how he wanted us to live in close communion with him, living in unions blessed by God, living without shame.

DISCUSS:

God's design for our lives is always for our good, and anything that is for our good, Satan seeks to destroy. We see this in the Garden of Eden where Satan could not stand the thought of humans being more important than him and holding dominion over the earth. Satan struck then to cause havoc and continues to do so today. Specifically, in what ways do you think Satan attacks marriage?

WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES SAY?

From Genesis through to Revelation, Scripture shows us that God's plan is that marriage is between one man and one woman. The Bible expresses the importance of our love and commitment to each other within marriage. Some of the teaching may cause offence to our modern sensitivities around gender roles, yet it is clear as Paul writes in Ephesians 5 –

- Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord
- Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church

Marriage is a union in which both the husband and wife are subject to each other. Being subject means that you choose to put the others needs first. Marriages that work well are between two people who have chosen to cherish the other, considering the others needs and seeking to help them thrive; because their partner has become the object of their affection they want the best for them and learn how to be subject to them. They become dance partners as they learn to listen and respond, refusing dominance and choosing partnership. And that is why marriage so perfectly illustrates the relationship that Jesus has with his people, the Church.

BIBLE READING: Genesis 1:27 to Genesis 2:24

QUESTIONS

1. This passage gives us quite a lot of detail about how God had looked for a suitable partner for Adam out of the world he had created. Discuss why you think that was?
2. In verse 18 we see that God recognised that it was not good for Adam to be alone. Contrast God's words, 'it is not good' with the words at the end of Genesis 1, where God saw all that he had made and 'behold it was very good'.
3. God saw a need to create a helper for Adam, what comes to mind when you hear the word 'helper?' The same word for helper is used elsewhere in the Bible in reference to God. For example, in Exodus 18:4 Moses said, "my Father's God was my helper". Does this challenge your original interpretation of the word helper, what do you now think of Eve being referred to as Adams helper?

4. God indicates that the helper needed to be 'suitable' for Adam. It's probably not surprising to us that none of the beasts or birds were found to be suitable. What do you think God meant by 'suitable'?
5. God eventually fashioned Eve from the rib of Adam. What was Adam's reaction when God brought Eve to him? For what reasons do you think he reacted this way?
6. In verse 24 the writer of Genesis says, "that for this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife". What reason is he alluding to, why is it good?
7. In Matthew 19 v 5 we see how Jesus underlined the words we read in verse 24. What do you think about this command for a man to leave his father and mother and be united to his wife in contrast with the understanding of much of secular society, where sex outside of marriage is prevalent? Consider Hebrews 13:4, which tells us that the marriage bed should be kept pure, what benefits are there to a young couple of abstaining from sex until marriage?
8. If you look back to Genesis 1 verses 27-28, we read that, 'God blessed them'. In a similar way today, a minister or church leader will pray God's blessing over a couple on their wedding day. Adam and Eve's was the first human marriage, fully blessed by God. How important is it to you that a marriage is blessed by God?
9. Marriage is a lifelong union between two people, a covenant relationship in which they commit to love and support each other through life's ups and downs. Talk together about the importance of the permanence of marriage; in what ways does marriage enable flourishing of all members of the family group?

STUDY 2

Biblical perspective on sexuality, God created sex for marriage - Song of Solomon

SETTING THE SCENE

In our first study we got a feeling for God's original intention for marriage; it was not good for man to be alone. What the Creation account doesn't give us though, is a sense that marriage was to be a place where we could receive one of God's most amazing gifts to us, that is, the gift of sex and sexual pleasure. As Christians we don't often talk about sexual pleasure, some Christians are not even that keen on Song of Solomon being included in the Bible, but it is there for an important reason!

Some say that Song of Solomon is an allegory of Christ's love for the church and it's quite easy to see how that works. Others would say that this book has been included in the Bible because it is a collection of beautiful poetry which reflects the divine gift of love. Still others may say that this is the most perfect marriage guidance book ever written! Whatever its primary purpose, we can take many great lessons from what is essentially a love story; from courtship through the wedding day and honeymoon, to the trials and daily pressures of married life.

DISCUSS:

This book in the Bible is commonly known as Song of Solomon but can also be referred to as Song of Songs. In the Bible there are other occasions where words are emphasised in this way; King of kings, Lord of lords, Holy of holies. What do you think is meant by the phrase Song of Songs?

WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES SAY?

God tells us that one of the purposes of marriage is procreation, but this book is much more explicit about how much fun, enjoyment and pleasure is involved in both the courtship phase as well as the honeymoon phase and beyond. Through Song of Solomon we can see the clarity of God's intention for sexual intimacy to be reserved for the marriage bed. We also see that he intended it to be an extremely intimate and personal experience reserved for husband and wife and how the courtship phase is an intricate part of the love story that requires self-control and obedience to God's word.

READING: A precis of Song of Solomon

The Courtship: 1:1 – 2:7

The book opens with a Shulammitte woman longing for her handsome king to kiss her. The king himself is obsessed with her, declaring her beauty and singing her praises. This poem of courtship and love is descriptive in the joy of physical attraction and expresses strong feelings of desire and passion. The passage closes with a word of caution that the two are not to become physically intimate until the time is right, that is, until the time of their marriage.

The Engagement: 2:8 – 3:5

The Shulammitte woman can hardly contain her excitement when her king returns once more. He says, 'arise my darling, my beautiful one and come along', this his proposal of marriage. She is quick to accept his proposal and responds saying, 'my beloved is mine and I am his'. As with any bride to be, she can hardly wait for her wedding day. When her fiancé is not with her, she misses him, she feels lost. Once again, we read at the end of this passage the same word of caution against becoming physically intimate before their marriage.

The Wedding: 3:6-10 and the Honeymoon: 4:1 – 5:1

The day finally arrives when her king returns, escorted by many warriors; it is the wedding day and his heart is glad. After the wedding there is always a honeymoon, and this is where the book starts to become graphic in a sensual way. The language used is very explicit yet also very discreet, the scriptures clearly show, in figurative terms, the beauty and intimacy of marriage. The bride invites her groom saying, 'may my beloved come into his garden and eat its choice fruits'. The groom responds, 'I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey; I have drunk my wine and my milk'. There's no mistaking the meaning of their words as they consummate their union, there is no reason why they should be ashamed of something so beautiful, a physical act that God designed exclusively for marriage.

