



# Sexuality

DISCUSSION SESSION 2  
**Human Sexuality in  
Christian Perspective**



# Note to Discussion Sessions

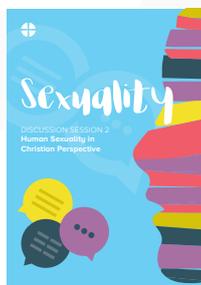
The following discussion session is part of a 4 series programme which has been designed to be used in a group from a local congregation or circuit. You can decide how much or how little of the suggested format to use. You know your context best. Please, modify or adapt the sessions as you see fit for the comfort level of your participants. If the full plan is followed, you should allow an hour to an hour and a half for each of the four sessions, which might easily be scheduled one night a week for a month.

The session guides are complements to and assume that participants will have read 'Sexuality – Developing Good Conversation on Difficult Questions' or the relevant sections of the document for each session prior to attendance. If your group does not wish to work in this way, you may plan to have some copies of the document on hand for people to review the relevant sections over a cup of tea/coffee prior to the start of the session.

## Session 1 Why This, Why Now



## Session 2 Human Sexuality in Christian Perspective



## Session 3 Discussing Homosexuality



## Session 4 What Should We Do next



🌐 All of these can be downloaded from [www.irishmethodist.org/WPHS](http://www.irishmethodist.org/WPHS)

# Sexuality

## DISCUSSION SESSION 2 Human Sexuality in Christian Perspective



## You Will Need:

- ✓ a Bible for each participant
- ✓ a copy of 'Sexuality – Developing Good Conversation on Difficult Questions' for each participant
- ✓ small group handout
- ✓ Gouge handout
- ✓ Methodist teaching handout
- ✓ a flip chart or white board
- ✓ sticky tape or blue tack for affixing flip chart pages around the room
- ✓ a pack of sticky notes
- ✓ a pen/pencil for each participant
- ✓ 'Rules' for good discussions page the group created last time (hang in a prominent place in the room)

### Open the Session with prayer.

#### PRAYER

Eternal God, who in Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, teach us to live in love, one for each other, not regarding ourselves more highly than we ought, but outdoing one another in loving service. Teach us to look to the interests of others, in imitation of the one who offered himself up because of his great love for the world. It is in his name that we ask it, Amen.

#### ICE-BREAKER

 10 mins

Give each member the 'sticky notes handout', four or five sticky notes and a pen/pencil.

Ask members to spend some time reflecting on what they read on the handout and write at least one answer to each question on a sticky note (they can write more if they wish).

### Tasks for the Leader while participants are thinking:

While the groups are discussing, prepare a flip chart page each for 'reactions/responses to the statement,' 'positive aspects of human sexuality,' 'negative aspects of human sexuality,' 'most urgent things for the church to do'. Hang these in separate areas of the room with the sticky tape or blue tack. Also during this time prepare a flip chart page with four large boxes like the Four Wesleyan Sources Handout from last time. Put Scripture, Reason, Tradition, and Experience each in one box.

Invite people, when they are ready, to put their sticky notes on the flip chart pages that correspond to the questions. When everyone has had a turn, read out what is on each and invite discussion.

Invite the group to voice similar themes or points of emphasis that are coming out of their reflection. Is there anything that you want to keep as an insight for our discussion? Write relevant comments in the boxes on the Wesleyan Sources flip chart page. Most of these will probably belong in either the reason or experience boxes, but if people make comments that come from one of the other areas, write it there.

#### BIBLE STUDY

 40 mins

### Get three volunteers to read one of the following biblical passages each:

 Song of Songs 1:1-2:7

 Proverbs 5:15-23

 1 Corinthians 7:1-9

As a group, see if you can describe each passage's perspective on human sexuality. What does the passage present as good about human sexuality? What does the passage present as bad or dangerous about human sexuality? What boundaries does the passage put around the expression of human sexuality?

### To the leader:

You may find it helpful to read some relevant materials about these passages prior to the session. A bibliography is provided at the end of these study session materials. Particular points of emphasis to bear in mind include the poetic nature of Song of Songs. That is, it gives images and metaphors to convey meaning and is not best 'decoded'. Poetry works with emotions and impressions as well as ideas, so it may be helpful to have your group think about how the poem makes them feel or what word pictures they find most compelling as a way into the passage. The Proverbs passage conveys 'conventional' style teaching presented as a father's advice to his son. This passage appears within larger teaching on avoiding the temptations of adultery. The Corinthians passage needs to be read with an awareness that Paul is answering questions raised by the Christians at Corinth in a letter they wrote to him. Paul deliberately differentiates between advice he gives and things commanded by the Lord.

As a group, name those things that you learned from the Scripture passages and list these in the Scripture section of the chart paper.

### ENGAGING TRADITION

 35 mins

#### Break into two small groups:

Distribute the handouts: William Gouge; Methodist Teaching (one to each group) Ask groups to read aloud and then discuss the questions.

When you re-gather have each group present a little bit about what they read and what they learned. Put notes from these insights into the Tradition square of the Four Wesleyan Sources flip chart page.

As a whole group, review what you have gathered from Scripture, Reason, Tradition

and Experience. Discuss: what things would we like to emphasise in describing Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective?

### CLOSING ACTIVITY

 20 mins

After the group has discussed for a few minutes, let them know that the final task for this session is to create our own group definition of God's purposes and intentions for human sexuality (to the best of our ability). This can be done as a group 'writing' project.

