



**Three Study
Modules**
on Human Sexuality
in the Context of
Christian Belief

Select Committee
on Human Sexuality
in the Context of
Christian Belief



The following prayer is offered by the Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Revd Richard Clarke, for use on occasions when these study modules are read alone or used in group session:

Most merciful God,

you have created us, male and female, in your own image, and have borne the cost of all our judgments in the death of your Son; help us so to be attentive to the voices of Scripture, of humanity and of the Holy Spirit, that we may discern your will within the issues of our time, and, respectful both of conscience and of conviction, may direct our common life towards the perfection of our humanity that is in Christ alone, in whom truth and love are one.

We ask this in his name.

Amen.

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Foreword

In 2012 General Synod directed that a Select Committee should be established to 'enable the listening, dialogue and learning process on all issues concerning human sexuality in the context of Christian belief to continue'. In January 2016 the Guide to the Conversation on Human Sexuality in the Context of Christian Belief was published, along with a Summary of that Guide and the study modules that are contained in the work of which this is an introduction.

These three documents, it is intended, are to fulfil differing purposes: the full Guide, available both on-line and in paper publication, is intended primarily for reference, the Summary gives brief information on the contents of the full Guide and may be read in its entirety in a few minutes. However, the three-module Study Guide, seeks to open the way for groups and individuals to explore these matters further, examine Scriptural passages, reflect on identity and the 'givenness' of God and, thereby, draw us to discuss and evaluate the substantial matters of human individuality and relationship, that affect us all.

It is hoped that the use of these studies, especially when approached with others, will encourage exploration and discovery, new insights into the Scriptures and a better understanding of the issues of human sexuality as the Bible is studied. It is further hoped that through feedback, from parish and other groups, that the Church of Ireland may be enriched, by hearing the prayerful reflections of its members across the dioceses, and that the Select Committee may press on to facilitate further conversations, and be better informed to respond to General Synod; in continuing its work of understanding the gifts of God; and to celebrate our common humanity as lived in Christ.

John Mann

The Rationale for the sessions

The three modules which you are about to begin present an opportunity for individuals and groups to engage in discussion, study, reflection and prayer on some of the issues and passages of scripture which are relevant to the wider understanding of human sexuality and in particular, homosexuality.

It is intended that the three sessions will allow space for reflection between studies and will provide members of the Church of Ireland with the opportunity to examine their own views and conscience as well as searching scripture in certain faith of finding God's direction and truth that it contains.

The purpose of the sessions is not to confirm or change opinions, instead, it is the prayer of the committee, that individuals will humbly approach these sessions with open hearts and minds and be willing to be shaped, taught and, where necessary, corrected by God's direction. Each of these sessions is designed with two key objectives in mind - to draw the reader closer to God and to enable all participants to understand the relationships between their own discipleship and their sexuality.

Overcoming inhibition and embarrassment will be key to the success of these sessions so a broad, flexible range of active strategies have been included to maximise engagement in a group setting. The mix of methods will not be relevant or appropriate for all groups so we encourage you to use what is beneficial and to adapt aspects which will not be helpful for your context. As you begin this short series of studies, commit to prayer before, during and after each session. Approach all of the studies with a desire to understand God's word and His message for the world today. Show generosity, grace and humility in how you interact with others and finally, resolve to continue learning, growing and submitting in your life as a disciple of Christ. These studies are unapologetically about your personal discipleship.

The Church of Ireland is a diverse and broad family. We share a history, a connection and a fellowship that are to be valued and celebrated. These studies will enrich our understanding of each other, stretch our personal opinions in the light of scripture and hopefully facilitate the development of connections and bonds between believers, so that the Church of Ireland can continue to approach difficult and sensitive issues in modern Ireland and, at the same time, bear faithful witness to Almighty God and His love.

Guidelines for participants:

In order to maximise the potential of this experience for all participants and to ensure that all involved are able to engage fully with the material in each session, the following guidelines are recommended.

The following modules involve topics of a sensitive and personal nature. It is therefore important that all participants:

- Address one another with respect;
- Listen graciously and cordially during discussion; and
- Respect the boundaries of personal dignity and worth.

Other guidelines may be agreed by the group in order to maximise the potential.

1

Session One: The God who Gives



Session One: The God who Gives

This first session will help us think about our own identity and reflect on the many personal gifts that God has given us. We will also identify the breadth of relationships in our lives and explore what true intimacy really means. This session shall allow participants to engage with personal stories about the relationship between faith and sexuality. The journey begins in Genesis and will allow us to examine scripture from Old and New Testaments. As we begin, our introductory reading helps us to think about God our creator.