The Falling Out: 5:2 – 6:3

Every marriage has a honeymoon period, but things eventually lose the excitement and shine of a new relationship. This couple were no different and they have a disagreement, an argument which resulted in Solomon storming out. His wife chases after him, she cannot find him, she fears that he

has gone elsewhere for intimacy telling those she meets that, ‘my beloved has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to browse in the gardens and gather lilies.’ She is anxious and upset about this because she believes that he has gone elsewhere for sexual intimacy and she knows that their marriage must be kept sexually exclusive (6:3).

The Reconciliation: 6:4 to 8:4

The argument ends as the husband quickly realises his mistake and comes back to her. He woos her with compliments, confessing her as, ‘my dove, my perfect one’, he recognises her as unique. The woman's friends urge her to come back to him and the husband continues to sing her praises and describe her beauty. He expresses his desire to enjoy her once more, eventually she is won over and responds by reciprocating his feelings. They go on a second honeymoon into the countryside and resume their passionate relationship. Yet again they warn others about the dangers of giving into the temptations of sex before marriage.

Conclusion: 8:5 – 14

Song of Solomon illustrates God's perfect design for marriage. Marriage is shown to be an exclusive relationship between a man and a woman of deep friendship, built on strong emotional bonds, physical pleasure and is to be an enduring and lifelong commitment. Marriages will have conflict and challenging times, but when a couple are committed to God, nothing can permanently quench the love God gives them for each other, nothing should prevent them from enjoying each other's intimacy and friendship for life. This is why it is so important for us to wait for marriage, so that two become one flesh, so that we maintain our self-value and identity.

QUESTIONS

1. Some people have said that Song of Solomon is an odd book to be included in the Bible. What do you think, why do you think this book has been included?

2. We read about the courtship phase of the relationship, perhaps something that's not so common today. During the time of courtship, a couple either consciously or unconsciously consider whether they are compatible in certain areas of their lives. Consider what you think is important under the following headings:
 - a. Identity
 - b. Values
 - c. Relationship
 - d. Communication
 - e. Decision Making

3. The courtship phase concludes in chapter 2 where in verse 7 we read a warning which points to saving oneself for the marital bed, what do you feel about this warning? Have you always felt this way or has your opinion changed?

4. When we consider Song of Solomon as a whole, what can we learn from it and what it teaches us about the changing phases of love?

5. In a world which has much sexual brokenness, are we too quick to give up when our relationships suffer difficulties? What can we learn from the falling out and reconciliation phases of Song of Solomon?

6. How can Christian marriage be a witness to an increasingly secular world?

STUDY 3

Marriage and teaching on sex outside of marriage

SETTING THE SCENE

Having spent the past two sessions looking at God's perfect design for marriage, we now move to teaching on sex outside of marriage. Up until the 1960's our culture embraced the traditional Christian view of marriage and sexuality. Following the sexual revolution of the 60s, Christian standards have gradually been eroded with the promotion of a wide range of sexual expression outside of marriage, relaxed attitudes to divorce and an openness to homosexuality, which is now



widely promoted and celebrated as a desirable way of life. Whilst Christians in the 1960s and 70s would rarely have questioned God's word, agreeing that marriage was his intention for us, over time, as the cultural acceptance of this relaxed view to morality has changed, many Christians have also being drawn into a more liberal attitude.

This quote by Francis Schaeffer hits the nail on the head:

People drift from generation to generation, and the morally unthinkable becomes thinkable as the years move on.¹

When considering the shift in cultural attitude towards sexual morality, we must not lose sight of the fact that our God is the same yesterday today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)

DISCUSS:

How do you think that secular culture has permeated Christianity, to the extent that what was once morally unthinkable is now forming the basis of a whole new doctrine within the established church?

WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES SAY?

God's word tells us that marriage is to be honoured. We already know that God instituted marriage in the Garden of Eden. Jesus himself honoured marriage, his first recorded miracle was at a wedding and in Matthew 19, Jesus confronted the divorce laws, reaffirming God's intent for marriage by quoting from Genesis. We also know that all scripture is God breathed, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

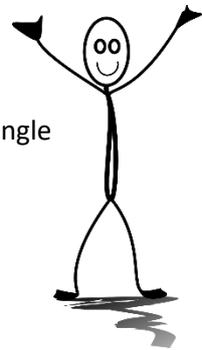
¹ C. Everett Koop and Francis Schaeffer, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, revised edition (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1983),

Paul's letters are no exception, what he wrote about marriage and its reflection of Christ and his church came directly from God.

BIBLE READING: Hebrews 13:1 - 9

QUESTIONS

1. Verse 4 tell us is that marriage is to be held in honour amongst all people. Honour in this context can be interpreted as precious or valuable. Can you think of other passages in the Bible which give us examples of things that are held to be precious or valuable to God?
2. Why do you think that God tells us that marriage should be honoured?
3. In what way does society today dishonour marriage?
4. In what way do Christians today dishonour marriage?
5. How would you advise a single person in your church who wants to get married, but who cannot find a suitable partner? How might verse 5 be useful?
6. How could your church become a more welcoming and inclusive space for single adults?
7. Verse 8 reminds us that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Does this knowledge have any impact on your understanding of marriage?
8. In verse 9 we are told not to be carried away by strange teachings, for it is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace. How do you interpret this advice in the current day?



STUDY 4

What does it mean to be God's people in this generation?

SETTING THE SCENE

You are walking down the street and notice smoke coming from your best friend's house. You run towards the house and see another of your friends sitting on a bench in the front garden ignoring the



smoke. You shout, "the house is on fire, have you called for help?" Your friend answers, "no, look through the window, they're having a party inside and are all having a great time, they don't need any help, they're doing great." You walk up to the window and look inside, your friends are laughing and having fun, oblivious to the fire and the danger that threatens their lives. What do you do?

Our answer is obvious because we see the big picture, and whilst we want our friends to have fun and enjoy their lives, we also want to protect them from any harm that may threaten them, so we would almost certainly call the fire service and knock on the windows to alert our friends of the danger.

Many of our friends and neighbours are living lives which bring them joy and happiness, yet they are unaware of the dangers of living in sin and the eternal consequences of not repenting and turning to God. Do we as Christians take on the human mindset and sit on the bench, maintaining that whilst they are happy and enjoying life, we shouldn't really warn them about any danger. Or do we act with the compassion of God, which is to see all people saved, and bang on the window and raise the alarm?

DISCUSS:

In Matthew 7 we are told, "not to judge, or you too will be judged" Do you think that this verse is misconceived to mean that we are in no position to warn other people of the impending danger, as illustrated in the story above?

WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES SAY?

God tells us that we are made in his image, and that he himself has a heart of compassion. God wants his compassion to flow through us to others, but before that can happen, we need to understand God. We cannot afford to have a misconception of who God is, and only through

reading his word can we understand his true nature and character and ourselves act with Godly compassion, rather than with our misguided human compassion. God clearly tells us that it is his will that not one of us should perish (2 Peter 3:9).

BIBLE READING: Ephesians 4:11 to Ephesians 5:2

QUESTIONS

1. Some Christians have openly changed their theology on issues such as sexuality when they have experienced friends or family members coming out to them. What do verses 14 and 15 tell us about being a mature Christian and how might that influence people in that situation?
2. In verse 17 we are told “not to live in the futility of our thinking.” What do you think Paul meant by this and how might this affect our compassion for others? (read verses 18 to 19)
3. Christians should stand out in our communities as different from others because of the way we live. This passage has some advice for us (verses 25 to 32), what stands out for you, and what changes might you need to make?
4. Verse 32 exhorts us to be kind and compassionate to one another. Compassion is easy in many circumstances; but how do you show compassion in a situation where a Christian fails to repent of habitual sin or fails to recognise their behaviour as sinful?
5. The next verse tells us to follow God's example and walk in the way of love. What examples can you think of from the New Testament where Jesus “walks in the way of love?”
6. When faced with difficult situations within our churches, where we see people walking outside of God's will for their lives, what can we learn from those examples of how Jesus lived?
7. Should our warnings about sin be different when we are speaking to non-Christians than our warnings when we speak to other Christians? If so, in what way should they differ?

8. Isaiah 5:20 says, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil”. It has been said that our Christian culture is weak and that we no longer know how to distinguish between good and evil, that we have a misguided compassion or mercy towards strangers we don't even know, a self-focused feeling to make us feel good. How does that criticism make you feel; do you agree with that sentiment?



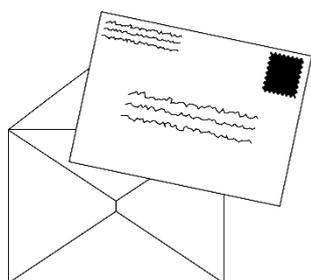
9. Our old way of life, the one we lived before we knew Jesus, is completely in the past, we should no longer be driven by our own desires and impulses. Read verses 22 to 24 again and discuss in the group what having the mind of Christ looks like for a compassionate Christian.

STUDY 5

Sexual immorality and homosexuality – Paul’s letters

SETTING THE SCENE

I wonder what Paul would have made of the fact that we are still reading his letters today, which were sent to encourage, to teach, and to respond to specific events which he was hearing about all



those years ago? They are full of wisdom and truth; they include specific teaching for the churches that they were sent to as well as teaching on the moral law which is relevant to all Christians throughout all time. Recognising Paul’s background as a Pharisee of impeccable teaching, we are assured of the soundness of his teaching on these matters. He was fully equipped with a knowledge of the Mosaic laws regarding sexual purity and moral excellence.

Paul was tuned into what the battle is all about, as illustrated in Romans 8 and Ephesians 6 where he explains that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of evil. He recognised that our bodies (our flesh) are weak, but the spirit is strong; he warned us that this would create a tension as our spirit fights against our weak and sinful flesh and against the spiritual forces of the world.

Our confidence in Paul’s teaching stems from the inclusion of his letters in the Bible. We recognise this as the holy word of God; indeed, we are warned in Revelation not to take away from this word or add to it. Recognising that life has changed and our modern behaviours and attitudes are different from those of Bible times, does not negate the validity of Paul’s letters, but may require us to prayerfully consider how we interpret and teach from them today.

DISCUSS:

Paul wrote these letters around 2000 years ago. Life has changed considerably since then with the internet, freedom of movement and speed of travel around the world, access to education and the media circus. How do you think changes in the way we live now in comparison to 2000 years ago may affect our interpretation of Paul’s letters?

WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES SAY?

God gave us many laws, both ceremonial laws (law of sacrifices that had to be carried out to make atonement for sin) and moral laws (laws that distinguish between right and wrong). The New Testament tells us clearly that the ceremonial laws are no longer binding because Jesus fulfilled them at the Cross. In addition, the New Testament (Hebrews 10:16) tells us that God has written his moral laws on our hearts, which shows us that they are still applicable today. We need to understand the distinction between ceremonial and moral law in order to appreciate what is still relevant today. For example, some may say that eating shellfish is a law of the Old Testament, yet we recognise that as it was part of the ceremonial law, it is no longer applicable to us.

There are three references to the prohibition of homosexuality in Paul's letters which show that the moral law still applies (these can be found in Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1). Jesus himself tells us in Mark 7 that the ceremonial laws are no longer relevant, but he goes a bit further than that, and says that it is what comes out of a person that defiles them and includes sexual immorality within the list of examples that he uses to illustrate this point.

BIBLE READING 1: Romans 1:24-32

QUESTIONS

1. Verse 24 relates to humanities rejection of righteousness. What sinful tendencies does this passage tell us that God allowed to happen to those who rejected the truth (verses 24 to 28)?
2. Verses 26 to 27 talk about sexual relations between two women or two men. What do you feel God is saying about these relationships? How do you interpret the term "they exchanged their natural sexual relations for unnatural ones?"
3. The passage says that, "they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God". What do you think that means, and how can we ensure that we retain the knowledge of God in our lives?

4. Verse 32 implies that certain people know God's thoughts on sin, (also refer to Romans 6:23 which says the wages of sin is death), and not only continues to sin but approve of those who sin. What do you think is the warning of this verse?

5. Do you think that people do understand the implication of their sinful actions, both:
 - 5a. Of their own actions?
 - 5b. As one who approves of another's sin?

BIBLE READING 2: 1 Corinthians 6:9-20

QUESTIONS

6. What do you understand by the phrase Paul uses in verse 9, "inherit the Kingdom of God?"

7. In verse 9 and 10 Paul lists a number of behaviours that are not conducive with living God's way, and therefore could prohibit us from inheriting his Kingdom. What do you feel about this list; do you think that some of these behaviours are worse than others?

8. We are told in verse 18 to flee sexual immorality, what reason is given for this and why do you think that it's important?

