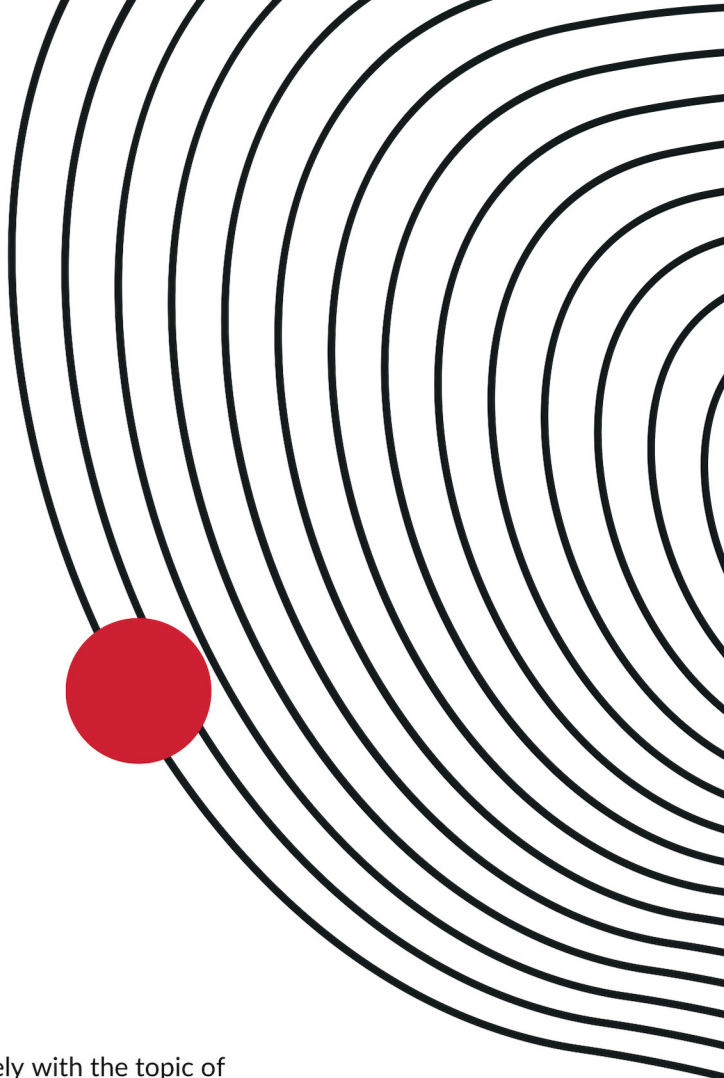


Sexuality AND JESUS



AN INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDY IN THE GOSPELS

Sexuality AND JESUS



FACILITATOR'S NOTES

This Bible study is one of a series aiming:

- To resource local churches and others to engage positively with the topic of sexuality in the Bible.
- To enable the Church to have a more Biblically-resourced conversation about sexuality, including at Conference.
- To model approaches to scripture and good conversations, including good disagreement.

This Gospels Bible study has three goals:

- To familiarise us with Matthew.
- To model how we allow scripture to surprise and challenge us.
- To consider how the Gospels resource our conversations and questions about sexuality.

There are six sections to this study:

- Introduction.
- Matthew 29:3-10 and activities.
- Matthew 29:11-12 and activities.
- Application.
- Conclusion.

In advance of the study:

- Read the Introduction for Facilitators.
- Look through the materials and make a plan.
- The core activities will take around 90 minutes. Fill the rest of your time by choosing which optional activities will suit your group best.
- Make a schedule for when each activity will begin and end.
- Make a list of what resources you need.

You will need:

