

SEXUALITY .



GOD'S DESIGN

MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

(7 BIBLE STUDIES)

EXAMINATION APPLICATION

BIBLE STUDIES

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THE SMALL PRINT

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Your Commitment

I would encourage you to make a commitment to attending your group regularly. I realise that sometimes there are things that get in the way, but do prioritise studying the Bible with other. This will involve sacrifice, and effective use of your time, but I really believe that in doing so you will get the most out of studying the Bible and praying together in your small group.

Your Contribution

What you put into the group is going to determine what you get out of the group. I encourage you to contribute honestly to the discussion and workings of the group. I understand people come from different backgrounds with unique personalities & life experiences. But, we all have a big part to play, so I encourage you to be fully present and take ownership of your group.

Your Preparation – Topical Studies

These materials are primarily for use in preparing and/or leading the group discussions but they will also be useful in keeping your thoughts together in one place. The materials firstly provide you with a series of passages so that you can identify and highlight recurring themes and note down your own thoughts and questions. Secondly, the materials include questions designed to provoke thought and help you think through what the passages meant both at the time it was written and also what it means for us now. Because these studies are topical there is a much stronger progression of thought (than there would be in a passage based study). The dangers of such studies are that discussion can move quite far from the Bible. Yet this it is still the best way of covering broad subjects like this.

I would really encourage you to make use of these materials, as doing so will help you contribute and get the most out of the group discussions. The materials are however only “tools”, they are there to help you and not to restrict you or force you to think in a certain manner. I want to see God speaking to you through these passages and if the questions or notes do not help you, then don't use them!

I have included within these materials an introduction to the book. Make of this what you will, but I hope that it is helpful in getting you started with these studies!

Your Leadership

Here are some useful pointers in how to lead your Bible study group. Be aware that included in this study guide are more questions than you can possibly ask and/or answer in one session. They are not designed to be used rigidly, and there will rarely be a need to ask every question! Make sure that you spend some time praying at the start and ensure you read & re-read the passages as much as possible. In relation to the passages, then consider the suggested questions with an open mind. There is rarely “a single right answer” and I would encourage you to share your thoughts with your group.

I have also included a number of quotations from relevant Christian literature, most of which are readily available online if you want to do further thinking or study. My prayer is that as you study together you would grow to love Jesus and experience Him more deeply.

I would appreciate your feedback and suggestions on how to make these materials even better!

Steve McClure, Spring 2019

INTRODUCING “SEXUALITY: GOD’S DESIGN”

Sex and sexuality! The world is talking about it and the world is enjoying it. Yet at the same time many people are uncomfortable having honest conversations about it. If you bring God into the conversation people often grow even more uncomfortable. Many find it difficult to accept that God would care about this facet of their lives, while others resist what they see as interference with a private matter. Are we among those who consider their sexual behaviour to be completely separate to their faith? In 2012 Relevant Magazine reported the following statistics which are quite staggering:

“A recent study reveals that 88% of unmarried young adults (ages 18-29) are having sex. The same study, conducted by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, reveals the number doesn’t drop much among Christians. Of those surveyed who self-identify as “evangelical,” 80% say they have had sex. The media’s marketing of sex, the cultural endorsement of the “do what feels good” mentality, the prevalence of pornography and the widespread misunderstanding of sex that prompts people to chase after love and acceptance in unhealthy physical relationships are all factors that make it difficult to practice chastity. The reality is chastity is not the norm. And such a discipline is certainly not easy.” Relevant Magazine, ‘The Secret Sexual Revolution’, 20 Feb 2012

Our culture has grown increasingly obsessed with sex and in doing so many misconceptions have crept into both our culture and even into our Christian communities. God has a lot to say in His Word about sex, both inside and outside marriage. Perhaps you find it surprising to hear that God is not anti-sex or anti-sexuality. Isn’t it amazing that while some of God’s people tend to be ignorant, anxious, and even embarrassed about all things sexual, God is clearly not! The truth is that He invented sexuality and values it so much that He wants to help us to use it properly. God has created us as sexual beings and both Scripture and our own experience testify that spirituality and sexuality are deeply entwined (Rob Bell has written an entire book about what he calls ‘the endless connections between sexuality and spirituality’). To help us think through this challenging and complex subject we must first define what we mean by sexuality and spirituality:

“Sexuality is the deep desire that drives us beyond ourselves in an attempt to connect with, to understand, that which is other than ourselves. Essentially, it is a longing to know and be known by other people (on physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual levels). Spirituality is a vast longing that drives us beyond ourselves in an attempt to connect with, to prove, and to understand our world. Beyond that, it is the inner compulsion to connect with the Eternal Other that is God. Essentially, it is a longing to know and be known by God (on physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual levels).” Alan & Debra Hirsch, Untamed, Chapter 8: Too Sexy for the Church, pg. 213

We are going to spend a lot of time in this series considering our sexuality; thinking about how God designed us and our sexuality. We are also going to be looking at some of the ways we can use our sexuality both positively (bringing glory to God) and negatively (displeasing God). This is of vital importance because of the intrinsic connection between the sexual and the spiritual. We need to rid ourselves of the notion that sexuality opposes spirituality and that the more sexual we are the less spiritual we are. Richard Davidson writes that:

“Sexuality is wholesome because it is inaugurated by God himself. Since the inauguration occurs within the context of a divine human relationship, sexuality must be seen to encompass not only horizontal (human) but also vertical (spiritual) dimensions. According to the divine design, the sexual

*relationship between husband and wife is inextricably bound up with the spiritual unity of both man and woman with their creator.” Richard M. Davidson, *Theology of Sexuality*, pg. 23*