9. What do you think constitutes sexual immorality?

10. In verse 11 Paul says, "and that is what some of you were." What hope does this bring you?

STUDY 6

Smoke and mirrors – false teaching

SETTING THE SCENE

Are we humble enough to recognise that some deception is possible, even probable, in the church today? Even within an average church congregation on a Sunday morning you will find those who have widely differing opinions on matters as important as sexuality, divorce and co-habitation. Who is right and who is wrong? Not all of these contradictory teachings can be true. How we interpret and teach scripture is extremely important because it is, we believe, the word of God. We therefore seek to understand and become obedient to its teachings. We do well to remember that deception is a real problem in the church today and has been around since the garden of Eden.

The Old Testament provides us with some essential background. It is here that we have the account of Satan's first ever deception in the garden of Eden, but more than that, we have several key passages that give us clear warnings of the deception to come. Passages which speak prophetically to us today of a time when there will be a change in moral values which will result in generations seeing good as evil and evil as good.

DISCUSS:

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Isaiah 5:20

Can you think of examples today of people calling things God regards as wrong, good and vice versa?

WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES SAY?

The whole purpose of God sending his son to earth was to give us an opportunity to become reconciled with God. Satan's mission in Matthew 4 was to tempt Jesus to obey and worship him rather than God. Satan will go to any measure to deceive us, as the words of Jesus found later in Matthew substantiate. Jesus exhorts us to enter through the narrow gate, to pick up our cross and follow him. Jesus is giving us every opportunity to read between the lines and recognise the reality



of our calling. He didn't promise us an easy ride because he knew that in order to become a disciple, we would be subjected to the

onslaught of Satan's lies and deception. But with a knowledge of God's word and the guidance of his Spirit we can stand against such lies.

Jesus knew that in order to follow him effectively we must be prepared to lose our own lives and stand firmly on the truth of his word, as He did, and be obedient to the truth of His word.

BIBLE READING: Matthew 7: 13-29

QUESTIONS

1. Jesus is clear in his warning that only a few find the road to the narrow gate. Satan clearly wants us to walk the wide road; how do you think he is managing to attract people to walk that way, despite their knowledge of the Bible?
2. We are warned in verse 15 to be aware of wolves in sheep's clothing. This indicates that the people we may need to be wary of are those who we feel safe with. Who do you think Jesus is referring to and how does that apply to us today?
3. How do we recognise people by their fruit? What is our responsibility when discerning whether people are speaking in truth?
4. Verse 21 is a stark warning to us as Christians, because it shows us that Jesus isn't just talking about those of other faiths and religions. What indications are there in this passage that Jesus is talking about people within the Christian Church?
5. When you read verses 21 to 23 what emotions do you feel and why?



6. Are you aware of any false teaching within your church or within other churches? If so, how do you think you should respond to it, consider verses 24 and 25 and also take a look at Matthew 10:16?
7. This warning about false teaching is not limited to the words of Jesus, they are also echoed by Luke, Peter and Jude, amongst others (Acts 20:29-30, 2 Peter 2:1-3, Jude 3-4). As you read these other passages what patterns do you see emerging?
8. The final two verses tell us that the crowd were amazed at his teaching because he spoke with authority, and not as their teachers of the law. What does this tell us about the authority of the Bible, which is God's word?
9. We can be taken in by false teaching on many topics, but this study specifically looks at issues of sexuality. Do you feel that you, or your church, have wandered either partially, or fully, from God's intention for our sexuality, and if so what changes to your thought patterns and actions will you take from this study?



LEADERS NOTES

These notes are provided to give you guidance when required. Each group will be different, and occasionally discussions may move away from the key topic of sexuality. Use these notes to help you keep conversations focused and to prompt conversations when needed.

Leaders notes, study 1 - God's perfect design for marriage, Genesis 1 & 2

DISCUSS Section

Answers are not limited to but could include:

Lack of self-control leading to sex before marriage, people following their own lusts for example adultery, conflict within marriage resulting in divorce, believing false teaching that promotes same sex relationships, temptations to view pornography, breakdown of communication between family members.

Questions

- 1. This passage gives us quite a lot of detail about how God had looked for a suitable partner for Adam out of the world he had created. Discuss why you think that was?**

God had given man dominion over the earth; he was in the garden of Eden to tend and look after it - this was a significant undertaking and it would have been difficult for Adam to have done this on his own. Encourage discussion around the role that God had given Adam to 'fill the earth and subdue it', considering the type of support and help he would need.

- 2. In verse 18 we see that God recognised that it was not good for Adam to be alone. Contrast God's words, 'it is not good' with the words at the end of Genesis 1, where God saw all that he had made and 'behold it was very good'.**

Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 cover the same process of creation, chapter one giving an overview, and chapter two giving us more detail about how God chose to create Eve from the bone of Adam. We can therefore conclude that where God says at the end of chapter one it was very good; he was referring to the fact that he had created both Adam and Eve. In chapter two, the story takes a step back and the writer of Genesis emphasises the importance of Eve

as Adam's partner (2:18). Then having emphasised their likeness by stating, 'bone of my bone' in verse 23 he goes on to describe the institution of marriage in verses 24-25. They were designed for covenant relationship with each other as they were called to covenantal relationship with their God. Humanity called together to live lives of obedience and love.

- 3. God saw a need to create a helper for Adam, what comes to mind when you hear the word 'helper?' The same word for helper is used elsewhere in the Bible in reference to God. For example, in Exodus 18:4 Moses said, "my Father's God was my helper". Does this challenge your original interpretation of the word helper, what do you now think of Eve being referred to as Adams helper?**

Encourage the group to discuss their thoughts and when they have done this it might help to talk about the Hebrew word which was used in Genesis for helper. The Hebrew word is 'Ezer', a word which is used a few places elsewhere in the Old Testament in reference to God. This indicates that Eve was to be much more than an assistant to Adam and suggests that she was to be a vital and powerful helper and supporter in their given dominion over the earth.

- 4. God indicates that the helper needed to be 'suitable' for Adam. It's probably not surprising to us that none of the beasts or birds were found to be suitable. What do you think God meant by 'suitable'?**

Adam had the opportunity to examine and name every form of animal life, yet he must have felt dissatisfaction at not having found one to be his counterpart, his companion. Allow the group some time to discuss their thoughts about what would have been suitable and then get them to consider their answer in the light of understanding the Hebrew word which we interpret as meaning suitable. This is the word is 'Kenegdo' and it is derived from two words:

KE – Like or As

NEGED – Opposite or Against

Was God looking for someone who was like Adam but also opposite to him?

