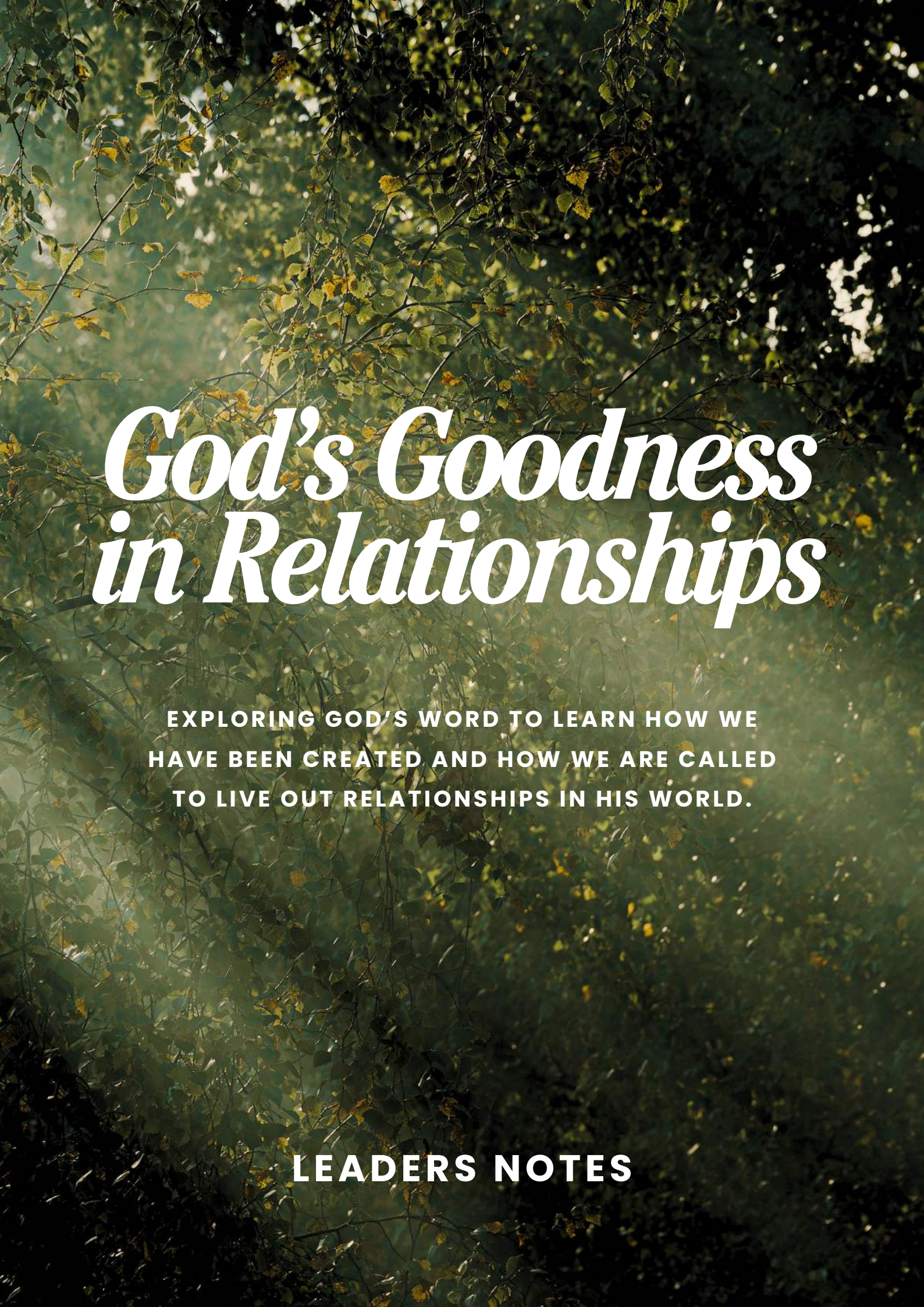




God's Goodness in Relationships

EXPLORING GOD'S WORD TO LEARN HOW WE
HAVE BEEN CREATED AND HOW WE ARE CALLED
TO LIVE OUT RELATIONSHIPS IN HIS WORLD.

LEADERS NOTES



A note to leaders

In his grace, God has made us in his image. But in this broken and sinful world, we fail to fully reflect that image and need God's continued grace and guidance to understand who we are called to be as we live for his glory and purposes on this earth.