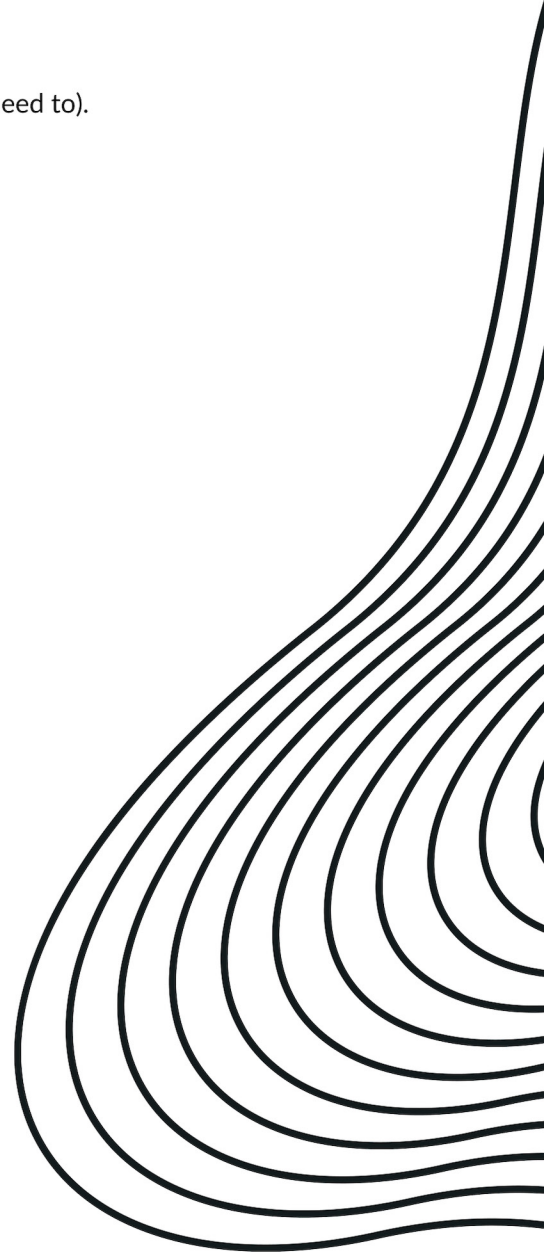
- Water, sweets and fruit for each table.
- A notebook or paper and pen for each person.
- Print outs of the text, A3 or larger (stick two A4 sheets together if you need to).
- Coloured pens.
- A screen with sound.
- A device to play the videos.
- A copy of the videos.

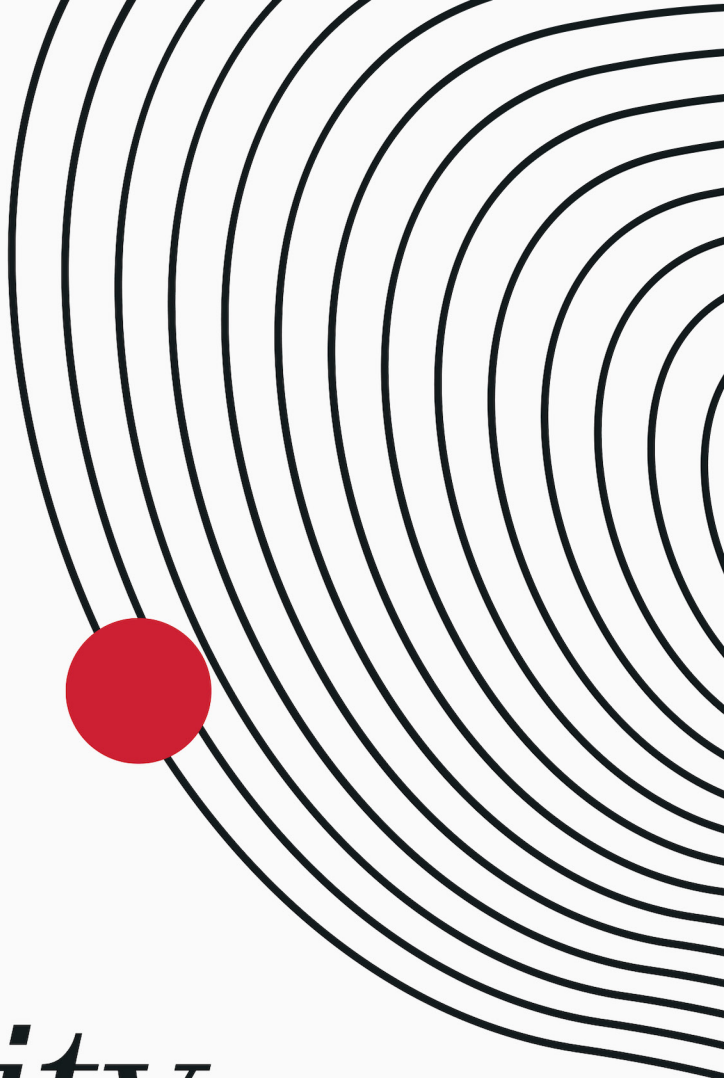
You may need:

- Post-it notes.
- Print-outs of the word bank or discussion questions.
- “Agree” and “Disagree” labels for walking debate.
- Coloured cards for spectrum debate.
- Internet access.
- Slides at [mentimeter.com](https://www.mentimeter.com) prepared in advance.