- 5. God eventually fashioned Eve from the rib of Adam. What was Adam's reaction when God brought Eve to him? For what reasons do you think he reacted this way?**

We can almost feel Adam's delight when he says that Eve is the bone of his bones and the flesh of his flesh. He had found a mate who is physically, and intellectually qualified to stand alongside him and carry out their God ordained role on earth. Was his reaction formed from loneliness? Could his reaction have been driven by his attraction to Eve, this woman who was similar to him, yet different?

6. **In verse 24 the writer of Genesis says, "that for this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife". What reason is he alluding to, why is it good?**

Eve was formed from Adam, she was formed from his rib, and that is the reason alluded to. Genesis shows us that man without woman or woman without man would not be complete, together they fulfil God's plans to hold dominion over the earth.

7. **In Matthew 19 v 5 we see how Jesus underlined the words we read in verse 24. What do you think about this command for a man to leave his father and mother and be united to his wife in contrast with the understanding of much of secular society, where sex outside of marriage is prevalent? Consider Hebrews 13:4, which tells us that the marriage bed should be kept pure, what benefits are there to a young couple of abstaining from sex until marriage?**

Encourage open discussion about this, bearing in mind the different situations of those in your group and their family members. If members of your group are prone to be more liberal towards sex outside of traditional marriage, you could perhaps talk about how the sexual revolution of the 60s and 70s changed views and how some of these attitudes have permeated into churches. It's important within these discussions to maintain that God's word is as relevant today as when it was first written. It's actually man who has changed significantly in attitudes to sex in the last few decades, whereas for the 4000 years prior to then, God's law has rarely been challenged. You may also want to point out that right from the beginning humanity has deviated from God's plans and constantly need his redemptive love.

8. **If you look back to Genesis 1 verses 27-28, we read that, 'God blessed them'. In a similar way today, a minister or church leader will pray God's blessing over a couple on their wedding day. Adam and Eve's was the first human marriage, fully blessed by God. How important is it to you that a marriage is blessed by God?**

Allow group members to discuss their personal thoughts. You can then ask them to think about two specific reasons for wanting God's blessing; these being the blessing of his presence and the blessing of his purpose.

9. **Marriage is a lifelong union between two people, a covenant relationship in which they commit to love and support each other through life's ups and downs. Talk together about the important of the permanence of marriage; in what ways does marriage enable flourishing of all members of the family group?**

Allow the group to discuss their thoughts and feelings about their own experiences, either if they're married themselves or of their experience of their own family upbringing. This question is designed to fully explore the positive benefits of marriage, and the parallels we can draw in our relationship with God, and with his relationship with the church.

Leaders notes , study 2 - biblical perspective on sexuality, God created sex for marriage

Discuss Section

The emphasis we note from 'King of kings' and 'Lord of lords' is that this is the very best of the best. We could think of Song of Songs as being a series of love poems, and the emphasis being that these are the best example of love poetry, and by inference the best example of how we should "do" sexual intimacy.

Questions

1. **Some people have said that Song of Solomon is an odd book to be included in the Bible.**

What do you think, why do you think this book has been included?

The fact that Song of Solomon focuses on romance and marital love shows us that God has a high regard for marriage, and that he showcases marriage as a place where love and sensuality should be celebrated.

2. **We read about the courtship phase of the relationship, perhaps something that's not so common today. During the time of courtship, a couple either consciously or unconsciously consider whether they are compatible in certain areas of their lives. Consider what you think is important under the following headings:**

- a. **Identity**
- b. **Values**
- c. **Relationship**
- d. **Communication**
- e. **Decision Making**

There may be a range of answers depending upon the age of your audience, but you are looking to draw out an understanding of the importance of building bonds within relationships.

- a. **Identity** – try and encourage them to think about their spiritual identity, for example where do they place Christ in their lives, are they spiritually mature and looking for

spiritual growth, what spiritual gifts do they have and how they see themselves using these in the future.

- b. Values - understand whether they have similar values, and what importance they place on God's word.
- c. Relationships - how do they relate to key people in their lives, and how do they relate to God.
- d. Communication – looking at listening skills, sharing skills and how they relate emotionally and intellectually.
- e. Decision Making – looking at how they manage to resolve disagreements, how do they participate in decision making.

3. The courtship phase concludes in chapter 2 where in verse 7 we read a warning which points to saving oneself for the marital bed, what do you feel about this warning? Have you always felt this way or has your opinion changed?

This question may elicit one answer, which reflects the biblical teaching which suggested that sex should be reserved for marriage; but that this is not necessarily the opinion of all Christians. Depending upon the answers given within your group, it may be worth exploring whether opinions have changed over a period, and if so, what has led to those changes. This may be one of the times to ask the question, “why do I feel this way?”, challenging the emotional thought process which has led to some failing to embrace God’s word on marriage.

4. When we consider Song of Solomon as a whole, what can we learn from it and what it teaches us about the changing phases of love?

Allow the group time to explore this question. There are no right or wrong answers but expect discussions to consider that relationships require commitment and perseverance to make them successful. They may also recognise that the first heady emotions of love will eventually die down, and if the courtship was successful in ensuring their compatibility, the couple will experience a deeper commitment of love. Exploring what a deeper commitment means should elicit responses around relational love becoming more of a mature friendship required for successful lifelong partnership.

5. In a world which has much sexual brokenness, are we too quick to give up when our relationships suffer difficulties? What can we learn from the falling out and reconciliation phases of Song of Solomon?

Some in the group may feel that marriage is not as respected as it was in the past, and divorce is often an easy way out. The group may discuss the reason for the fallout and the reactions from it. The key points are that the wife recognised that she still wanted an exclusive relationship with the husband and was prepared to chase him for that. And the husband recognised the need to make it up to her, to win her love once more. The group should recognise that both parties play an important role in overcoming adversity and conflict, marriage is a gift from God but one that must be worked at.

6. How can Christian marriage be a witness to an increasingly secular world?

The group will probably come up with a range of answers, all of which should emphasise that Christian marriage between a man and a woman is a wonderful thing. In a world where sexual idolatry has become the norm, Christian marriage is an institution to be fought for, and one which all young Christians should aspire towards.