In these three weeks, we will open God's word together to consider how we have been created and how we are called to live faithfully as embodied people, including how we understand sex, sexuality, and relationships in His world. We will also consider how we reflect God's grace to each other and to the world around us, especially when we encounter different experiences, questions, and disagreements within our church family, and between our church family and the world when it comes to sexuality.

We pray that we might understand more deeply our imago dei, our creation in the image of a gracious and loving God, and how we are called to live in this world to reflect his character and to be his children.

Highlight events

Dr Darrell L. Bock will be joining us at St Paul's Castle Hill in July. He is a Senior Research Professor of New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary and Executive Director of Cultural Engagement at the Hendricks Center. He has authored or edited more than 45 books and has written for major outlets including the Los Angeles Times. He will be speaking at the following events:

Recharge Breakfast – July 25th

A training morning for small group leaders as we prepare to begin our series in Galatians. All are welcome.

Sunday Services – July 26th

Whole Church Teaching Night – July 28th

An opportunity for our whole church to gather, be encouraged, and be challenged from God's word

A special note to leaders for mixed gender groups

This study series explores some deeply personal topics. If you're leading a mixed group, we encourage you to consider splitting into men and women, as these conversations are often better explored in a single-sex setting where people may feel more comfortable speaking openly and honestly.

STUDY #1

A biblical approach to sex

Leaders Note

The central teaching point of this study is that God has given boundaries for sex, not because it is ungodly or dirty, but because it is good and powerful.

As you lead through this study, please be aware that 1 Corinthians 7 has been misused as a tool of spiritual abuse, coercion and sexual abuse. This study directly addresses this misuse, but it may be helpful to give a warning to your group beforehand and be prepared to pastorally care for members of your group as you discuss this topic.'

If you need any assistance, please do not hesitate to reach out to anyone on the staff team you feel comfortable approaching, or visit stpauls.church/care for a variety of helpful resources. Where appropriate, please contact relevant authorities.

READ: GENESIS 2:18–25

STUDY NOTE

In Genesis 2:18–22 the word used for the man is ha'adam ("the human/humanity"), rather than the personal name Adam. It is only after the suitable "helper" is created (a term often used elsewhere to describe God as the helper of his people) that the language shifts to ish ("man") and ishah ("woman") in Genesis 2:23. The passage moves from humanity alone to humanity expressed as male and female together, showing that relationship and difference are part of God's good design for humanity.

UNPACK

1. Throughout Genesis 1 God repeatedly declares his creation “good.” What is the first thing God says is “not good”? What does this reveal about how we were created?

God says it is “not good” for humanity to be alone (Genesis 2:18). We were created for relationship and fellowship. While this passage leads to marriage, this truth is not limited to marriage.

2. What do verses 23–25 teach us about God’s good design for relationships, bodies, and sexuality?

Sex is a powerful expression of the “one flesh” union of marriage. Genesis presents sex not as something shameful or dirty, but as a good gift from God designed for intimacy and relationship.

3. Why do you think the passage ends by highlighting both nakedness and the absence of shame? (v25)

This is an important question in helping us understand the purpose of sex within marriage, it may be helpful to spend some time here.

The image of being naked and completely vulnerable before a spouse and feeling no shame is a powerful one. This is a picture of deep intimacy, complete trust, and holding nothing back from the other. The whole person is known, accepted, and loved.

READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 7:1–8

In verse 1 Paul appears to be responding to something the Corinthians were saying: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” Some in Corinth seem to have viewed avoiding sex, even within marriage, as more spiritual.

4. How does Paul's response in verses 2–3 challenge the idea that sex is sinful or less spiritual? How does this connect with the "one flesh" picture in Genesis 2:24–25?

Paul makes it clear that sexual intimacy is a good and healthy part of marriage, not something to be rejected as dirty or unspiritual. This connects with the picture of "one flesh" in Genesis 2:24–25, where husband and wife are naked and feel no shame. God's design for sex is a good gift to be enjoyed within marriage and expressed through mutual consent, intimacy, trust, love, and self-giving.

IMPORTANT STUDY NOTE

In verses 3–4 Paul uses the language of marital "duty" and says husbands and wives have authority over each other's bodies. Sadly, these verses have sometimes been misused to pressure, coerce, or demand sex from another person. To use Scripture in this way is both spiritual abuse and sexual abuse.