Genesis 1: 26-31(NRSV)

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

²⁷ So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." ²⁹ God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food." ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. ³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

- Now read the passage again, but this time underline all words that refer to a gift from God.
- Now read the passage again, but this time circle all words that refer to an action of God.
- Spend some time as a group discussing the gifts and actions of God in creation.

The pinnacle of God's creation is humanity. As humans, we can give thanks for the unique and amazing way that God has created us. Our understanding of our own identity is a foundation on which many of our choices and desires will be based. This next activity will help us understand some important aspects of the identity that God has given us.



Who am I?

Our identity is made up of many different aspects. There are physical, emotional, intellectual, relational and spiritual dimensions to it. Search the scripture passages included below and then write key words that make up your unique and personal identity.

<i>Physical</i>		Genesis 1:26-27 Genesis 5:1-2 Romans 8:5
<i>Emotional</i>		2 Samuel 22:7 Luke 1:46-55 Philippians 4:6
<i>Intellectual</i>		1 Kings 10:24 Proverbs 14:33 Romans 12:2
<i>Relational</i>		John 15:12 1 Thessalonians 4:9 Hebrews 10:24
<i>Spiritual</i>		Isaiah 43:1 John 1:12 1 Peter 2:9



Reflect on how unique you are. Your group might want to stop and pray and give thanks to God for the gift of our identity.

A key part of our identity is the range of relationships that we are part of. For Christians, how we treat others is a key factor in living out an authentic and relevant life as a disciple. Jesus used challenging words to remind us of our duty to care, love and respect.



As we turn our attention to scripture again, read the following passage in which Jesus instructs listeners in relation to living in accordance with the law.

Matthew 22: 36-40 (NRSV)

³⁶ "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" ³⁷ He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Read the passage again and then think about the answers to the following questions:

1. **Whom does Jesus command us to love?**

.....

2. **How important is this commandment to Jesus?**

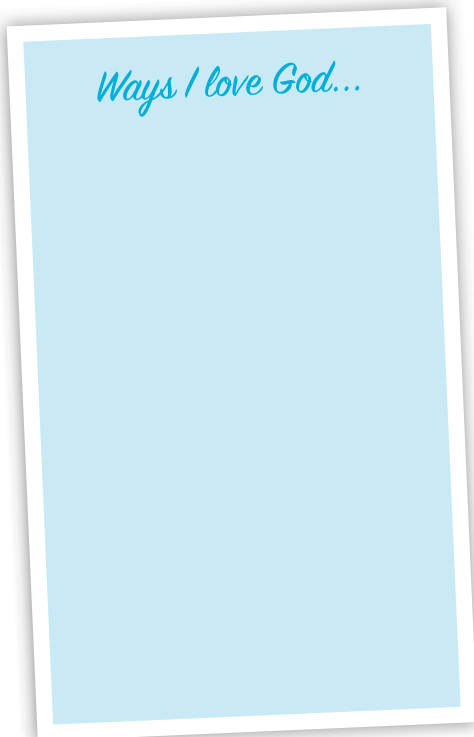
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.....

3. **Think about some of the practical ways that you can demonstrate a Christ-like love for yourself and others in the week ahead.**

.....

.....





DISCUSS

Throughout the three sessions, the following statement will appear:

“With regard to relationships and sex, personal holiness is more important than personal happiness.”

This is a difficult statement to comprehend and brings many issues to mind. Take time between sessions to reflect on it and to consider prayerfully your response to it. In this session, simply spend some time with your group discussing your reaction to it.



ENGAGE

Read the stories from two people who share their own experience of Christian faith and same sex attraction.

If you are comfortable, write down your thoughts, feelings and questions about each one and discuss in your groups.



The Bible contains many references to relationships. In Genesis 2:20-25, God acknowledged that relationship was key to our flourishing and contentment. God himself is relational and calls us to be in a relationships with himself, through saving faith in Jesus Christ. God also created humans to be relational and therefore we must understand his intentions for how we are to live and act in those relationships. The passage below will help us to consider some of these issues.



Genesis 2: 20-25 (NRSV)

²⁰ The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. ²¹ So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken.”

²⁴ Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.



In this passage, the man and wife were intimate but felt no shame. Intimacy grew out of God’s design for relationship and it was a very meaningful and holy experience. Today, intimacy is often misunderstood.