Leaders notes, study 3 - Marriage and teaching on sex outside of marriage

Discuss Section

Depending upon the dynamics of the group, for example different ages, the discussion may vary greatly but you may expect it to cover thoughts such as:

- As generation gives way to generation, we are moving further from the source of our faith and much of our Christian teaching has either been watered down or eliminated from our education system.
- As permissive attitudes towards sex have been more prevalent since the 60s there are generations now who know nothing of the high moral standards that were in place in this country for hundreds of years.
- Many children of Christian parents have been exposed to a culture which embraces sexual immorality, and in some cases the lines between what they hear at home and what they hear at school have been blurred. As these children grow and become young adults they naturally seek to fit in their learned understandings to their Christian faith.
- There has also been a gradual shift in Christian understanding of loving your neighbour as yourself, with many now understanding this love to mean condoning any immoral behaviour rather than being seen to be unloving or judgmental.

Questions

1. **Verse 4 tell us is that marriage is to be held in honour amongst all people. Honour in this context can be interpreted as precious or valuable. Can you think of other passages in the Bible which give us examples of things that are held to be precious or valuable to God?**

If necessary, allow time for members of the group to look in their Bibles or refer to the internet to come up with examples. You could direct them towards passages such as:

- Isaiah 43:4
- Matthew 10:29-31
- Exodus 19:5
- 1 Peter 2:4
- Psalm 139:17

Ultimately, the message should be that God sees marriage as something sacred, something that he put high value on, something that is precious to him.

2. Why do you think that God tells us that marriage should be honoured?

There may be a number of responses to this, including references to our answers from question one and how God values marriage. You may also look for answers such as, marriage is a gift from God, marriage has been shown to be God's desired unit for children to be raised within, marriage is a covenant, a lifetime commitment, marriage is reflection of Christ's relationship with the church.

3. In what way does society today dishonour marriage?

The more obvious answers may include having sex before marriage, having affairs, not seeing marriage as necessary rather choosing to live together, validating same sex marriage and no-fault divorce.

4. In what way do Christians today dishonour marriage?

This may be more difficult for the group and may require some sensitivity depending upon the status of those in your group. But some of the ways Christians have dishonoured God's intent for marriage in addition to those answered in the previous question include viewing celibacy as more spiritual than marriage, marrying an unbeliever, not praying for our future spouse, not praying for our marriage. Conversation may also turn to the Churches role in promoting marriage as the union of one man one woman for life and good relating which is platonic.

5. How would you advise a single person in your church who wants to get married, but who cannot find a suitable partner? How might verse 5 be useful?

Let the group put forward their own ideas, there may be some revelation from their own experiences! What you are looking for is understanding and appreciation of the importance of waiting for the right partner, someone who is also a Christian, and a celebration of singleness. Considering Jesus and Paul as two examples of the joy in serving God as a single person, singleness is not to be undermined. Verse 5 encourages us to be content knowing that God is always with us, we are never alone.

6. How could your church become a more welcoming and inclusive space for single adults?

Churches are typically family friendly spaces, which can leave some single people feeling marginalised and not valued. Encourage any single people in your group to give their testimony of their experiences and as a group discuss any things that stand out that could be improved.

7. Verse 8 reminds us that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Does this knowledge have any impact on your understanding of marriage?

This question is designed to elicit conversation about how marriage has changed over time, and how these changes are more to do with societal views on sex and relationships than God's views. You could look back at your grandparent's views about marriage and how they differ from modern day views. What has caused these changes?

8. In verse 9 we are told not to be carried away by strange teachings, for it is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace. How do you interpret this advice in the current day?

The book of Hebrews explains in detail that God's will does not change; this verse is warning against false doctrine. In interpreting this message, we are looking for a recognition that false teachers will be prevalent and will seek to twist God's word. Marriage, first written about in Genesis, is not to be trampled on or ignored, God's will for marriage is the same today as it was in the Garden of Eden.

Leaders notes, study 4 - What does it mean to be God's people in this generation?

Discuss Section

There is no right or wrong answer but inevitably some may feel that this verse is misused by Christians and non-Christians alike. Try to direct the discussion to how this verse often seems to be used when someone objects to a behaviour or practice as sinful, and how we ourselves might use this as justification for keeping our opinions to ourselves. Then ask the question, “is this really what Jesus meant?” The point of this verse and his teaching is that we shouldn't be self-righteous or hypocritical in our judgment of others, but if we are living a God honouring life and do not have a “plank” in our own eyes, we can righteously help others to see the sin in their lives; always to be done with compassion, gentleness and respect, never with self-righteous judgment.

Questions

- 1. Some Christians have openly changed their theology on issues such as sexuality when they have experienced friends or family members coming out to them. What do verses 14 and 15 tell us about being a mature Christian and how might that influence people in that situation?**

These verses show us that, as followers of Jesus, we must be committed to the truth and not be swayed by Satan's lies. They also emphasise the issue of false teaching and our need to be guarded against this, continuing to grow in maturity to become more like Christ. Try and encourage the group to think of how we react to friends and family ‘coming out’ in light of the setting the scene scenario discussed earlier, asking the question, “is our compassion truly reflecting who God is?”

- 2. In verse 17 we are told “not to live in the futility of our thinking.” What do you think Paul meant by this and how might this affect our compassion for others? (read verses 18 to 19)**

This refers to our human tendency to think that our ways are better than God's. Our pride, excuses and rationale, prevent us from acting like God as we try to do things in our own human strength and understanding. Examples of how this might affect our compassion may include instances where we blame God for our feelings, thereby misrepresenting his true nature, times we fail to acknowledge the problem of sin and the times we fail to acknowledge that God's love and plans for someone's life are far greater than ours could

ever be.

- 3. Christians should stand out in our communities as different from others because of the way we live. This passage has some advice for us (verses 25 to 32), what stands out for you, and what changes might you need to make?**

The key points to be drawn out are clear and significant. Members of your group will have different points which speak to them about their own lives. Allow them to share and discuss the changes they might need to make. Where you can, try and draw these discussions back to us being created in the image of God and his compassionate nature.

- 4. Verse 32 exhorts us to be kind and compassionate to one another. Compassion is easy in many circumstances; but how do you show compassion in a situation where a Christian fails to repent of habitual sin or fails to recognise their behaviour as sinful?**

It may be worth having a brief look at what you feel compassion is and how we show it. Allow the group time to discuss their approach to habitual sin, encouraging them that it is biblical to address these situations amongst their Christian brothers and sisters. The two important points to address are: 1) we recognise the need to talk to them about their sin and 2) that this is done in love, we allow ourselves to be a conduit for God to flow through in order to bring his heart of compassion to the situation.