Firstly we are going to consider **Sexuality and Creation** and explore what Genesis 1-3 says about our sexuality both in terms of how we were created in God’s likeness and how that was affected by the fall. Our aim is to establish a foundation upon which to base all subsequent insights into our sexuality. If we don’t get this right, then everything else will be distorted! Time and time again it seems that these early chapters of Genesis are the key to understanding the whole topic. Then secondly we are going to look at **Sexuality and the Supremacy of Christ** (based on chapters 1&2 of John Piper’s book *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*) thinking positively about how sexuality is God-designed as a way to know Him more fully and that knowing Him more fully is the road to purity. All misuses of our sexuality derive from not having the true knowledge of Christ opened up to us through the gospel. Thirdly in **The goodness of Sex and Marriage** and the Goodness and Gift of Singleness we will celebrate God’s good gift to us both of sex and marriage and also the gift of not being married. These studies will help us think about how we can enjoy the situation we are in as God intended us to. This is really key because society is downplaying and distorting the place of both marriage and singles and we as Christians are also guilty of doing so too. Fourthly in **Misuses of our Sexuality: Homosexuality and the Gospel** we will try to make sense of the current hot topic of homosexuality which has become a significant and increasingly divisive issue both within our church and our society today. We will affirm the Bible’s teaching on homosexual practice while appreciating that God is by no means ‘anti-gay’ and that the gospel is good news for all. Fifthly in **Misuses of our Sexuality: Girls & Guys Studies** we will think through *some* of the other ways in which we misuse our sexuality. We will consider how these things can become enslaving idols, how they cause harm to us and to those around us and how we might redirect them to God for His glory. Finally in **Broken People living in a broken world** we will think about how we respond to the challenges arising from the Bible’s teaching about sex and sexuality. We will consider the way Jesus accepts and gives dignity to the woman caught in adultery and try to learn how we can do likewise to our fellow brothers and sisters. We will also seek to put sex into perspective by considering Jesus’ teaching about there being no marriage (and by implication no sex) in Heaven.

A final warning!

With this subject we need to be sensitive to one another; we will likely be coming at this topic from a different place: some married, some unmarried; some dating, some single; some content with the way that things are, some not and so on. Inevitably we will also bring baggage from our past, experiences that will inevitably flavour our thinking and practice accordingly. Those things are important but can I encourage you to set things to one side and look afresh at what the Bible actually has to say to us:

*William Loader writes that “Particularly in dealing with matters of sexuality it is not uncommon for people to become deeply involved emotionally in wanting, indeed, needing texts to say certain things which would reinforce or confirm their own beliefs and attitudes...The danger, then is violation of the text in a way comparable to when someone insists that we are saying or should be saying what he or she wants us to say, even when we are not.” *Sexuality in the New Testament*, pg. 6*

To this end please heed the encouragements about getting the most out of these studies, be prepared, embrace the potential awkwardness associated with this topic and try hard to allow the Bible to develop and form your convictions about sex and sexuality.

Steve McClure January 2013

Key texts for this series

- Sex and the supremacy of Christ, Editors John Piper & Justin Taylor © 2005, Crossway Books
- Sexuality in the New Testament, Understanding the key texts, William Loader © 2010, SPCK
- God, Sex and Marriage, John Richardson © 1995 MPA Books, Biblical Application Series
- The Theology of following Jesus, Richard M Davidson © 1988, Andrews University Press
- Sex God, Rob Bell © 2007, Zondervan
- Real Marriage: the truth about sex, friendship and life together, Mark & Grace Driscoll © 2012, Thomas Nelson
- Untamed; reactivating a missional form of discipleship, Chapter 8: Too sexy for the Church, Alan & Debra Hirsch © 2010 Baker Books
- Soul Virgins: Redefining Single Sexuality, Doug Rosenau & Michael Todd Wilson © 2006 Baker Books
- The Meaning of Marriage, Facing the complexities of commitment with the wisdom of God, Tim Keller © 2011 Hodder & Stoughton

Other Sources

- The Message of Genesis 1-11, David Atkinson © 1990, IVP
- The Message of 1 Corinthians, David Prior © 1985, IVP
- The Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis © 1944 New York: Macmillan
- Philip D Jenson & Tony Payne, Beyond Eden © 1990 The Good Book Company (UK)
- Joshua Harris, Not even a Hint: Guarding your heart against lust, © 2003 Multnomah
- Captured by a better vision; Living Porn Free, Tim Chester © 2010 IVP
- Homosexuality and following Jesus, Laurence Koo, Dutch Navigators, 2011
- A Battle I face, Interview with Vaughan Roberts © 2012, Evangelicals Now (<http://www.e-n.org.uk/6028-A-battle-I-face.htm>)
- Articles in Christianity Today <http://www.christianitymagazine.co.uk/sexuality.aspx> by Steve Chalke (Oasis Trust) and Greg Downes and <http://www.eauk.org/church/stories/not-radical-enough.cfm> a response by Steve Clifford (EA)

Resources

- True Freedom Trust, <http://www.truefreedomtrust.co.uk/>

“Christians have no right to be embarrassed when it comes to talking about sex and sexuality. An unhealthy reticence or embarrassment in dealing with these issues is a form of disrespect to God’s creation. Whatever God made is good, and every good thing God made has an intended purpose that ultimately reveals His own glory. When conservative Christians respond to sex with ambivalence or embarrassment, we slander the goodness of God and hide God’s glory which is intended to be revealed in the right use of creation’s gifts.”

R. Albert Mohler Jr

STUDY 1 – SEXUALITY AND CREATION

INTRODUCTION: In this study we will explore what Genesis 1-3 says about our sexuality both in terms of how we were created in God's likeness and how that was affected by the fall. Our aim in doing so is to establish a foundation upon which to base all subsequent insights into our sexuality.

SETTING THE SCENE: What are your initial thoughts on how you would describe our "sexuality"? Read through the first page of the introduction and reflect on your response to these ideas. What feelings (positive or negative) do you have about the series ahead? (see also Additional Quotes 1)?