Paul's intention was not to subject one spouse to the sexual demands of the other. In a culture where husbands were often assumed to have greater authority, Paul's emphasis on mutual duty and mutual authority was a radical call for husbands and wives to give themselves in love to one another. It does not give either person permission to demand that their desires be met, or to use the idea of obligation to pressure their spouse. The obligation Paul describes is not a tool to use over another person, but a call for each spouse to seek the good of the other.

5. How do verses 3–4 describe this duty? How does Paul's emphasis on mutuality and giving challenge the idea that these verses give permission to demand or take?

Paul describes duty not as the right to take from another person, but as the responsibility to love and give yourself to another. The focus is not on what a spouse can demand, but how each spouse can seek the good of the other.

Key thought to help lead your group here

If our response to this passage is primarily to think about how our spouse should apply it, rather than considering our own call to love and serve, that may be a warning that we have missed the heart of Paul's teaching here.

6. How do other pictures of marriage and Christian love, such as Ephesians 5:25–33, (optional extra: Philippians 2:3–4 and 1 Corinthians 13:5), help us understand the kind of love and self-giving Paul has in mind?

When it comes to sex, we must remember the clear Christian ethic for marriage and all relationships: sacrificial love, honour, selflessness, gentleness, kindness, and patience. These calls over our whole lives do not cease to shape our actions when it comes to sex, nor do our desires give us permission to forget them.

Positively speaking, sexual intimacy is a good gift from God designed to be expressed in a context of love, trust, honour, and self-giving.

7. In verses 5–6, why does Paul encourage married couples to continue pursuing regular sexual intimacy together? How does this challenge both a selfish view of sex and a view that treats sex as unimportant or unspiritual?

*Sexual intimacy is good and powerful, which is why God gives it as a unique expression of the one-flesh union of marriage. This goodness and powerful connection should not be dismissed or given up lightly, but should be approached with mutual love and care. **God has given us sex to bless our marriages, not marriage to bless us with sex.***

Paul also recognises that sexual desire is real and that prolonged absence of sexual intimacy can create temptation (v5). He does not offer this as an excuse for sin but encourages couples to care for their marriage and each other with wisdom and love.

IMPORTANT STUDY NOTE

As we consider Paul's encouragement for married couples to pursue sexual intimacy, it is important to remember that every marriage and season of marriage will look different. Disability, illness, injury, trauma, grief, age, and many other circumstances can impact a couple's sexual relationship.

As Paul's own life reminds us in verses 7–8, sexual expression is a good gift from God, but it is not necessary for a complete and fulfilled life.

8. What do verses 7–8 teach us about singleness? How might Paul's words challenge the way both the church and our culture think about marriage and sex?

*After speaking positively about sex and marriage, Paul speaks positively about singleness. **Sex and marriage are good gifts from God, but they are not necessary for a complete and fulfilled life.** Our ultimate identity and fulfillment are found in Christ, not our relationship status.*

APPLY

9. This study has presented sex as a good gift from God, rather than something dirty or shameful. How does this challenge the messages about sex we might hear from the world or even from within the church?

God's design for sex challenges different messages we may have received. Some expressions of purity culture have wrongly treated sex as dirty, shameful, or damaging, rather than a good gift from God. At the same time, our culture can wrongly present sexual freedom as doing whatever we desire. The Bible gives a different picture: sex is good and powerful, which is why God gives boundaries for it..

10. God's boundaries around sex are given because sex is good and powerful. How might this shape the way we think about sex, whether married or unmarried?

We can have a positive view of sex as a good gift from God, even if it is not a gift we are currently experiencing. God's boundaries do not exist because sex is bad, but because it is valuable. Within marriage, sex should be seen not as something to take or demand, but as another way to love, serve, and give ourselves to our spouse.

PRAY

Spend some time praying as a group in response to what you have covered. Pray that we would see God's good design for sex, relationships, and our bodies, and that we would reflect his grace and love in how we treat one another.

Remember to pray for your group's link missionary and the church as a whole.

STUDY #2

Growing up in chastity

Leaders Note

The central teaching point of this study is that pursuing godliness, self-control, and honouring others with our sexuality is not only for single people waiting for marriage, but a lifelong pursuit of holiness and sanctification for all Christians.

Please be sure to include the final question. When discussing sexual sin, we can often focus on failure and repentance without landing on the grace and new identity we have in Christ.

This may also be a helpful time to remind your group of the expectations around confidentiality.