Pray:

- For the participants.
- For yourself.
- For good, Spirit-filled conversations.
- For God to be encountered in the words of scripture.





Sexuality AND JESUS



AN INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDY IN THE GOSPELS



1. WELCOME

- *Direct people to tea and coffee facilities if you have them.*
- *Explain briefly how the Bible study will run.*
- *Acknowledge the range of abilities and experiences in the room.*
- *Ask for agreement that we will be sensitive and gracious to one another especially where there are differences of opinion.*

For example:

“You are all very welcome to this Bible study. We’re going to be looking at some of the words of Jesus to see what they have to say to us about sex and sexuality. We have some short videos and activities to help us get in to it and then we’re going to be engaging with the scriptures together. This means we let the Bible speak for itself and then we bring our questions and our experiences. We talk together, we listen to one another’s perspective, and if we disagree, then the disagreement helps us to understand a different point of view and to see our own point of view more clearly. This is an ancient way of engaging with the Bible and it helps us really get the scriptures into our heads and hearts and allows it to shape our lives.

There will be a range of experiences in the room. Someone might be reading the Bible for the first time, someone might be an expert – both those perspectives are valuable. There will also likely be a range of experiences and opinions about sex and sexuality. These are important too. There is no pressure for anyone to share anything they don’t want to, but when people do share, and especially if there is a difference of opinions, can we agree that we will show Jesus-like grace to one another as we learn together? People need space to talk and think through ideas without being judged, so let’s give one another that space. Finally, when it comes to Bible study, and when it comes to sex and sexuality, we are often much more comfortable talking about the experiences of others than about ourselves. The challenge today is that I allow the scriptures to speak to me – to shape me and change me. Let’s get started.”



2. VIDEO 1: SURPRISE

This video begins the session by thinking about Jesus' ability to shock and surprise us.

Play the video until the pause sign appears.

3. OUR QUESTIONS – PART ONE

This activity gets us to consider Jesus' ability to surprise us, and then allows us to bring our questions about sex and sexuality.

Part Two of this activity comes at the end of the study.

Choose which version of the activity best suits your group:

○ ACTIVE VERSION

Resources: *Thick markers, two colours of post-it note.*

You will need enough post-it notes and thick markers for everyone and somewhere to stick the post-its that is visible to everyone.

“We have two colours of post-it note and we have two questions. The (blue) post-it note is for the first question and the (yellow) post-it note is for the second question. When you've got your answers come and stick the (blue) post-its on this side and the (yellow) post-its on this side.

Depending on your group you may want to add:

“If sticking your post-its up yourself is an issue, someone in your group can do it for you.”



○ ONLINE VERSION

Resources: Internet access. Mentimeter account. Mentimeter presentation prepared in advance.

- Log on to www.mentimeter.com
- Log In.
- Create "New Presentation".
- Click "New Slide".
- Select "Word Cloud".
- Add the question: "What is the most shocking thing Jesus says?"
- Create a second "Word Cloud" slide with the question: "What one question would you ask Jesus about sex and sexuality?"
- Display the slide on your screen.

"We have two questions to think about. If you have a device with you, go to menti.com, enter the code and then enter two or three answers. If you don't have a device with you someone else in your group can enter your answer for you."

Change slides between questions.



○ ACCESSIBILITY VERSION

Resources: Thick markers, two colours of post-it note.

This version is intended for groups where a significant number will have mobility issues and where the Online version would be impossible or inappropriate.

"We have two colours of post-it note and we have two questions. The (blue) post-it note is for the first question and the (yellow) post-it note is for the second question. When the time comes you can hold up your post-its, or stick them somewhere we can all see."

Ask:

"The first question is: What do you think is the most shocking thing Jesus says?"

Allow participants to respond. Draw attention to any common answers. You might want to ask one or two people to explain their choices.