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MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE (GEN 1:24-31): How is the creation of animals (1:24-25) contrasted with the creation of mankind (1:26-31)? How do you understand what means to be created in God's image and likeness (1:26)? (Consider the following: relationships, responsibility, rationality and real-ness)? What is the significance of the fact that we were created in the image of God as 'male & female'?

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EQUALITY OR HIERARCHY (GEN 1:26-28 & 2:7-24): What do the two accounts imply about the superiority or inferiority between male and female? How do you respond to the woman being described as a 'helper suitable for him' (see Additional Quotes 2)?

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SEXUALITY AS WHOLENESS: We're told that it was 'not good for the man to be alone' (2:18); what has been your experience of this hunger for wholeness? How did the creation of mankind as male and female lead to the experience of sexuality as wholeness (aka 'creative complementarity')?

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SEXUALITY EXPRESSED IN RELATIONSHIP (GEN 1:26-28, 2:18-24): How do the creation accounts teach us that human sexuality is for relationship? How is this worked out in practice through the various relationships we enjoy and ultimately in the marriage relationship (2:24)? What does the idea of 'they became one flesh' imply about the dependency, oneness and intimacy of the relationship?

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SEXUALITY AND PROCREATION: Keeping in mind what we've already discussed, how important is procreation to our sexuality? What can we infer from the description of sex and sexuality in 2:24 without any reference to procreation (contrast with 1:28 which says be fruitful and multiply)?

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WHOLESOMENESS AND BEAUTY: What are the implications of God's declaration in 1:31 that all that He had made (including our sexuality) was very good (implying wholesomeness and beauty)? How is this goodness and beauty seen in the shameless nakedness described in 2:25? How does this passage challenge the melancholic attitude towards sex often shown by Christians?

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SEXUALITY POST FALL: NAKEDNESS (GEN 3:5-11): How are we to understand what the passage means when it says that Adam & Eve's eyes are opened to know 'good and evil' and their subsequent realisation of their nakedness? NB: the word naked here is different to 2:25; denoting the ideas of a consciousness of guilt and a nakedness of the soul.

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SEXUALITY POST FALL: JUDGEMENT (GEN 3:16): What impact do we see on relationships with one another and with God (esp. v16c)? Is this the beginning of wives submitting to their husbands or just a distortion of it (NB: the word 'rule' is not tyrannical but more like comfort, protect, care and love)?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: How would you summarise what you have learned about God's intention for us as sexual beings and how this has been distorted by the fall? How would you contrast this with either with what society is telling us and/or your own thoughts on this subject?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God that we are made in His image and ask God to help us to understand this more deeply. Pray that we would celebrate sex and our sexuality as male and female.

MEMORY VERSE: GENESIS 1:27

STUDY 2 – SEXUALITY AND THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION: In this study we will try and positively about how sexuality is God-designed as a way to know Him more fully and that knowing Him more fully is the road to purity. All misuses of our sexuality derive from not having the true knowledge of Christ opened up to us through the gospel.

SETTING THE SCENE: What do you observe about what Society and the Church believe and practice about sexuality? How would you define the relationship between sexuality and spirituality? To what extent do you think that sexuality is or can be a pointer to, or substitute for, God (Additional Quotes 3)?

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SEXUALITY AS A WAY TO KNOW GOD MORE FULLY (EZEKIEL 16): How would you describe God's message to Israel in Ezekiel 16 (esp. v1-8, 15, 32-37 & 59-63)? What emotions would this evoke in you if God was writing this to you (see also James 4:4, Mk 8:38)?

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To what extent do you agree with the relationship between sexuality and knowing God described in Additional Quotes 4? How is this illustrated in the shocking language of Ezekiel 16? How might the existence of this sexual language and imagery make God more deeply knowable? What surprises you about the language, tone and way that this imagery is used in this passage?

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CHRIST'S LOVE FOR THE CHURCH (EPH 5:25-32): What is the significance of the picture Paul uses here for how husbands are to love their wives? How this a fulfilment of Ezekiel's vision (16:60-63)? How does this relational and sexual imagery help you to know God?

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KNOWING GOD MORE FULLY GUARDS OUR SEXUALITY (HOSEA 2): Why is the promise, "And you shall know the LORD" (the context is God describing the restoration of His marriage with Israel) so significant? To what extent do you agree that knowing God prevents misuses of our sexuality?

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Though we do not have a sexual relationship with God, to what extent would you describe our 'knowledge of God' like that of a 'lover' (opposed to say a scholar)? How do we or could we misuse our sexuality? How do these so-called 'misuses of our sexuality' hide or distort the true knowledge of God?

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KNOWING THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE: How does the Bible teach that this true knowledge of God brings the powerful passions of the body under the sway of truth, purity and love (e.g. Rom 1:28, 1 Thess 4:3-5 & 1 Pet 1:14-15)? How do you understand the promises in 2 Pet 1:3-4 and John 8:31-32 that the knowledge of Christ frees us from corruption (Quote 5)?

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THE GOSPEL AND THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST: Why is our sin and God's wrath towards that sin our biggest obstacle to knowing the supremacy of Christ? How in and through the gospel has God made it possible for us to know the beautiful supremacy of His Son?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: How does knowing the supremacy of Christ enlarge your soul (putting sex in perspective) and save our sexuality from sin (empowering us to win the battle over temptation)? See also Additional Quotes 5. If you have time, reflect on the supremacy of Christ in Colossians 1:15-23.

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share with one another some of the struggles you face in the area of sexuality. Encourage one another about how knowing the supremacy of Christ can help you find freedom. Pray that you would each come to know and understand the supremacy of Christ more fully.

MEMORY VERSE: COLOSSIANS 1:15-17

STUDY 3 – THE GOODNESS OF SEX AND MARRIAGE

INTRODUCTION: In this study we will celebrate God's good gift of sex and marriage and to think about how we can enjoy it as God intended us to. This is the study about Sex and Marriage; we will all be coming from different places but we will thank God for the powerful gift of Sex He has given us.