READ: 1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-8

UNPACK

1. As you strive to live in a godly way, do you tend to focus only on what is right and wrong, or do you also consider what is pleasing to God? How might this change the way we approach life?

We can tend towards asking “what can and can’t I do?” rather than also asking “what is pleasing to God?” This is particularly important when it comes to our sexuality. The shift in the question we ask should dramatically change the way we approach every part of our lives.

2. In verse 3, what does it mean that God’s will for us is our sanctification?

Sanctification is the work of God shaping us more and more into the people he has called us to be. Verse 1 helps us understand this: we are already “in the Lord Jesus” and made holy before God, yet we are also involved in the ongoing process of sanctification as we seek to live in order to please him more and more.

3. Looking at verses 4–5, Paul is writing to the whole church. How does the call to control our own bodies and live in holiness and honour apply whether we are single, dating, or married?

This is an important premise to establish for the rest of the study.

We often emphasise the importance of single people pursuing sexual purity and waiting until marriage, which is good. However, we can fail to recognise that the call to self-control, holiness, and honour continues within marriage. There is a challenge for everyone in this passage, no matter our relationship status.

4. In verse 6, Paul shifts from self-control to considering how our actions affect others. What could it mean to “wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister” in this matter?

Paul challenges the idea that our sexual choices only affect ourselves. A failure of self-control can lead us to use others for our own desires rather than loving them as brothers and sisters. Sexual holiness is not just about avoiding sin, but seeking the good of others.

READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 6:12–20

5. Whether single, dating, or married, what does it look like to live with self-control, holiness, and honour, remembering that our bodies are not our own but belong to the Lord?

Paul’s reminder that our bodies belong to the Lord is not a rejection of our bodies, but a reminder of their value. Because we belong to Christ, we seek to honour him with our bodies and our sexuality. This call applies to everyone: single, dating, and married. Self-control is not a rejection of desire, but bringing our desires under the lordship of Jesus.

6. How does what we have seen in these passages connect with what we saw last week in 1 Corinthians 7, where Paul presents sex as a good gift from God within marriage?

These passages are not in conflict. The goodness and power of sex are the very reason God places boundaries around it. Here Paul shows us what it looks like to glorify God and honour others with our bodies, while still understanding sex as a good gift from God and a blessing within marriage.

APPLY

7. Where can you celebrate the ways God's Spirit has already been sanctifying you in this area?

This question aims to help people recognise and celebrate the growth they have already seen through the sanctifying work of the Spirit. When we discuss sexuality, it can often become focused only on guilt and failure. This question helps us remember that God is at work in us, and that his design for sex and our bodies is good.

8. Where might God be calling you to change your approach, repent, and seek accountability as you continue pursuing sanctification?

Allow time for honesty and reflection here. The next question will provide an opportunity to remind anyone reflecting on their sin of the reality of God's grace and forgiveness. The focus on seeking accountability is a prompt to consider how we can actively pursue sanctification in practical ways. Treat accountability as a launching point to explore what steps of wisdom, support, and change might look like.

9. Read 1 Corinthians 6:9–11. Sexual sin can often carry a unique sense of guilt and shame. How does the grace of God change the way we view our past failures and who we are now in Christ? Are there areas where past guilt or shame still shapes the way you see yourself?

*Paul does not minimise sexual sin, but he also refuses to let it become our identity. The Corinthians had real past failures, but Paul reminds them, "that is what some of you were." In Christ they are washed, sanctified, and justified. **While sin can have real consequences and cause real pain, the gospel rejects the idea that sexual sin permanently damages or defines a person. Our identity is found not in what we have done or what has been done to us, but in what Christ has done for us.** As we pursue holiness, we do so as people already loved and forgiven by God, not as people trying to escape our past or earn our place before him.*

PRAY

Pray that we would see God's good design for sex, relationships, and our bodies, and that his Spirit would continue to sanctify us as we seek to live lives pleasing to him.

Remember to pray for your group's link missionary and the church as a whole.

STUDY #3

Loving one another in disagreement

Leaders Note

The central teaching point of this study is that even when biblical teaching is hard to hear, it must be understood in light of the overwhelming goodness of the gospel. When it comes to sexuality, we should not be ashamed of the gospel, but we must also ensure we are not shameful in our approach to others. We are called to engage with grace, gentleness, humility, and love, with a desire to see people come to know Jesus rather than simply convince them to adopt a Christian sexual ethic.