"If you could ask Jesus just one question about sex and sexuality what would it be? We often hear people say 'If I could ask Jesus just one question, I would ask him...' Jesus doesn't always address our questions directly in scripture. We need wisdom and the help of God's Spirit to apply scripture to our lives. But if Jesus was in this room and you could ask just one question about sex and sexuality what would it be? It could be your own question. You could be asking for someone else. What does marriage mean? Why is there disagreement and division in families and churches over sexuality? Why is there suffering and abuse in the world? When it comes to sexuality, what is God's will for my life? What is your one question about sexuality?"

Allow participants to respond. Draw attention to any common answers. You might want to ask one or two people to explain their choices.

“We’re going to spend some time listening to Jesus in the scriptures, and then we’ll come back to our questions at the end.”



4. DIFFICULT TEXTS

Resources: Print of resource sheet. Bibles.

In this activity different groups read two different scriptures, then report back to one another.

“Everyone who met Jesus was challenged and changed, so when we meet Jesus in scripture, we should expect to be challenged and changed. We may have our own ideas about what Jesus teaches about sex and sexuality, marriage and family, but we’re going to read Jesus’ words for ourselves and talk together about what we hear.”

This works well by splitting table groups in half with one half reading Matthew and the other half reading Luke. The first part of the discussion happens in those small groups. The second part of the discussion is for two small groups joined together (one Matthew group and one Luke group.)

Distribute copies of the printed resource sheet. Allow about half the time for the first part of the discussion and half the time for the second part.

In small groups:

Read either Matthew 22:30 or Luke 14:26

Discuss:

- Why might people be shocked to hear Jesus say this?
- Do you think people in Jesus’ time would have been shocked to hear Jesus say this?
- Read a few verses before and after. Is it any more clear what Jesus means?

In larger groups:

Report back to one another: What is your text about?

Discuss together:

- What questions have Jesus’ words left you with?
- Do you think it’s still possible for people to be surprised by Jesus’ words 2,000 years after he spoke them? Why or why not?



5. VIDEO 2: INTRODUCING MATTHEW 19:3-10

Play the video until the pause sign appears.



6. READING MATTHEW 19:3-10

Resources: A3 coloured prints of Matthew 19:3-10, coloured pens.

Print Matthew 19:3-10 in colour on A3 paper. Cut along the dotted line to keep the Matthew:19:11-12 text for later. Depending on your group you may want one per table, two per table, or even one per person.



“One person in each group should read the text out loud. Choose a coloured pen and as you listen, underline any words that seem important. If there is something you have questions about, put a question mark. Write any comments and questions in the white space.”

Give enough time for each group to finish reading aloud.

“What is your number one question about this text? Tell your group.”



7. COMMENTARY BUILDER – PART ONE

Resources: A3 coloured prints of Matthew commentary, cut into sections.

This is the central activity of this Bible study. Participants take pieces of commentary in any order, match them with the Bible text and discuss a question. It will work in threes or whole tables.



Print a colour A3 copy of the Matthew Commentary for each group, cut along the dotted lines. Set aside the blue sections numbered 6-8 for later.



○ TABLE-TOP VERSION

Give each group a copy of pieces 1-5. Fold them in half, jumble them up, put them in a box or a glass.

“We’re going to dig a little deeper into what Jesus is saying. So take a slip of paper at random from in front of you. Match it to the Bible text. Read what it says, then discuss the question. You have a few minutes for each.”



○ HIDE-AND-SEEK VERSION

Print enough copies of pieces 1-5 for each group and hide them around the room, bluetacked to walls, under tables, in picture frames etc.

“We’re going to dig a little deeper into what Jesus is saying. There are five pieces of information for each group and they are hidden around the room. So start looking. When you find one, stop searching, match it to the Bible text. Read what it says, then discuss the question before looking for the next piece. You have a few minutes for each.”



8. DISCUSSION TOPICS – JESUS ON DIVORCE

Resources: *Print of topics resource sheet.*

This activity works well in threes, or as a whole table. Distribute print-outs with the questions.



Choose two or three of these topics and share your thoughts and questions with one another.

1. Which of the pieces of information is most important to understanding the text?
Are any of the pieces of information something you had never thought of before?
2. Some people say Jesus sides with the conservative Rabbi Shammai in the divorce debate. Do you think he does? Or is what Jesus says different from both Shammai and Hillel?
3. Jesus takes a different approach to scripture from the Pharisees. When they were debating the meaning of a single word of the law in Deuteronomy, Jesus answers by pointing them to Genesis.
What can we learn from Jesus’ approach to scripture?
Does Jesus’ approach mean that some scriptures carry more weight than others?
Does Jesus approach mean that we need to know the big picture and understand where scriptures fit in the story if we want to apply them?
4. What would it mean to take Jesus’ approach to the debates of our time?
What assumptions does Jesus challenge?
What attitudes does Jesus criticise?
What would Jesus say into polarised debates?
What might Jesus say that no one else is saying?