Most of our relationships will only involve physical contact such as a handshake or a hug. Some relationships will involve a much deeper level of physical intimacy. Often, it can be embarrassing to talk about sex, particularly in public, and so we must continue to treat people and the gift of sex with respect and acknowledge that some people might prefer to maintain a level of personal privacy.

Intimacy of course, is not just about sex. True intimacy involves communication, trust, respect and connection and not just the physical act of sex which is often devalued by the media and messages that we receive from the world around us.



DEFINE

In a group, come up with a definition of **INTIMACY**:

In your group, list examples of intimate relationships or actions. (e.g, a hug, a handshake, a kiss)

There is of course, a difference between intimacy and sexual intimacy.

In your group, define **SEXUAL INTIMACY**:

Finally, in your group, discuss your definitions and then list any relationships where you think that sexual intimacy is permitted by God.

The Bible has much to say about sex and the amazing gift from God that it is that we will deal with in sessions two and three. God created our bodies in such a way to enjoy sex. God also gives us guidelines about how we should enjoy sex and what sort of relationship sex should be part of. When we misuse his gift, our experience and understanding of sex can be mixed with guilt or shame. We shall examine these issues further in session two.



REFLECT

Spend some time considering the issues that have been raised during this session. Your group may find it useful to talk about your thoughts, to share a time of silence or to pray together. Use the three practical steps below to help you focus on identity and intimacy:

- *Give thanks for the gift of your own identity and the relationships that you are part of.*
- *Commit to praying for opportunities to demonstrate God's love to people that you have a relationship with.*
- *Consider the role of intimacy in your own life.*



2

Session Two: The God who Guides



Session Two: The God who Guides

REFLECT

This session will build on your experience of the first session. It is important that you spend some time reflecting on the previous session and the impact on your group. You may want to prayer together to ask God for wisdom and discernment as you begin this session together.

Perhaps your group might like to talk about:

- **What was the most helpful thing in the previous session?**
- **What difference did the previous session make in terms of how you understand Gods teaching on relationships and sex?**
- **What are your hopes for this session?**

This session aims to help participants understand that God has specific instruction that shape and fashion how we live in relationships. This is about appropriate behaviour in various relationships but with a particular focus on sexual relationships. We shall discuss appropriate behaviours in our different relationships and once again, as is central to all sessions, encourage participants to explore the connection between their discipleship and sexuality.

It is important to acknowledge that guidance can come from a variety of places such as reason, tradition or experience. In this instance, the study will focus on scripture as authority. The guide reflects something of the complex nature of the interpretation of scripture on pages 19-26.

REFLECT

In the previous session, the statement below was introduced. Now write down your own thoughts or questions that it raises for you.

“With relation to relationships and sexuality, personal holiness is more important that personal happiness.”





Different behaviours are appropriate for different relationships. Tick the boxes if you think that the action is appropriate for the relationship. The range of relationships mentioned here acknowledges the scope from casual to very committed.

	Colleague/ Classmate	Sibling/ Child	Friend of same gender	Spouse	Boyfriend/ Girlfriend
<i>Texting</i>					
<i>Sex</i>					
<i>Saying I care about you</i>					
<i>Buying a present</i>					
<i>Going to the cinema</i>					
<i>Helping them with a task</i>					
<i>Talking about your problems</i>					
<i>Kissing</i>					



The vertical relationship that we can have with God, through Christ, changes us and shapes our actions, attitudes and values. The horizontal relationships that we have with other people around us should reflect the love of Christ that is in us.

Romans 5: 8 (NRSV) says, "But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us."



Let's look at what the Bible has to say about relationships. Read the following passages and consider what they tell us about love. Consider how we can respond to the challenge that they issue to mirror that love in our relationships.

Relationship	Reading	Response
<i>Friend</i>	Proverbs 18:24	
<i>Disciple</i>	John 13:34-35	
<i>Child</i>	Exodus 20:12	
<i>Parent</i>	Proverbs 22:6	
<i>Employee</i>	Colossians 3:23	
<i>Husband/wife</i>	Hebrews 13:4	

Read each of the passages above. Now take a moment of silent reflection. Ask God to reveal his thoughts and guidance to you. Now re read the passages and highlight the key words or phrases that stand out for you. Take another moment of silent reflection. Ask God to reveal practical ways in which you can respond in each of your relationships.



Romans 12:1-2 (NRSV)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect.



THINK

According to this passage, as disciples of Christ, how should we use our bodies?



READ

1 Corinthians 6: 9-20 (NRSV)

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, ¹⁰ thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers - none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Glorify God in Body and Spirit

¹²"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. ¹³"Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food," and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. ¹⁵Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall be one flesh." ¹⁷But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. ¹⁸Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; ¹⁹but the fornicator sin of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.