READ: ROMANS 1:16–32

UNPACK

1. Paul says he is not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. Are there people or situations where we find it harder to believe the gospel is truly good news? Are there times we find it hard to be unashamed like Paul?

Allow people to be honest here. The answers may not go straight to the topic of sexuality, and that is a good thing. People may speak about their workplace, family dynamics, or other situations where they find it difficult to be bold in their faith. Allow people to explore this rather than rushing them “on topic.”

2. For some people, particularly those who are not straight, the Christian message about sexuality can feel like bad news rather than good news. Why do you think this is?

Spend time listening here. Some may speak about personal experience, friends, family, or the history of how churches have spoken and acted. The aim is not to dismiss this tension but to honestly recognise it.

3. Discussions around sexuality can be deeply personal because they are not just about ideas, but about people, identity, relationships, and desires. How do you honestly respond when conversations like this arise?

This does not need to be a teaching moment, but a space for people to honestly reflect on their own response to this topic. Allow people to share their questions, experiences, discomfort, or concerns without feeling the need to immediately resolve everything.

READ: ROMANS 3:21–31

4. Romans 1 describes humanity turning away from God, while Romans 3:21–24 shows us God's response. How do these passages show both our shared problem and our shared hope? Why is this important as we discuss sexuality?

Paul's argument is not that one group of people needs grace and another group offers it. "All have sinned" and all are justified only by grace. The great equalising truth of the gospel is that everyone needs God's grace, and that grace is offered to all. The ground is level at the foot of the cross.

5. How should understanding our own need for grace shape the way we engage with people we disagree with?

Christians do not engage from a position of moral superiority, but as people who have received grace and want others to know that same grace.

6. Why is it important that our ultimate hope for people is not that they would change their sexuality, behaviour, or lifestyle, but that they would come to know Jesus? How does this change the way we engage with others?

*Christians have at times focused more on changing the behaviour of those who do not follow Jesus than witnessing to the goodness of the gospel. Our ultimate hope is that people would come to know Christ, trusting that the Spirit brings transformation. **The Christian hope is changed lives through sanctification, not legislation or cultural expectation.** This should lead us to engage others with patience, humility, and love rather than treating changed behaviour as the starting point. At the same time, following Jesus is a call to bring our whole lives, including our sexuality, under his lordship.*

7. Our culture often sees sexuality as central to identity. Over the last two weeks we have seen a Christian vision where every part of ourselves, including our sexuality, belongs to Jesus. How might this shape the way we think about identity, freedom, and fulfilment?

Our sexuality is an important part of our lives, but the Christian vision is that no part of ourselves, including our sexuality, is where we find our ultimate identity. True freedom is not found in simply expressing every desire, but in belonging to Christ and becoming the people God created us to be. As we saw in the last two weeks, following Jesus means seeing sex as a good gift from God, while also bringing our desires and our bodies under his lordship.

APPLY

8. What might it look like to hold Christian convictions about sexuality while showing genuine love, humility, and compassion?

Holding Christian convictions with love means caring deeply for the whole person, not simply focusing on their actions or sexuality. We should recognise the cost of discipleship and have compassion for the sacrifices involved in following Jesus, while remembering that Jesus calls all of us to surrender our whole lives to him. We show love by seeing people as more than their sexuality, pointing them to Christ as we would anyone else who does not yet know him, and always displaying the fruit of the Spirit in the way we speak and act.

9. Where might Christians need to repent of ways we have failed to reflect God's grace in the way we think about, speak about, and treat others when it comes to sexuality? How should God's grace shape our approach moving forward?

10. How can we make sure the gospel we communicate represents the good news of Jesus, not just a message about what people must give up? How might this shape the way we engage with those who disagree with us?

The gospel calls us to surrender our whole lives to Jesus, but it is first and foremost good news of God's grace, love, forgiveness, and new life in him. As we talk about sexuality, we must be careful not to communicate only what Jesus calls people away from, but what he calls people into. Our hope is that people would know the goodness of life with Christ.

PRAY

Pray that we would see the goodness of the gospel and be shaped by the grace we have received in Christ. Pray that God would help us reflect his love, humility, and compassion as we engage with others, and that we would continue to bring every part of our lives under his lordship.

Remember to pray for your group's link missionary and the church as a whole.



**small
groups**
LIFE TOGETHER