CONVERSATION



9. QUOTE: EUGENE M. BORING ON “WHAT GOD HAS JOINED TOGETHER”.

Resources: *Print of resource sheet.*



Provide a printed copy of this material to each group.



“In all of this, while still reflecting the first-century patriarchal culture, Jesus has transcended its views of marriage and the family by making marriage an element of the will of God, expressed in creation rather than merely a culturally conditioned contract on the human level. In the biblical story of creation, the first human pair were intended solely for each other, marriage being a God-given human relationship.”

M. Eugene Boring – The Gospel of Matthew, The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, Abingdon Press, 2015, pg285

- In what ways could it be said that Jesus’s teaching here is “still reflecting the first-century patriarchal culture”?
- In what ways has Jesus “transcended [first- century] views of marriage and the family”?
- Is it overstating the case to suggest that Pharisees did not think of Genesis as a model for marriage until Jesus suggested it?
- What questions does it give us if we say marriage is “an element of the will of God”?



10. VIDEO 3: WHAT WOULD JESUS SAY TO US TODAY?

This video provides a brief link to the next piece of text.



Play the video until the pause sign appears.



11. READING MATTHEW 19:11-12

Resources: *A3 coloured prints of Matthew 19:11-12, coloured pens.*

Distribute the copies of Matthew:19:11-12 that you cut from the A3 print out earlier.



“As before, one person in each group should read the text out loud. Choose a coloured pen and as you listen, underline any words that seem important. If there is something you have questions about, put a question mark. Write any comments and questions in the white space.”



Give enough time for each group to finish reading aloud.

“What is your number one question about this text? Tell your group.”



12. COMMENTARY BUILDER – PART TWO

Resources: *Print of resource sheet.*

As with Part One, participants take pieces of commentary in any order, match them with the Bible text and discuss a question.

Distribute the blue sections of the commentary numbered 6-8.



○ TABLE-TOP VERSION

Give each group a copy of pieces 6-8. Fold them in half, jumble them up, put them in a box or a glass.

“As before, we’re going to dig a little deeper into Jesus’ words. So take a slip of paper at random from in front of you. Match it to the Bible text. Read what it says, then discuss the question. You have a few minutes for each.”



○ HIDE-AND-SEEK VERSION

Print enough copies of pieces 6-8 for each group. This time you will have to hide them some time after the end of Part One.

“As before, we’re going to dig a little deeper into Jesus’ words. There are three pieces of information for each group and they are hidden around the room. So start looking. When you find one, stop searching, match it to the Bible text. Read what it says, then discuss the question before looking for the next piece. You have a few minutes for each.”



13. DISCUSSION TOPICS – JESUS AND EUNUCHS

Resources: *Print of topics resource sheet.*

This activity works well in threes, or as a whole table. Distribute print-outs with the questions.



Choose one or two of these topics and share your thoughts and questions with one another.

1. “Jesus was the first religious teacher that we know of to elevate the role of unmarried, single life to be a normal, honorable, significant, meaningful way of life. Early Christianity was the first religious movement that elevated people not getting married as leading exemplary lives.”

Tim Mackie - Jesus, Marriage, and Sex [Matthew], YouTube

Is it difficult to imagine how revolutionary this teaching of Jesus was?

Is it still revolutionary in our time?

How good are churches at communicating this teaching of Jesus?



2. Jesus chooses “eunuch” as his metaphor for people who don’t get married, don’t have sex and don’t have children.
Does Jesus mean that giving up marriage, sex and children is “cutting off” a part of yourself?
Is Jesus positive or negative about this choice?

3. Jesus acknowledges that some people are born in a way that means they will not get married, have sex or have children. Is our culture accepting of this? Is our church culture accepting of this?

4. How much tension is there between Genesis, where the man and woman are partners and sexuality is part of the good creation, and Jesus’ teaching here that elevates being unmarried?
Are there married and unmarried ways to reflect the image of God?
Are there married and unmarried ways to experience and express covenant love?



14. “THOSE TO WHOM IT HAS BEEN GIVEN”?