SETTING THE SCENE: Where did you learn about sexuality; e.g. school, church, media? Why as Christians do we tend to be ignorant, anxious or even embarrassed about talking about sex despite the fact that the Bible is full of it; e.g. incest (Gen 19), adultery (2 Sam 11-12) or rape (2 Sam 13)? How have we been impacted by attitudes towards sex throughout history?

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SEXUAL VS. SPIRITUAL DIVIDE: If God has indeed created us as sexual beings why do we believe (or at the very least practice) a sexual and spiritual divide? Is sex any less spiritual than other activities? C.S. Lewis wrote that "The devil's grand strategy against pleasure is to twist it, to get us to misuse it." What is your response to this idea in relation to God's gift of sex?

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A CELEBRATION OF SEX (PROV 5:18-19, SONG OF SONGS 1:2-4, 2:3-7 & 16-17, 7:1-9) : How do you understand these descriptive passages which graphically depict and celebrate the gift of sex? Why do you think that Song of Songs (which includes no commands, liturgy, hymns, visions or oracles but only love songs) was included in the Bible (see also Quote 6)?

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LEAVING, CLEAVING & ONE FLESH (GEN 2:24-25): What does God have to say about the appropriate context and circumstances for sex? Society encourages us to have multiple sexual partners: what is the problem with this? How do these aspects of leaving, cleaving/being united and becoming one flesh help us understand God's intention for sex (Additional Quotes 7, Hebrews 13:4)?

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What insights can we glean from the passages in the NT where these verses are quoted (Mark 10:6-9, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 & Ephesians 5:28-33)? Consider the phrases 'one with her in body' (1 Cor), 'a profound mystery' (Eph) and 'what God has joined together, let no man separate' (Mark 10)?
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LESSONS FROM CORINTH (1 COR 6:12-20, 7:1-5): What were 'the matters' which the Corinthian church had written to Paul about (7:1)? Why would some at Corinth regard the avoidance of sexual behaviour as good (contrast with those Paul speaks to in 6:12-20 who evidently didn't think that what you did with your body had any impact on the soul)?
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How would you summarise Paul's advice to the group in chapter 7 who are arguing for sexual abstinence? To what extent does Paul's positivity and encouragement about the importance of sex within marriage surprise you? How do you feel about this marital duty/obligation to *one another* that Paul refers to (7:3)? What exactly is the concession Paul refers to in v6?
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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: Are you more likely to see sex as a 'God' (See Misuses of sex and sexuality studies), as 'gross' (i.e. dirty or unspiritual) or as 'gift'? What are the implications? How can we be 'transformed' to the likeness of Christ rather than 'conformed' to those around us (Rom 12:1-2)?
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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Talk about how this study has impacted your attitude towards sex and how we can bring glory to God by obedience in this area. Pray for one another that both our attitudes towards sex and our subsequent sexual behaviour would honour God.

MEMORY VERSES: 1 TIMOTHY 4:4-5

STUDY 4 – THE GIFT OF SINGLENESS

INTRODUCTION: Having looked at the goodness of Sex & Marriage we now turn to the question of singleness: is it God's second best for us? As a live issue for many it has the potential to cause much pain. The Bible however contends that to be single is both a gift and a good thing,

SETTING THE SCENE: What would you say are some reasons why singleness can be so difficult and painful to so many? What would you say is the general response of the Church to singleness and how would you critique that response? What is your experience of struggling with singleness?

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THE GIFT OF SINGLENESS (1 COR 7:6-7): Having written about marriage (v1-5), Paul now turns to singleness and he says that both are gifts (*Charisma* which is literally a *grace gift* from God). What is the significance of this description (see usage in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 as a gift to build others up)?

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THE GOODNESS OF SINGLENESS (1 COR 7:8-9 & 26-31, MATT 19:11-12): Paul says that it is good to be single (See v7-8, 26-31): what basis does Paul make these statements and how does this contrast with what we saw the previous study (i.e. Genesis 1-3 & Ephesians 5:28-33)?

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How do you understand Paul's statements in 1 Cor 7:29 (*time is short*) and 7:31 (*the world is passing away*) and what does this mean for our attitude towards marriage and family? What do you think Jesus meant by what He said in Matthew 19:11-12 (on the back of a discussion about divorce)?

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IDOLISING SEX AND MARRIAGE: We could argue that our society idolises sex and relationships (though perhaps not so much marriage outside the church): why is this and how does this impact our level of contentment with being single? To what extent would you say that Jesus or Paul (both of whom did not marry) were less complete or whole than if they had married (Hebrews 4:15 & 1 Peter 2:22)?

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OUR GREATEST NEED: How does all that we've learned about how sexuality points towards our ultimate marriage with Christ help us find perspective on the issue of singleness (Additional Quotes 8&9)? To what extent do you agree that our ultimate needs can only be fulfilled in Christ?

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THE ADVANTAGES OF SINGLENES (1 COR 7:32-39): What does Paul have to say in these verses about what he sees as the advantages of being single? How specifically does Paul see singleness helping fulfil the ultimate aim of *undivided devotion to the Lord* (v37)?

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REMAIN IN THE SITUATION WE ARE IN (1 COR 7:17,20 & 24): Three times Paul says that we should remain in the situation we were in when God called us: in what ways can we grow in contentment about the situation God has placed us in (See Additional Quotes 10)?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What steps can we begin to take in order to better glorify God regardless of the situation we find ourselves in?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Single or married pray for one another that you would each find contentment with the situation God has placed you in and the satisfaction that only He can provide. Pray that we would embrace the *gift* that God has given to us and make the most of it for the glory of God.

MEMORY VERSES: 1 COR 10:31b

STUDY 5 – MISUSING OUR SEXUALITY: HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION: In this study we will try to make sense of the issue of homosexuality which has become a significant and increasingly divisive issue both within our church and our society today. We will see that God is not anti-gay and that the gospel is for all.