- 5. The next verse tells us to follow God's example and walk in the way of love. What examples can you think of from the New Testament where Jesus "walks in the way of love?"**

Allow the group time to reflect or search the internet to come up with examples. Verses they could refer to include: Matthew 14:14 (healing the sick), John 11:43 (raising the dead), Matthew 15:32 (feeding the hungry), Mark 6:34 (preaching the Kingdom), Matthew 8:16 (casting out demons), John 17:20-21 (interceding for his disciples and church), John 3:16 (giving his life for the world), John 8:11 (forgiving the adulterous woman).

- 6. When faced with difficult situations within our churches, where we see people walking outside of God's will for their lives, what can we learn from those examples of how Jesus lived?**

You might want to give the group specific examples, for example, a young couple join your church and it becomes apparent after a few months that they are living together outside of marriage. Allow the group to discuss their own thoughts about each situation, perhaps considering how Jesus would have approached it given the examples you have looked at of walking in the way of love.

7. Should our warnings about sin be different when we are speaking to non-Christians than our warnings when we speak to other Christians? If so, in what way should they differ?

This question will probably invoke a degree of debate which is not a bad thing. It is biblical and important that we do address sin within our Christian communities, but there is a certain pattern which can be useful in doing this which can be drawn out from the story of the adulterous woman. 1) ensure the safety and wellbeing of the condemned person (get rid of the condemning crowd), 2) do not address the topic of sin in the presence of those who seek condemnation or punishment (speak to the person alone), 3) assure them that your intentions are pure (tell them that you do not condemn them) and 4) do not dwell on the past but look to the future, and here the words of Jesus cannot be surpassed (go and sin no more).

8. Isaiah 5:20 says, “woe to those who call evil good and good evil”. It has been said that our Christian culture is weak and that we no longer know how to distinguish between good and evil, that we have a misguided compassion or mercy towards strangers we don't even know, a self-focused feeling to make us feel good. How does that criticism make you feel; do you agree with that sentiment?

There are no right or wrong answers to this question, opinions may well vary within the group. Try and focus the conversation on how our compassion might be self-focused. How do the group feel about that accusation and what do they think can be done to help Christians to become more focused on how God expresses compassion?

9. Our old way of life, the one we lived before we knew Jesus, is completely in the past, we should no longer be driven by our own desires and impulses. Read verses 22 to 24 again and discuss in the group what having the mind of Christ looks like for a compassionate Christian.



Having the mind of Christ means to think like Him and to love like Him. Perhaps prompt the group to think about how Jesus was moved to open the eyes of the blind man when he cried out, “son of David have mercy on me.” Jesus’s compassion had action - he opened the blind man’s eyes, surely that is what we are called to do for those around us, to take action and open their eyes?

Discuss Section

This question will probably open up many avenues of discussion. One area that may be worth exploring further is the sexual revolution, and how this has changed the cultural landscape. For example, when considering homosexuality, there can sometimes be a misconception that loving and consensual same sex relationships are a modern-day phenomenon, however that is not the case. There are documented same sex unions from the times that these letters were written, and this knowledge can help to dispel some of the misunderstandings over the interpretation of Paul's letters. Media and social media are also responsible for shaping our culture, do the group see that as pivotal?

Questions

- 1. Verse 24 relates to humanities rejection of righteousness. What sinful tendencies does this passage tell us that God allowed to happen to those who rejected the truth (verses 24 to 28)?**

This question may elicit some discussion over what it means when it says that God gave them over to the sinful desires of their hearts. This is really covered by the following verses and you are looking for the fact that they were deceived, believing lies rather than God’s truth and that they worshipped created things as opposed to God. This manifested itself in the way they behaved, with a particular emphasis on their sexual activity.

- 2. Verses 26 to 27 talk about sexual relations between two women or two men. What do you feel God is saying about these relationships? How do you interpret the term “they exchanged their natural sexual relations for unnatural ones?”**

Some liberal theologians claim that this refers to women or men who were heterosexual exchanging their natural orientation for a homosexual orientation, rather than this meaning that all homosexual relations are wrong (the implication being that there were those who were born gay for whom homosexual sex was natural). If this is the understanding among your group you may want to take some time to talk about this in more detail, with specific emphasis on talking about the difference between sexual orientation and sexual activity (for example we may have same sex attraction but that doesn’t mean it is right to act on those

feelings), potentially discuss in more detail the fact that all sex outside of marriage is classed as sexual immorality.

- 3. The passage says that, “they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God”. What do you think that means, and how can we ensure that we retain the knowledge of God in our lives?**

Paul is showing us in Romans 1 how humanity has fallen. We started by rejecting God as Creator, refusing to recognise his greatness through his creation. That led to us rejecting him as our provider, we failed to give him thanks, and we worshipped his creation as opposed to worshipping God himself. This is what it means to not retain the knowledge of God, and we can overcome this by recognising God as our creator and our provider, thanking him and worshipping him alone.

- 4. Verse 32 implies that certain people know God’s thoughts on sin, (also refer to Romans 6:23 which says the wages of sin is death), and not only continues to sin but approve of those who sin. What do you think is the warning of this verse?**

What you might want to draw out of this question is how we may respond differently to those who recognise a lifestyle as sinful, yet continue to live in that way, as opposed to those who don't recognise their lifestyle as sinful. It would also be interesting to gauge the feeling of the group on what they think God’s response is to those who condone or encourage sin.

- 5. Do you think that people do understand the implication of their sinful actions, both:**

5a. Of their own actions?

5b. As one who approves of another’s sin?

You would probably expect most people to recognise the implications of their own sin, but do we think about how God views our approval of other people's lifestyles which may be sinful? Maybe ask the question, is there a difference between turning a blind eye and actively encouraging others to sin?

- 6. What do you understand by the phrase Paul uses in verse 9, “inherit the Kingdom of God?”**

Put simply, to not inherit the Kingdom of God, is to not have eternal life. You can contrast this with the good news that when we believe in the good news of Jesus (John 3:16) all our sins are forgiven, and we are made holy and right in God's sight and receive eternal life.

7. In verse 9 and 10 Paul lists a number of behaviours that are not conducive with living God's way, and therefore could prohibit us from inheriting his Kingdom. What do you feel about this list; do you think that some of these behaviours are worse than others?

The attitudes towards these behaviours will be purely subjective, but it would be interesting to see if people feel that sexual immorality is worse than greed, or that idolatry is worse than drunkenness. The bottom line is that all sin is contrary to God's word. Can we afford to be picky about which ones we class as worse than others? The group may pick up on verse 18 which speaks about sexual sin being a sin against one's own body which leads into question 8.