Resources: *Print of resource sheet.*

Provide a printed copy of this material to each group.

There is a debate about what is being referred to in verse 11: “not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.” Likewise verse 12: “The one who can accept this should accept it.”

What possible options can you see for the “word” that Jesus is referring to?

How much does this parallel 1 Corinthians 7:7 where Paul describes celibacy as a gift that not everyone has?

What interpretive techniques could shed light on this question?



15. PAUSE – PART ONE

Resources: *Print of topics resource sheet.*

This quiet activity allows a pause for reflection before moving on.

“It is good to pause for moment, to allow us to catch up with ourselves. So sit comfortably, and let’s have a moment of quiet.

...

And in the quiet, call to mind:
Anything you have found interesting.

...

Anything that has surprised you.

...

Anything that has been uncomfortable to hear.

...

Acknowledge it.
Hold it.
And know that you are held by God.

Leave a minute or so of quiet before continuing.



16. VIDEO 4: WHAT ABOUT US?

This video introduces applying the scripture to our context.

Play the video until the pause sign appears.



17. DISCUSSION TOPICS – TIM MACKIE

This activity works well in threes, or as a whole table. Distribute print-outs with the questions.



CONVERSATION

Choose two or three of these quotes from Bible Project's Tim Mackie and share your thoughts and questions with one another.

1. "For Jesus the purpose of life is not happiness. The purpose of life is the kingdom of God... human beings will fulfil their true purpose when they are so made like God's own character that they are living breathing images of the loving Creator God. For some humans that will mean getting married because marriage, in Jesus' view, is... a covenant symbol of the covenant love of God. But in Jesus's mind is getting married the only way to image the covenant love of God? No."

What part of this is the most challenging?

What part of this is most different to how our culture views life and marriage?

2. "Sex produces about as much heartbreak as it does ecstasy and marriage is definitely not a guarantee of happiness or fulfilment."

Do you think this is a fair comment?

Where do we encounter idealised views of sex and marriage?

3. "We end up creating churches where people who are not married feel second-class and where people who are gay feel even more ostracized."

How much has a certain view of marriage contributed to making people feel lesser or unwelcome in Church spaces?

How could what we have heard from Jesus today challenge that?

4. "In our culture, to hear Jesus say you don't need to have sex to have a meaningful life... You may as well start talking about aliens... That is so off the map of our culture."

How challenging is the idea that you don't need to have sex to have a meaningful life?

Can you think of any prominent examples of people who are single and celibate?

5. "Jesus envisions a full, meaningful, significant human existence that does not involve having sex or having children but it does involve a life of covenant love."

What does it mean to have a life of covenant love?

How could local churches become better places for unmarried people to experience and express covenant love?

All quotes taken from: Tim Mackie - Jesus, Marriage, and Sex [Matthew], YouTube.



18. THE SOURCE OF OUR ETHICS

Resources: *Print of resource sheet.*

Provide a printed copy of this material to each group.

Matthew 19 asks a question about the foundation of our sexual ethics.

In a polarised debate, liberals and conservatives were debating the meaning of scripture. In quoting Genesis rather than the law, Jesus is making quite a radical move, suggesting that the focus is in the wrong place.

- Might Jesus' view that the law of Moses was a concession have been controversial for the Pharisees?
- How strong a case could be made that the Pharisees were basing their sexual ethics primarily on factors other than scripture?
- What warning does the Pharisees' approach give in contemporary debates in the Church?
- How much do you agree with this summary of the difference of approaches between Jesus and the Pharisees?

The source of our Christian sexual ethics cannot be conservative normativity. It must be a radical picture of new creation.



19. SPECTRUM DEBATE

Read a series of statements and have participants indicate their response.

○ WALKING VERSION

Designate one end of the room “agree” and the opposite end “disagree.” People place themselves somewhere along the line based on how much they agree or disagree with the statement read.

“I’m going to read some statements. If you agree with the statement go to this end of the room. If you disagree with the statement go to this end of the room. Or, place yourself anywhere in between.”

○ TRAFFIC LIGHTS VERSION

Resources: Green, amber and red cards for each participant.

Each participant has a green, amber and red card. Read the statements. People hold up cards to indicate how much they agree or disagree.

“Everyone has three cards. I’m going to read some statements. If you mostly agree with the statement raise your green card. If you mostly disagree with the statement, raise your red card. If you are somewhere in the middle raise your amber card.”