SETTING THE SCENE: Why do you think that so many perceive the church to be anti-homosexual (Additional Quotes 11)? How would you respond to the accusation that the Bible is at best out of touch and at worst anti-gay? How much is our reputation as Christians at stake on this issue?

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HOMOSEXUAL PRACTICE (GENESIS 2:24): What does the Bible teach about homosexuality (Additional Quotes 12)? How does this sit with God's intention for sex in marriage (Gen 2:24)? How would you define the term 'sexual immorality' (Used 23 times, more on this in Additional Quotes 13)?

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DETESTABLE PRACTICE (LEV 18:22 & 20:13): What's the significance of the range of things the Bible describes as detestable (or an abomination); e.g. a lying tongue, haughty eyes, dissenters (Prov 6:16-19), dodgy weighing scales (20:10), a person with deaf ears to God who then prays (28:9)?

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Does this prohibition still apply? Why or why not? To what extent do you think we are guilty of selective law keeping? Which laws has Jesus 'fulfilled' and therefore no longer apply (See Matt 5:17-20 and Jesus' declaration that all food is clean in Mk 7:19 – He makes no such declaration about Sexuality)?

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THE KINGDOM OF GOD (1 COR 6:9-11 / 1 TIM 1:9-10): How are we to interpret the broad range of acts of the sinful nature that Paul writes about in these passages? How do these verses (which have been used to condemn) actually bring a huge note of hope for gay people?

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UNNATURAL RELATIONS (ROMANS 1:18-2:1): What is the thrust of Paul's argument and the purpose of the examples he uses here within the context of this letter? Within that context what are the specific things that Paul singles out here (note that homosexuality is again one of many things)?

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LIVING IT OUT: What can we conclude from these passages about what the Bible does or doesn't say about homosexual orientation, desire and practice? If we are all sexual sinners (which we surely are), what might it look like to show consistency (rather than hypocrisy) in how we relate to gay people?

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THE 'CONTROVERSY OVER INCLUSIVENESS'; What is your reaction to the tension between Jesus' love commandment (inclusivity) with the Bible's teaching on homosexuality? What do you think a healthy position on this could look like?

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THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS (MARK 10:29-30): How can we help those struggling in this area to honour Christ and find their identity in Christ? What might be the 'roots' of homosexuality? Do you think people are born gay? Does God promise to take away homosexual feelings?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What hope is there for those who in this area: e.g. a new beginning (1 Cor 5:17), a new community (the church) and a new world (Rev 21:5)? How can we be more understanding and better at welcoming gay people into our Christian communities?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Talk about your own struggles in this area either personally or in how to respond to this controversial and divisive issue. Pray for one another that right theology would help you develop right practice and a more loving and gracious response to those who struggle in this area.

MEMORY VERSES: MARK 10:29-30

STUDY 6a – MISUSING OUR SEXUALITY (GIRLS STUDY)

INTRODUCTION: In this study we will think through some of the other ways in which we misuse our sexuality; considering how these things can become enslaving idols, how they cause harm to us and to those around us and how we might redirect them to God for His glory.

SETTING THE SCENE: What does society around us (or maybe even the church) tell us about what we should or shouldn't believe about our sexuality as women (see Additional Quotes 14)? In all that we've studied (a positive view of sex, sexuality & marriage) what have you observed about the tension between what we're told by the world around us and what the Bible teaches us about sexuality?

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CALLED TO BE FREE (GAL 5:13, 1 COR 6:12-20, 10:12-13): Paul tells the Galatians that we are called to be free but then encourages them not to use their freedom to indulge the sinful nature (Gal 5:13); how might principles here in 1 Cor 6:12 (repeated in 10:23) help us to do this in the area of sexuality? How do the examples of 'food' and the 'body' reinforce this point?

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As women, how may we misuse our sexuality in ways that are not 'lawful', 'beneficial' or 'enslaving'? If there is 'no temptation that is not common to all' (1 Cor 10:12-13); what are the underlying similarities and diverse expressions of the temptations faced by men & women (See Additional Quotes 15&16)?

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VISUAL/SOCIAL MISUSES (1 THESS 4:3-8, 1 JOHN 2:15-17): Studies suggest that 1/3 of visitors to adult websites are women (www.internetfilterreview.com): how do you respond to such a statistic? How is battling lust part of embracing your sexuality)? What do 1 Thess 4:3-8 and 1 John 2:15-17 have to say about these things? How might we struggle with this so-called "social pornography" (e.g. Romance novels, gossip magazines & chick-flics)?

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As women how might emotional attachments, suppression / denial of femininity, insecurities, interest in other people's affairs result in a misuse or distortion of our sexuality? What things do we use to define ourselves, our worth and our identity as women?

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A PORTRAIT OF FEMININITY (PROV 31): What is your initial response to the description of the 'wife/woman of noble character' (KJV 'a virtuous woman')? What do you think such a woman would look like in our generation and culture? Who do you know who you would describe in this way?

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How do the following ideas help develop a helpful picture of female sexuality? (1) *Trustworthiness* (v11), (2) *Good not harm* (v12), (3) *Diligent at work* (v13-20, e.g. Lydia), (4) *Successful and savvy* (v16-19, 24-27 e.g. Esther), (5) *generous* (v15,20, e.g. Ruth), (6) *building others up* (v26), (7) *not fearing the future* (v17,21), (8) *investing in the next generation* (v28) & (9) *Fearing the Lord* (v30).

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: To what extent would our priorities be transformed if our lives were characterised by the kind of things described in Proverbs 31? How might this help us to give glory to God and invest for this season (whether single, dating or married)?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share and pray for one another about some of the areas in which you struggle to live out your sexuality in ways that are lawful, beneficial and glorifying to God rather than as enslaving idols. Pray for one another that you would be able to grow in embracing your sexuality.