8. We are told in verse 18 to flee sexual immorality, what reason is given for this and why do you think that it's important?

Sexual sin is sin against one's own body, our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. When we think about temples, churches or sacred places we could ask the question would we be sexually immoral in those places? Almost certainly we would shy away from that, likewise we should shy away from sinning within our own bodies.

9. What do you think constitutes sexual immorality?

Allow the group time to consider their answers to this question; these sins have certainly been covered in earlier studies. You would expect to hear adultery, fornication, incest and homosexuality as answers, but if not mentioned perhaps you could ask them their thoughts about pornography, masturbation, sexual acts that don't involve penetration, lustful thoughts and so on? If we are to flee sexual immorality, we must recognise what that looks like.

10. In verse 11 Paul says, "and that is what some of you were." What hope does this bring you?

I would expect that this brings different hope to different people depending upon their experiences in life, but ultimately this verse gives us all hope. We've all been sinners outside



of God's plans for our lives, yet this verse shows us that anyone and everyone is accepted into God's family when they ask him into their life.

Leaders notes, study 6 - Smoke and mirrors – false teaching

Discuss Section

It's worth suggesting that within our secular culture the boundaries between good and evil are often blurred and, in some cases they are non-existent. If you get the group to consider the moral landscape of their grandparents generation in comparison to the current generation they may understand how the Christian viewpoint has become more and more marginalised and things which used to be morally unacceptable are now accepted everyday occurrences. You could also consider how Christians standing up for their faith are often now labelled as prejudiced which is a clear illustration of how society now calls something evil that was once seen as good.

Questions

- 1. Jesus is clear in his warning that only a few find the road to the narrow gate. Satan clearly wants us to walk the wide road; how do you think he is managing to attract people to walk that way, despite their knowledge of the Bible?**

Allow the group to discuss how they think that the gospel message has become blurred.

With a specific emphasis on questions of sexual morality their answers may range from lack of clear teaching on topics of sexuality, generational differences in the way sex education is taught, churches remaining silent on sexual morality, false teaching which embraces sexual immorality, misinterpreting God's command to judge not, misunderstanding of what compassionate Christian love looks like.

- 2. We are warned in verse 15 to be aware of wolves in sheep's clothing. This indicates that the people we may need to be wary of are those who we feel safe with. Who do you think Jesus is referring to and how does that apply to us today?**

This question is aimed to get people to think about the preachers and teachers that they are listening to, either in church or online. With greater exposure to a wide range of churches and preachers/church leaders via the internet we have to be confident that what we are watching or listening to is scripturally sound.

3. How do we recognise people by their fruit? What is our responsibility when discerning whether people are speaking in truth?

False prophets/teachers appear to be preaching God's message but they themselves do not live according to his ways. In the short term it can be hard to see if the person is bearing fruit because fruit is not always immediately evident from hearing one sermon. God tells us to test everything, and that is a responsibility we must take seriously. We need to read our Bibles, pray for discernment, discuss teaching with other respected Christians and not just trust the words of someone because they're in the pulpit.

4. Verse 21 is a stark warning to us as Christians, because it shows us that Jesus isn't just talking about those of other faiths and religions. What indications are there in this passage that Jesus is talking about people within the Christian Church?

Jesus talks here very clearly about, 'those who prophesied in my name, those who drove out demons in my name, and those who performed many miracles'. We know that no other faith or religion will use the name of Jesus in their practice. He's not talking about Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus or Jews, Buddhists, atheists or agnostics. Jesus is talking about those who use his name, a clear reference to those professing to being Christians.

5. When you read verses 21 to 23 what emotions do you feel and why?

This may evoke emotions such as sadness, compassion for those led astray, anger at those who are false teachers. It may elicit fear or worry, and it is important to address those concerns and allow people to discuss this in more detail, to reassure them of their salvation or lead them to how to gain salvation.

6. Are you aware of any false teaching within your church or within other churches? If so, how do you think you should respond to it, consider verses 24 and 25 and also take a look at Matthew 10:16?

If there is no awareness locally of false teaching, you could perhaps discuss some of the teaching that does take place in other churches which is contrary to biblical authority. What you are encouraging is for people to be rock solid in their understanding of the Bible and

their trust in it. Matthew 10:16 talks about us being as shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves.

7. This warning about false teaching is not limited to the words of Jesus, they are also echoed by Luke, Peter and Jude, amongst others (Acts 20:29-30, 2 Peter 2:1-3, Jude 3-4). As you read these other passages what patterns do you see emerging?

The patterns that emerge include:

- the element of secrecy.
- the fact that the false teachers will arise from within their own number.
- the introduction of distortion and destructive heresies.
- They are ungodly people

8. The final two verses tell us that the crowd were amazed at his teaching because he spoke with authority, and not as their teachers of the law. What does this tell us about the authority of the Bible, which is God's word?

There is a direct comparison between the impact when Jesus speaks and when the Pharisees speak, and this helps us to understand that when the truth is spoken with authority it has a significant impact. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit and teach the truth from God's word, we will see fruit from our labours. When false teachers distort God's word, there is no authority and no fruit.

9. We can be taken in by false teaching on many topics, but this study specifically looks at issues of sexuality. Do you feel that you, or your church, have wandered either partially, or fully, from God's intention for our sexuality, and if so what changes to your thought patterns and actions will you take away from this study?

This is a significant question which will require some time at the end of the last session in order to be beneficial for the group. Encourage openness and honesty about where your church sits currently on issues of sexuality and how it might change in order to remain faithful to God's design for us and for marriage. It might be useful to put together a proposed action plan for your group to discuss with your leadership team to address any issues or concerns that have arisen as a result of completing this study.



TRANSFORMED MINISTRIES

We are passionate about supporting churches as they teach on issues of sexuality and as they support individuals who struggle with unwanted same sex attraction. We seek to empower individuals and church leaders to connect with God's heart for those who experience same sex attraction, and to equip members of your congregations to fully understand what God's word teaches us on this subject. We also want to equip you to walk alongside those who have or still do experience same sex attraction as they explore God's word and discover the transformational freedom that Jesus Christ brings to all.

This Bible study has been produced to be used as a tool in small groups to help teach on issues of sexuality in a Christian setting. We pray that it will help members of your church communities to delve deeper into Scripture, to understand for themselves God's perfect design for our sexuality.

We also support those who are living with unwanted same sex attraction who are seeking a deeper relationship with God. We have a support group "Transformed UK" and potential new members can contact us via our website or via email.

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