○ ONLINE VERSION

Resources: Internet access. Mentimeter account. Mentimeter presentation prepared in advance. Agree-Disagree Spectrum image.

- Log on to www.mentimeter.com
- Log In.
- Create “New Presentation”.
- Click “New Slide”.
- Select “Pin on image”.
- Add the image of the agree-disagree spectrum.
- Change the title text to the statement.
- You will need a fresh slide for each of the statements you read.
- Display the slide on your screen.

Participants log on to menti.com using phones or other devices, enter the code, then place a pin somewhere on the image.

“Log on to menti.com and enter the code. I’m going to read some statements. If you agree with the statement then place your pin at that end of the spectrum. If you disagree with the statement place your pin at that end of the spectrum. Or, place yourself anywhere in between.”

Statement 1:

“Jesus’ vision of sexuality is totally shocking in our world. Agree or disagree.

Why have you placed yourself there?

What is the most shocking thing about it?”

Statement 2:

“Marriage is easier than singleness. Agree or disagree.

Why have you placed yourself there?”

Statement 3:

“It is better to remain unmarried. Agree or disagree.

Why have you placed yourself there?”

Statement 4:

“The church has been a welcoming place for single people. Agree or disagree?”

Why have you placed yourself there?

Does anyone who disagrees have suggestions about how to do better?

Statement 5:

“My local church values singleness as highly as marriage. Agree or disagree?”

Statement 6:

“The Church does a good job representing Jesus’ vision of sexuality. Agree or disagree?”

Why have you placed yourself there?

Does anyone who disagrees have suggestions about how to do better?



20. OUR QUESTIONS – PART TWO

This activity refers back to Part One and the answers people gave. If you used a post-it note version of that activity, indicate it. If you used an online version, return to your worldcloud slide. Read the reflection slowly.

We're going to finish with some quiet reflection, so sit comfortably.

...We started off by bringing our answers to the question – What do you think is the most shocking thing Jesus says? Have a look at the answers that were given.

...Would you add anything to them now?

...Is it good that Jesus can surprise us?

...We then thought about the one question we would ask Jesus about sex and sexuality.

... Look at the questions we asked.

... We said at the start that Jesus doesn't always address our questions directly in scripture. We need wisdom and the help of God's Spirit to apply scripture to our lives.

... Are any of your questions answered?

... Did anything we heard today help you to think differently about your question?

...

After spending time in the scripture, do you now have any more questions that you would add?

...

... What's next for those questions? Is it something you need to hold in prayer? Or continue to think through? Or to bring to the scriptures again? Or to follow up with a conversation or an action?

...

... We remember that all our thoughts, all our feelings, all our questions, are welcome before God."



21. VIDEO 5: FINAL REFLECTIONS

Play the video until the end.

22. RESPONDING

Resources: Pens and paper. Prints of Responding resource sheet.

Depending on your group you might want to leave them with more than just the two questions from the video to think about. This list of response suggestions can go home with people, or – if you have some extra time you could do them together.

“There are lots of ways we can respond to what we hear in scripture. Here are a few suggestions that you can use to help get the scripture into our heads, hearts and lives.”

Responding to Scripture.

This week, ask yourself:

- What is the most shocking or surprising thing I have heard Jesus say?
- How might it change me?

You might want to respond in some more ways. Here are some suggestions.

- Write a personal prayer responding to what you’ve heard in the scripture.
- Create something: a poem; a painting; a list; a sculpture; a meal; a photograph; a wordcloud.
- Read or listen to Matthew 19 at BibleGateway.com.
- Choose just one word or phrase and think about what it means.
- List some personal commitments that you want to make in the coming week.
- Listen to this talk about Matthew 19:3-10 from BibleProject’s Tim Mackie:



Jesus, Marriage, and Sex [Matthew] - Tim Mackie (The Bible Project)
youtu.be/1xvt6AMaBow



23. CLOSING

- *Thank everyone for coming and taking part.*
- *Remind people to respect one another by keeping any opinions and stories shared confidential.*
- *Remind people where to find appropriate pastoral support if desired.*
- *Share details of any future Bible studies.*



FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD • LIVING WHOLEHEARTEDLY AS FOLLOWERS

© 2024 The Methodist Church in Ireland. Registered Charity No. 108435 (NI) No. 20000578 (ROI).