MEMORY VERSE: 1 CORINTHIANS 6:12

STUDY 6b – MISUSING OUR SEXUALITY (GUYS STUDY)

INTRODUCTION: In this study we will think through some of the other ways in which we misuse our sexuality; considering how these things can become enslaving idols, how they cause harm to us and to those around us and how we might redirect them to God for His glory.

SETTING TE SCENE: What does society around us (or maybe even the church) tell us about what we should or shouldn't believe about our sexuality as men? In all that we've studied (a positive view of sex, sexuality & marriage) what have you observed about the tension between what we're told by the world around us and what the Bible teaches us about sexuality?

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CALLED TO BE FREE (GAL 5:13, 1 COR 6:12-20, 10:12-13): Paul tells the Galatians that we are called to be free but then encourages them not to use their freedom to indulge the sinful nature (Gal 5:13); how might principles here in 1 Cor 6:12 (repeated in 10:23) help us to do this in the area of sexuality? How do the examples of 'food' and the 'body' reinforce this point?

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As men, how may we misuse our sexuality in ways that are not 'lawful', 'beneficial' or 'enslaving'? If there is 'no temptation that is not common to all' (1 Cor 10:12-13); what are the underlying similarities and diverse expressions of the temptations faced by men & women (See Additional Quotes 15&16)?

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LUST (1 THESS 4:3-8, 1 JOHN 2:15-17, MATT 5:27-30, JOB 31:1): One common saying says "95% of men struggle with lust...and the other 5% are lying." How is battling lust part of embracing your sexuality? What do these verses have to say about these things?

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Mark 7 catalogues a number of sexual sins that Jesus said originate in our hearts and we're already learned that our most important sexual organ is actually our brain (study 2); if this is true (and in light of

the pound of flesh on billboards, media, the internet and so on) how can we guard our hearts? What might it look like to make 'a covenant with our eyes not to look lustfully at a woman' (Job 31:1)?

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PORNOGRAPHY/MASTURBATION: Driscoll writes "The purpose of pornography is clearly lust. And throughout the Bible, God repeatedly condemns – as a grievous evil – lust for anyone but your spouse." What are the consequences of these misuses of our sexuality and who faces those consequences (see also Additional quotes 17-18)?

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The internet offers widespread availability, accessibility and anonymity; how can we respond Biblically to this increasingly widespread struggle for us as men?

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THRILL OF THE CHASE: How can we exercise power over another person's sexual responses through our behaviour (think about the flirt and the tease)? How is this a distortion of our sexuality and what are the consequences both for us and for those we are 'playing games' with?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER (PROV 7): What were the first steps towards temptation for the young man 'who had no sense' (v8-9)? How can we flee from sexual immorality (1 Cor 6:10, Prov 5:8)? What was the process of seduction (note the nature of the lies involved) that the woman set out upon (v10-21)? What was the cost of unfaithfulness as spelt out in v23-27 (see also Prov 6:32-35)?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share and pray for one another about some of the areas in which you struggle to live out your sexuality in ways that are lawful, beneficial and glorifying to God rather than as enslaving idols. Pray for one another that you would be able to grow in embracing your sexuality.

MEMORY VERSE: 1 CORINTHIANS 6:12

STUDY 7 – BROKEN PEOPLE LIVING IN A BROKEN WORLD

INTRODUCTION: In this study we will try and respond to the challenges arising from our study over the past 5 weeks about the Bible's teaching about sex and sexuality. We will try and put sex into perspective as we consider Jesus' teaching about marriage (and by implication sex) in Heaven.

SETTING TE SCENE (PHIL 1:6): What would you say have been the key things God has been teaching you about sex and sexuality this term? What things have encouraged or discouraged you? We are all a 'work-in-progress'; how might Phil 1:6 encourage us in this area? What is (or has) God asking you to repent of this evening and throughout this series (you can share more in prayer groups)?

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BROKEN PEOPLE (JOHN 8:3-11): Are sexual sins worse than other sins; why or why not (consider both the severity and the consequences)? Why (as evidenced here by the Pharisees) do we so often take the high ground when it comes the sin of others?

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RESTORING BROKEN PEOPLE: How does Jesus restore the dignity of this woman (most likely standing naked before a leering crowd, humiliated & terrified)? How does Jesus demonstrate grace and acceptance? Why is it important that He does this before calling her to repentance? What can we learn from this about how Jesus deals with our sin?

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CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE (PSALM 51:1-10): How does the context help us to understand this Psalm (See 2 Samuel 11-12)? Reflect on the Psalm and think about the extent to which you can relate to this declaration of repentance (resulting from his adultery and attempted cover-up).

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LOOKING DEEPER: What are the key elements of the Psalm and of how David humbly approaches God for forgiveness? How did David's sin (and by implication our own) affect his relationship with God? What might it look like to repent of your sin and come before a holy God who freely offers forgiveness?

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MOVING FORWARD (ROM 7:15-20): What is your experience of this 'cyclical pattern' of dealing with sin in the Christian life? What things have and haven't helped you in the battles you face? (Remember the lesson from Study 2 as summarised in Additional Quotes 4).

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To what extent does the hope offered in C.S. Lewis' allegorical story (Additional Quotes 19) resonate with you? How can we redirect our struggles to "become holy passion" that will take us to God?

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SEX IN PERSPECTIVE (LUKE 20:27-38 & MATT 19:11-12): What light does Jesus' response to the Sadducees (with their question about the resurrection) shed on the future of marriage and sex? Who does Jesus mean by *'those worthy of taking part in the age to come'* (Lk 20:35)? As we live here and now, what are the implications of Jesus' comments about the future of marriage?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What have been your key takeaways from these studies? Whether married or unmarried how can we glorify God through our sexuality 'for the sake of the Kingdom'?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Ask God for forgiveness for the different ways in which we have either failed to embrace and value our sexuality or the ways in which we have misused our sexuality. Ask God to meet us in our brokenness and pour out His love, grace and acceptance upon us.