ASK

1. Who does Paul claim will be excluded from the Kingdom of God? What does this mean?

.....

2. In what ways does Paul say we dishonour our bodies?

.....

3. How does Paul suggest that we treat our bodies?

.....

4. Can sex ever be "just sex"? Explain your answer with reference to this passage.

.....

.....

 **THINK**

As disciples of Christ, should we conduct ourselves and our sexual relationships differently to the world around us? Are you living a life that honours your body as belonging to the Lord and containing the Holy Spirit?

 **READ****Ephesians 5:3-6 (NRSV)**

³But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and vulgar talk; but instead, let there be thanksgiving. ⁵Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient.

How does this passage relate to modern culture? Reflecting on recent stories from the media, experience or culture what examples of sexual immorality can you think of?

Everyday behaviours that are common and attitudes that become normal in society can often become acceptable behaviours - even for Christians who should be living in a way that honours God and strives to live like Jesus. As disciples who are committed to surrendering every area of our lives to the will of God, we must be open to God's leading and guidance and try to ensure that our sexual attitudes and behaviours are aligned with what the Bible teaches.

 **READ****1 Corinthians 7:1-9 (NRSV)**

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is well for a man not to touch a woman."
²But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. ³The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶This I say by way of concession, not of command. ⁷I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind. ⁸To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. ⁹But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.

 **ENGAGE**

Read the passage and then take a moment of reflection. Now re read the passage and highlight any words that relate to relationships or sex. Take another moment to reflect. Ask God to give you wisdom about how you can best apply his guidelines and boundaries regarding sexual relationships to your own life. Ask him to reveal where there is sin in your relationships and ask him to forgive you. Read the passage a final time and then reflect on it. This process may be difficult and you may wish to spend more time reflecting on it privately at a later date. If you have experienced hurt in relationships in the past then you may wish to talk to someone about your feelings.

 **DISCUSS**

In your groups, spend some time discussing the following statement:

“The Bible clearly teaches that the ideal context for sex is between a husband and his wife.”

 **WRITE**

In the space below, write down three key messages that the Bible teaches about relationships and sex that you will think about this week.

1.
.....
2.
.....
3.
.....

 **WALK**

Join in with the walking debate. Take your position somewhere on the line between “agree” and “disagree” and if you are comfortable, share your reasons with the group.

 **REFLECT**

Before the next session begins:

- *Give thanks each day for the gift of intimacy in your life.*
- *Commit to asking God for guidance on how you can best honour him with your body and in your relationships.*
- *Ask God to reveal any sexual sin in your life and then commit, with God's help, to avoid sexual immorality.*

This session has been designed to help participants engage with scripture and to reflect on their own personal lives. There are clearly areas of sensitivity involved in the discussions that have taken place and the thoughts that have been evoked. If you have found any of the issues raised difficult then please seek the support that you deserve.



3

Session Three: The God of Grace



Session Three: The God of Grace

As you reflect on session two, share your thoughts on the passages that were studied.

Perhaps your group might like to talk about:

- What was the most helpful thing in the previous session?
- What difference did the previous session make in terms of how you understand Gods teaching on relationships and sex?
- What are your hopes for this session?

In this session, we shall address the variety of interpretations of scripture relating to relationships, sexual identity and practice. We shall also examine strategies for understanding others and demonstrating grace when disagreement arises.

REFLECT

Think back to a time when someone hurt you, perhaps it is a recent memory. With reference to that situation, complete the following table:

<i>My reaction was...</i>	
<i>I felt...</i>	
<i>I wanted to...</i>	
<i>I had to...</i>	
<i>I learned to...</i>	
<i>Now I can...</i>	

Again in this session we will be looking at various passages of scripture and examining what they have to say to us about relationships and sex. The following passage helps us to carefully consider how we approach difficult subjects without falling into the trap of judging others or making assumptions about them. The gracious attitude of Jesus in this passage provides an example to all.



John 8:4-11 (NRSV)

⁴they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again".

Once you have read the passage, answer the following questions:

1. What was the woman accused of?

.....

2. What do you think Jesus wrote on the ground?

.....

3. Jesus told the woman to "Go your way, and from now on do not sin again". It is clear that Jesus thought that her actions were wrong but offered her freedom and grace and an opportunity to live in a new way. What changes do you think she made in her life following her encounter with Jesus?

.....

.....