At the top of a new page of the flip chart write 'God's purposes and intentions for human sexuality'. Explain that you will give the pen to someone who will write as much or as little as they like, leaving off wherever they like and passing the pen to someone else. Each person will pick up where the previous writer left off and continue writing the statement. When everyone has had a turn, you can offer additional turns to anyone who thinks they might have more to say. Then, lead the group in a discussion of what you have written. Are there parts that not everyone agrees on? Are there things you'd like to smooth out, or delete? Are you happy that the statement expresses what you have discussed as a group?

#### Close the Session with prayer.

### PRAYER

God our maker and our sustainer, you have made us fearfully and wonderfully. We have struggled to express your purposes for our relationships, but we trust in your guidance and in your grace. Teach us to use our minds, our bodies, our emotions, and our relationships for your purposes and for your glory. In the name of Christ, who offered the whole of himself for our sakes, Amen.

# Sticky Notes Handout

According to the document 'Sexuality – Developing Good Conversation on Difficult Questions': 'Christians are heirs to at least two different ways of thinking about sex. One concentrates on the negative aspects of sexuality – its capacity for abuse, selfishness, deceit and destructiveness. The other sees the positive side of sex as part of God's good intention for a flourishing human life, one in which love and companionship are developed within a committed sexual relationship'

1. How do you respond to this statement? Do you think it is accurate? What have you heard from the church about sex?

3. List positive features of human sexuality that merit the church's attention.

2. List negative features of human sexuality that merit the church's attention.

4. Which list is most urgent? Why? What should we be doing about it?



# Methodist Teaching

Read the following two excerpts. Then answer the questions below:

## Excerpt from 'Practical Expressions of Methodist Belief'

('Practical Expressions of Methodist Belief' accessed online: [http://www.irishmethodist.org/sites/default/files/pdf/news/practical\\_expressions\\_of\\_methodist\\_belief.pdf](http://www.irishmethodist.org/sites/default/files/pdf/news/practical_expressions_of_methodist_belief.pdf))

*We recognise the family as the primary unit in society and all possible encouragement is given to ministers and congregations to support and strengthen family life. Marriage is a relationship, intended as permanent, between one man and one woman within which sexual intercourse establishes a unique intimacy. A loving marriage relationship is seen as the only appropriate relationship within which sexual intercourse may take place. The church advocates responsible family planning, with the use of contraception.*

## Excerpt from 'I do: How United Methodists understand Christian marriage'

Accessed online: [www.umc.org/what-we-believe/i-do-how-united-methodists-understand-christian-marriage](http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/i-do-how-united-methodists-understand-christian-marriage)

*A service of Christian marriage is a celebration of love, but not simply the romantic love between husband and wife. It also celebrates the love of God for us, and the love Jesus calls us Christians to share with the world.*

*The Dismissal of "A Service of Christian Marriage" illustrates this well. After offering a brief prayer of blessing over the couple, the pastor charges the couple to a lifetime of mission, saying, "Go to serve God and your neighbor in all that you do."*

*The pastor then addresses the whole congregation with these words, "Bear witness to the love of God in this world, so that those to whom love is a stranger will find in you generous friends."*

*A wedding is a beautiful moment that ushers in a new era for the bride and groom, and a worship service reminding us of the love God has shown us in Christ Jesus. In Christian marriage, we are called to be witnesses of that love and to share it with others.*

1. What was new to you in Methodist teaching about marriage? What surprised you?

3. What is the relationship between marital love and Christian love?

2. What perspective do these passages take on human sexuality?

4. How does our human sexuality impact upon / interact with our relationship with other human beings?

# Bibliography for the Leader

## SONG OF SONGS

Richard M. Davidson 'Theology of Sexuality in the Song of Songs: Return to Eden' *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 27:1 (1989): 1-19. accessed online [biblicalstudies.org.uk](http://biblicalstudies.org.uk) 25.11.16 <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1917&context=auss>

André LaCocque, 'Love in the Song of Songs' <http://www.bibleodyssey.org/passages/related-articles/love-in-the-song-of-songs.aspx>

Fiona C. Black, 'Love as Strong as Death (Song 8:6-7)' <http://www.bibleodyssey.org/passages/main-articles/love-as-strong-as-death.aspx>

Meredith G. Kline, 'Bible Book of the Month – Song of Songs' *Christianity Today* 3 (1959): 22-23, 29. accessed online [biblicalstudies.org.uk](http://biblicalstudies.org.uk) 25.11.16 [http://www.meredithkline.com/files/articles/bible\\_book\\_of\\_the\\_month\\_song\\_of\\_songs\\_kline.pdf](http://www.meredithkline.com/files/articles/bible_book_of_the_month_song_of_songs_kline.pdf)

## PROVERBS

Robert B. Chisholm, "Drink Water from your own Cistern": A Literary Study of Proverbs 5:15-23' *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (2000): 397-409 accessed online [biblicalstudies.org.uk](http://biblicalstudies.org.uk) 25.11.16 [http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted\\_hildebrandt/OTeSources/20-Proverbs/Text/Articles/Chisholm-ProvCistern-BSac.htm](http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/OTeSources/20-Proverbs/Text/Articles/Chisholm-ProvCistern-BSac.htm)

## 1 CORINTHIANS

G.J. Laughery, 'Paul: anti-marriage? Anti-Sex? Ascetic? A Dialogue with 1 Corinthians 7:1-40,' *Evangelical Quarterly* 69.2 (1997):109-128. accessed online [biblegateway.org](http://biblegateway.org) 25.11.16 [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/1997-2\\_laughery.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/1997-2_laughery.pdf)

1-2 Corinthians Resource Page, E.N.T.E.R., Felix Just, S.J. <http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Paul-Corinth.htm>

David G. Horrel 'Corinth' Bible Odyssey <http://www.bibleodyssey.org/places/main-articles/corinth.aspx>