

Dear Community Group Leaders,

Thanks for all you do!

This week's discussion guide is quite long, for a reason. We don't expect you to use all of it! Given the nature of the topic we wanted to give you options, based on the particular make-up of your group, on how to lead a fruitful discussion.

You will find questions here that focus more on the overall passage (1 Cor. 6:9-20), and questions that are more focused on the topic of alternative sexuality. Please pick and choose a few from each section that will work the best for your group. You'll also find some resources suggested by Rankin for further study.

As always, please call me if you have any questions, or just want to process all of this a bit more as you look forward to leading your group this week!

Blessings to you,

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The Cruciform Life: Gospel Identity

Oct. 22, 2017

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Psalm 103

(Here is a passage to help your group as you worship. You can go through it together or in groups in meditation and/or in prayer)

Have one person in the group read through the Psalm as an opening time of meditation and prayer. Read it through slowly, pausing between each line and asking everyone in the group to ponder a specific way each of the “benefits” listed have been true in their own life. After the Psalm, share in a time of prayers of thanksgiving based on what everyone has meditated upon during the reading of the Psalm.

Icebreaker

What’s the last movie you saw that portrayed sexuality in a way that either bothered you, or that affirmed something you believe?

Text for Discussion: I Cor. 6:9-20

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

This is a difficult, controversial passage that has caused a lot of pain and stirred up a good deal of controversy. So before discussing it, we must remember that it is talking about people who deserve our love, sympathy and compassion – our neighbors, coworkers, friends, family, *ourselves*. And we should ask why the church today seems to attract the very people Jesus repelled while repelling those He attracted. How has the church come to feel more like a waiting room for a job interview than the waiting room of urgent care?

Jesus welcomed those on the margins of society. He ate with them, listened to them, and cared for them like no one else ever had. We too should be the first to offer kindness, sympathy and compassion. Our desire should be to hold grace and truth together – always in that order and always full of both – willing to walk the line of radical inclusivity for all and radical demand for any ready to admit their need of Jesus and accept His help.

We must stop treating sexual sins as more worthy of condemnation than our socially acceptable ones. The Bible never says this. But sexual sins do affect the body uniquely because they involve our bodies in a way nothing else does. The act unites body and soul, the physical expression of whole life intimacy, and God’s way for us to say, “I belong completely and exclusively to you in every respect.” It satisfies some of our deepest unmet emotional needs: intimacy, connection, the need to be touched. And it feels good. If we put those together – exhilarating physical sensation with deep emotional satisfaction – it’s no wonder we can’t resist, especially if we’re not convinced of the harm it could cause. Like any loving father, God puts boundaries around the powerful things that have the potential to harm His beloved children. Because like fire, when taken outside its created boundaries, sex can be destructive and leave scars.

Sex is a foretaste of the communion God made us to have with Himself, a promise of a union more real than any we could have with another person (v15). For our Father is the only one who can truly say, “I will love you, forever.” Outside the church, sex has become irreducibly bound to our sense of identity and essential to human intimacy. But these cultural conversations about freedom and identity are not ultimately about sexuality. They are about the question of what makes for a flourishing, fully human life. For if freedom means the ability to express ourselves in the ways we determine, then to deny or restrict self-expression can’t help but feel unnatural, unkind and unjust – like a denial of our true identity. But what if we were meant to discover who we are in relationship with God rather than by looking within ourselves or achieved by our choices? What if our real self is waiting to be found in Christ, receiving by God’s grace? Wouldn’t that make sense if God created us?

Christians ought to be the most compassionate people about these questions of sexuality. We of all people know sin is not freely chosen and that without Jesus we are trapped and held in bondage by powers we cannot break by ourselves. We should also be overflowing with sympathy. If any of us thinks the Gospel can slot easily into our lives

without causing major disruption to our own aspirations, then it's likely we have not really started following Jesus at all. A change in our habits is not a condition of being welcomed and loved by Jesus. But because He rose from the dead, we have to listen to and follow Him, even when it's hard to understand what He's asking and why. Each of us has things Jesus asks us to renounce – things that are precious to us, deep desires we've had for as long as we can remember. What Jesus asks of us to prize Him over is not easy: father, mother, sister, brother, our own lives. The Way is hard that leads to life... but what if it's worth it? What if everything Jesus says is true, and one day we will see that all He asks of us to lay down has been worth it?