We are often quick to judge people based on what we know about their actions or behaviours. Often, we may not ever have met the person, spoken to them or attempted to understand their motivation or circumstances. As disciples who are committed to sharing the grace of God generously, we must always be slow to condemn and instead quick to love our brothers and sisters. In the reading above, Jesus reminded everyone in the crowd that nobody is perfect.

That doesn't mean that it is wrong to ask questions or even to disagree, but it is important to respect the dignity of everyone and create safe environments where everyone can learn about one another without the fear of judgement or rejection.

REFLECT

The Bible reminds us in **1 John 1:9 (NRSV)**:

“If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Reflect on your own thoughts and actions over the past week. Have you been guilty of judging others unfairly? Confess your attitudes and thoughts to God and ask for His forgiveness.

Although the forgiveness of God is available to all who repent and ask for it, many people do not see the connection between sexual immorality and sin. The following passage, written by Paul, is often quoted when dealing with these themes. It is important to carefully consider not only the sin that it highlights, but the grace and forgiveness that it points us towards.

READ

Romans 1: 18-32 (NRSV)

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. ¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; ²¹for though they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools; ²³and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.

²⁴Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, ²⁷and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

²⁸And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. ²⁹They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, ³¹foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²They know God’s decree that those who practice such things deserve to die - yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.

 **ENGAGE**

1. How passionate do you think God is about the scenarios outlined in this passage?
2. In the light of v24, is sexual promiscuity a mark of humanity's freedom?
3. Do you think that Paul is speaking of opposite sex sexual relationships or same sex sexual relationships? How even-handed do you consider that Paul is being in his claims?
4. How do you think Paul links homosexual sexual relationships with the suppression of the truth and its exchange for a lie?
5. How clear in Paul's mind is the link between a lack of intentional discipleship and promiscuous sexual behaviour?

 **REFLECT**

How do you feel in the light of Paul's comprehensive teaching? Do you feel comfortable? Why? If not, why not? Read the passage again and write down three words about how it makes you feel.

1.
.....
2.
.....
3.
.....

 **DISCUSS**

In your group, spend some time discussing the following statement:

“The teaching of Paul regarding same-sex relationships bears little relevance to life in today's culture.”

The following passage contains the words of Jesus. In all areas of life and discipleship, surely it is his example and teaching that we seek to follow? Read the following passage and take some time to reflect on it:



Luke 6: 36-42 (NRSV)

³⁷ "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

³⁹ He also told them a parable: "Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰ A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher.

⁴¹ Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?

⁴² Or how can you say to your neighbour, 'Friend, let me take out the speck in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye."

Although Jesus is not speaking directly about Human Sexuality in this passage, his words have a resonance for this intimate area of each of our lives. This passage is another helpful reminder that we must always remember that grace must be present when discussing our own ideas or those of other people. There has been much hurt caused by angry exchanges and poor understanding. The words of Jesus also call us to live as his disciples, to discern His call and to follow His teaching in every area of our lives, including our expression of sexuality and our management of all our relationships with our fellow disciples.



In earlier sessions we discussed the following statement:

"With regard to relationships and sex, personal holiness is more important than personal happiness."

As we reach the conclusion of the studies, share your thoughts on that statement and identify any change that may have occurred.

Each of us has been created as a unique and loved individual. It is the grace of God in each of us that allows us to love one another and to share these conversations together, even when we disagree. There is great opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ to our neighbours, family, community etc in how we conduct our relationships. As this series concludes, pray that God will continue to reveal to you the ways in which you can honour him as you love him and love his people.

Your group may find it helpful to discuss their thoughts, share silence or pray together at this point.



ACTION

Confess if you have ever caused hurt to someone because of how you handled a disagreement.

Commit to showing more grace to people that you disagree with in the week ahead, even on difficult issues.

Continue to engage with this contentious issue. Read books, study scripture and ask God for wisdom to understand. Commit to engaging with materials and perspectives that are different to your own opinions as well as those that resonate with your own views. We commend the entirety of the guide for your further study and pray that it will prove beneficial to you as you continue to engage with this sensitive topic.



REFLECTION

Thank you for participating in the Church of Ireland's important conversation on human sexuality. I hope that it has been of some help to you and that it has been revealing and thought provoking, and, indeed, that its exploration has been both positive and fulfilling.

I trust that our conversations will continue and that all the deep and precious matters of our faith; our continued discipleship; our seeking to imitate Jesus Christ and our striving for peace and justice, may strengthen our confidence and resolve to proclaim the Good News of the saving love of God as shown in Christ our Lord. To him be glory for ever.

John Mann



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