MEMORY VERSES: PSALM 51:10-12

ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS:

QUOTE 1: “For many, sexuality is simply what happens between two people involving sexual pleasure. But that’s only a small percentage of what sexuality is. Our sexuality is all of the ways we strive to reconnect with our world, with each other, and with God. A friend of mine has given his life to standing with those who have been forgotten and oppressed the most. He’s in his early thirties, he’s single, and he talks openly about celibacy. What makes his life so powerful is that he’s a very sexual person, but he has focused his sexuality, his “energies for connection,” on a specific group of people. Some of the most sexual people I know are celibate. They sleep alone.” *Rob Bell, Sex God, pg. 42*

QUOTE 2: “The Hebrew phrase [for ‘a helper fit for him’] includes 2 words ‘ezer kenegdo’. The first implies someone who assists and encourages. ‘Help’ provides support for what is lacking in the one who needs help. It’s a word that is used several times in the OT for the help which comes from God. The ‘helper’ is then qualified by ‘kenegdo’, which seems to be related to the verb meaning ‘to be plain or visible’. A related noun refers to an ‘eminent’ person. So perhaps ‘helper fit for him’ means ‘a helper matching his eminence’ or perhaps ‘his distinctiveness’. It certainly points to one who is fit to stand before the man, opposite him, as his counterpart, companion and complement. There is no sense of inferiority, subordination or servitude implied here.” *David Atkinson, Message of Genesis 1-11, pg. 69*

QUOTE 3: “Sex is like religion not only because it is objectively holy in itself but also because it gives us subjectively a foretaste of heaven, of the self-forgetting, self-transcending, self-giving that is what our deepest hearts are designed for, long for and will not be satisfied until they have, because we are made in God’s own image and this self-giving constitutes the inner life of the Trinity.” *Peter Kreeft, How to Win the Culture War: A Christian Battle plan for a society in crisis, pg 95, IVP 2002*

QUOTE 4: “I have 2 simple but weighty points...The 1st is that *sexuality is designed by God as a way to know God in Christ more fully*. And the 2nd is that *knowing God in Christ more fully is designed as a way of guarding and guiding our sexuality*...Now to state the two points again, this time negatively, in the 1st place *all misuses of our sexuality distort the true knowledge of Christ*. And, in the 2nd place, *all misuses of our sexuality derive from not having the true knowledge of Christ*. Or to put it another way: all sexual corruption serves to conceal the true knowledge of Christ, but the true knowledge of Christ serves to prevent sexual corruption.” *John Piper, Sex & the Supremacy of Christ, pg 26*

QUOTE 5: “My conviction is that one of the main reasons the world and the church are awash with lust and pornography is that our lives are intellectually and emotionally disconnected from the infinite, soul staggering grandeur for which we were made.” *John Piper, Sex & the Supremacy of Christ, pg 43-44*

QUOTE 6: “Because of its concern for the covenant, the Old Testament’s interest in sex is mainly with its relation to begetting. There are few clues as to whether it should be fun. The Song of Solomon fills this gap. It says that along with having children, sex is for pleasure, joy, communion, and celebration. Pregnancy is not even mentioned in the book! It paints a beautiful picture of what redeemed sex looks like. Karl Barth said the tone of the book is ‘eros without shame.’ He described it as a poetic commentary on Genesis 2:25.” *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ, Ben Pattison, pg. 51*

QUOTE 7: “Sex is part of the bond between husband and wife; it unites them – physically, but also at a more profound level. Sex is part of the glue that holds man and woman together in unified relationship.” *Philip D Jenson & Tony Payne, Beyond Eden, pg. 29*

QUOTE 8: “Paul says that both being married and not being married are good conditions to be in. We should be neither overly elated by getting married nor overly disappointed by not being so – because Christ is the only spouse that can truly fulfil us and God’s family the only family that will truly embrace and satisfy us.” *Tim Keller, The Meaning of Marriage, pg. 194*

QUOTE 9: “We’re single because that’s God’s will for us right now. Is that discouraging to hear? It shouldn’t be. That’s when we need to remember that our most important identity is not being single; it’s being saved. God has done for us something far more important than getting us to the wedding altar. The gentle words of my pastor, C.J. Mahaney, are a good reminder: “You’re greatest need is not a spouse. Your greatest need is to be delivered from the wrath of God – and that has already been accomplished for you through the death and resurrection of Christ. So why doubt that God will provide a much, much lesser need? Trust His sovereignty, trust His wisdom, trust His love.” *Quoted from Carolyn McGulley, Sex and the Supremacy of Christ, pg 187-191*

QUOTE 10: “If you are single, your singleness is not just where you happen to be right now. It’s where God has you right now, and there’s a world of difference between those two outlooks.” *Tony Evans*

QUOTE 11: “Kinnaman & Lyons (*unChristian*) looked into what “outsiders” thought of people in the church, and reveal that 91% of those surveyed (aged 16-29), stated that their primary perception of the church was that it was “anti-homosexual” and attacked gay people incessantly. These are staggering statistics. How did we find ourselves in a place where the primary thing “outsiders” can say of us is that we are anti-gay?...Our very reputations as Christians are now tied in with a people group most of us at best tolerate and at worst have outright contempt for.” *Alan & Debra Hirsch, Untamed, pg. 220-222*

QUOTE 12: “The Bible contains 6 admonishments to homosexuals and 362 admonishments to heterosexuals. That doesn’t mean that God doesn’t love heterosexuals. It’s just that they need more supervision.” *Lynn Lavner*