What will it take for us to become a community where every person feels like part of a new family with access to deep soul-knitting friendships that are deeper and more satisfying than the families we were born into? Let us extend grace and peace to one another as sisters and brothers, helping each other to remember that Jesus is better and His love is greater than any other love.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

What does it mean to live in a way that recognizes that “you are not your own”? (vs. 19)

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

Opening Questions

- Read vs. 9-11 again. What do you think the phrase, “inherit the Kingdom of God” (repeated 2X in these verses) is referring to?
 - How does being “washed, justified, and sanctified” (vs. 11b) provide a balance to what is listed in vs. 9-10? How does it provide a foundation for the verses to come?

Digging Deeper

- Read vs. 12-13. What are some examples of things that “lawful but not helpful” for you personally? (Note that these may be different for different people).
- Read vs. 15-17. How does the fact that our bodies are “members of Christ” affect how we think about our sexuality, and our sexual activity?
- Read Genesis 2:21-25. This is a key biblical picture of healthy sexual activity – it is designed to take place in the context of marriage between a man and a woman.
 - How is sexual immorality unhelpful to us?
 - How does maintaining biblical sexual practices help us?
- Read vs. 18. What does “fleeing” from sexual immorality look like in our current culture?
- How do we flee immorality, and yet maintain an attitude of compassion and non-judgmentalism towards those outside of the church who do not agree with a biblical stance?

Discussion Guide Editor's note: The bible is clearly in the camp of treating alternative sexuality as being outside of what God's desire is for us (i.e., treating it as sexually immoral). If people have questions about this concept, point the resources at the end of this guide for further study. Work to keep the focus of the discussion on how we can be loving and caring to those who do not agree, while maintaining biblical standards in our own lives. The resources at the end of this guide were suggested by Rankin, and include a short summary (in italics) from him regarding the book's content.

Application Time (split up into groups of men and women for this section)

- Read verses 19-20. Then go back and read vs. 9-11 again. What are some ways we can make our bodies “a temple” with regard to...
 - Greed, honesty, alcohol, gossip (some of the things listed in vs. 9-10)
 - Specifically, what are some ways we can make our bodies “a temple” with regard to sexuality?
- Read Matthew 5:8. How does the positive motivation that “the pure in heart shall see God” help you as you think about living rightly with regard to your sexuality?
 - How can this positive motivation be more effective than a negative motivation (i.e., a focus on moving towards godliness rather than a focus on “not doing sin”)?
- What are some specific actions you can take this week to lean into the idea that “you are not your own”? (vs. 19b).

Experiment of the Week

- Read through Psalm 103 every day this week. Each day, write down one “benefit” (vs. 2) that jumps out at you of being united with Christ.
- At the end of each day, write down one sentence in a journal that describes how you saw that benefit evidenced in your life during the day.
- At the end of the week, write a paragraph or two that details how what you recognized in the past week can be a motivation for you towards following the way of Jesus with regard to sexual morality, or towards leaning into a lifestyle of generosity, honesty, temperance, and gracious speech? (The opposites of some of the things listed in vs. 9-11.)

Praying for One Another

(Here are some ideas from the study to help focus your time in prayer as a group. Use by themselves or along with other prayer requests.)

- Pray for each other around some of the specific struggles that have been mentioned during the application time.
- Read Psalm 103 once again as a closing reminder of how God’s benefits can motivate us towards walking with Him every day.

Resources for further study:

Is God Anti-Gay? by Sam Alberry

London, UK: The Good Book, 2015

Probably the best short treatment of the traditional view.

Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality by Wesley Hill

Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016

If you want to know what it’s like to be gay and celibate, Hill has written what many in his shoes consider to be the definitive account.

The Secret Thoughts of An Unlikely Convert by Rosaria Butterfield

Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant, 2012

A well-publicized account of how the repentance and kindness of a pastor was integral in the radical shift of this former lesbian women’s studies professor.

Jesus Outside the Lines by Scott Sauls

Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2015

A model approach to the important themes of “tone and posture” in navigating controversial issues.