QUOTE 13: “The word sexual immorality often crops up in the NT as being something that Christians must avoid or flee from. Translated from a variant of the Greek word *porneia* this word is where we get our English word pornography. In Greek it carries with it the meaning of any sex outside of heterosexual marriage including adultery, incest, prostitution, lust, same sex practice. The key issue Biblically is not actually whether its homosexual or heterosexual but the special place of sex within heterosexual marriage according to the plans and purposes of God. The key verse in the whole debate is actually Gen 2:24.” *Jonathan Berry, True Freedom Trust speaking at Above Bar Church, Nov 2012, <http://abovebarchurch.org.uk/resources/sermons-and-talks/app/speaker/jonathan-berry>*

QUOTE 14: “There are only two portraits of the single woman in popular media. One is the current pop icon, surgically augmented with a low fabric to flesh wardrobe ratio, usually sporting a vulgar phrase on her bust or bum, and unabashed in her sexual aggressiveness. The other is the forlorn result of the pursuit of sexual freedom – the confused waif whose self-centred ruminations are the fodder for fictional characters on TV (*Ally McBeal*) or in movies and literature (*Bridget Jones*)”. *Carolyn McGulley, Sex and the Supremacy of Christ, Sex and the Single Woman, pg 185*

QUOTE 15: “Unvarnished erotic lust is seen as a typically male problem. As one common saying puts it, “95% of men struggle with lust...and the other 5% are lying.” But what about the 100% of women sitting in churches, either secretly struggling or secretly smug? There are core similarities between men and women, along with some typical differences...At the level of motive, for example, male sexual sin and female sexual sin often operate in somewhat different ways. Men are often more wired to

visual cues, to anonymous body parts eroticism. Women are often more wired to feelings of personal intimacy and emotional closeness as cues for sexual arousal.” *David Powlison, Sex and the Supremacy of Christ, Restoring Pure Joy to the Sexually Broken, pg 74-75*

QUOTE 16: “Without wanting to generalise or point out the obvious, men and women will express their sexuality in similar but also different ways. Male sexuality will tend to express itself in more “genital” ways, and female sexuality will tend to express itself in more “social” ways, including insecurity, emotional over-attachments, inappropriate interest in other people’s affairs, and promiscuity among other things. We recognise that not all men or women fit neatly into these obvious stereotypes, but stereotypes exist for a reason... If male porn has to do with looking at people’s private parts, the female version has to do with looking at people’s private lives. We call this “social pornography”. It fills women’s gossip magazines and does enormous damage to the women addicted to them.” *Alan & Debra Hirsch, Untamed, Too Sexy for the Church, pg. 217-218*

QUOTE 17: “Masturbation perverts God’s covenant-making and renewing intent. It teaches people mentally, physically, and emotionally to satisfy themselves. This is why marriage doesn’t really solve the problem. Masturbation is easier than sex with one’s wife, because it is not really about sex. It is man’s lazy, self-centred desire to satisfy himself, rather than give himself to and for his wife. Inside marriage, sex is like a good steak dinner. It not only tastes good, but it is good for you and builds up a marriage. Outside of marriage, sex is like sweets. It may taste good, but it does not last, and a steady diet of it will make you sick – sick in your soul and sick in your relationships with women.” *Michael Lawrence, Sex and the Supremacy of Christ, Sex and the Single Man, pg 140-141*

QUOTE 18: “You don’t control porn. Porn controls you. One of the most powerful...is that it does not harm anyone. But that is a demonic lie. Porn hurts God. Every human being is known, loved and observed by God. When people are abused, defiled and objectified, God is grieved in His heart...Porn harms viewers, rewiring them so as to have their sexuality defined by a sick industry seeking to addict them, take their money, and destroy any intimacy with their spouses...Porn ultimately leads to the objectification of women, shaping and rewiring in such a way that we become unable to see women as we should...Porn also harms women. Like the rewiring and corrupting of men, porn does the same for women who consume it...Just as food is consumed and digested by the body, pornography and our response to it alter our brain in a way that is difficult to undo. Pornography is the consumption of sexual poison that becomes part of the fabric of the mind.” *Real Marriage, Mark & Grace Driscoll, pg. 148-150*

QUOTE 19: “In *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis tells a great allegorical story about a ghost of a man afflicted by lust. Lust is represented by a red lizard that sits on the shoulder of the man and whispers convincingly into his ear. The man eventually begins to despair about the lizard, at which point an angel offers to kill it for him. But the man is torn about what to do. He fears the death of lust will kill him; he makes excuse after excuse to the angel to keep the lizard. But finally the man allows the angel to seize and kill the lizard. The angel grasps the reptile, breaks its neck, and throws it to the ground. This ghostly man is gloriously transformed into a real and solid being while the lizard, rather than dying, is turned into a powerful white stallion. Weeping with tears of joy, the man jumps onto the horse and they fly to the heavens. What Lewis is saying here is that *eros* (and in this case lust), redeemed and directed, becomes holy passion and will take us to God. When we fail to integrate our lives under God, sexuality becomes a dangerously isolated part of our nature – unsanctified, yet potent. And when so strong a force as sexuality is left to itself, it invites the darkness. Unredeemed, it becomes a major problem for followers of Jesus in a world dominated by sexual imagery and impulses.” *Alan & Debra Hirsch, Untamed, Too Sexy for the Church, pg. 216*

MEMORY VERSES

STUDY 1: SEXUALITY AND CREATION

“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

Genesis 1:27

STUDY 2: SEXUALITY AND THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

¹⁵The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Colossians 1:15-17

STUDY 3: THE GOODNESS OF SEX AND MARRIAGE

⁴For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

1 Timothy 4:4-5

STUDY 4: THE GOODNESS AND GIFT OF SINGLENESS

“...whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

1 Corinthians 10:31b

STUDY 5: MISUSES OF OUR SEXUALITY: HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE GOSPEL

²⁹Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.”

Mark 10:29-30

STUDY 6: MISUSES OF OUR SEXUALITY: GIRLS & GUYS STUDIES

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything.

1 Corinthians 6:12

STUDY 7: BROKEN PEOPLE IN A BROKEN WORLD

¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Psalms 51:10-12