

Welcome to Relationships Matter

This course is designed to deepen our understanding of what the Bible says about sex, sexuality and same-sex attraction, and to see that it really does offer a better story about relationships than our culture.

Who is this course for?

This course is for anyone and everyone. It helps us understand how much we have been shaped by various cultural stories when it comes to sex, sexuality and same-sex attraction. In contrast, the course is designed to deepen our understanding of what the Bible says about sexuality and relationships and to see that it really does offer a better story. It's best used in a small group context but can be used in larger groups or individually.

What you need to run this course

- A laptop, or device to watch the video. You can either download them so they're available offline, or watch them on YouTube, or streamed from the Being Human website (beinghumanlens.com).
- The PDF study guides for each session can be downloaded and printed or viewed on a phone, tablet, or laptop.
- An environment where people will feel comfortable to talk about sex and sexuality – a living room, or a room at church. You want to create a space where people feel able to share openly and ask questions.

What each session looks like

Introduction: We'll leave this up to you. Get your group chatting, recap last week, or open in prayer.

Video: Watch the video, which will be about 15 minutes long.

Discussion: Go through the discussion questions, don't worry if you don't cover them all, allow conversation to flow naturally.

Additional resources: End by pointing your group to extra resources, this will be helpful for people with questions or who want to go a bit deeper.

Tips for leaders

1. Be the first to share vulnerably

Topics of sex and sexuality are deeply personal, and some people will find them hard to talk about. If you feel able, first model honesty and openness as this will help your group feel at ease and will foster good conversation.

2. Listen well

When people share their story, experience, or questions, listen well, resist interrupting, allow the person to feel heard and valued before responding.

3. Include everyone

As the leader, you don't need to answer all the questions. Encourage everyone to speak, asking for their opinions, teasing out peoples' questions – that's much better than them listening to you give good answers.

4. Pray

Pray for your group before and after the session. It's always important to pray, but particularly when it comes to discussing issues of sex and sexuality. We have included 'Response' sections in each session; these are quite generic but can also be amended to allow space for more personal ministry time if that's where the conversation and the groups lean towards. These topics are spiritually contested topics, so don't forget to pray with and for your group.

Any questions

Email: beinghuman@eauk.org

1: Relationships, sex and sexuality

– the Bible, culture and sex

1. Introduce the session

5 minutes

Explain to the group why you're running the Relationships Matter course and acknowledge that sex and sexuality are not always easy topics to talk about but that it is good to do so.

Explain how the course will work, that you'll watch a video, have time to discuss and you'll share any extra resources at the end.

Ask people to share the last thing they saw that referenced sex or relationships – maybe a book or an advert. What was the message?

Ask people to share the last time they saw or heard a Christian perspective on sex and relationships.

2. Watch the video

15 minutes

Summary points

- As a culture we seem obsessed with sex. Sometimes we have detached it from love and sometimes we confuse it with love.
- As Christians we have often offered a simplistic view of sex, which says: sex is always bad until you're married and then sex is always good.
- The God story has so much to say about sex, sexuality, and relationships.

3. Discussion questions

30 minutes

1. The video mentioned some TV shows and songs that speak about sex and relationships?
 - a. Can you think of other examples?
 - b. What is the story they tell about sex/relationships?
2. How do you feel about doing a course on sex and sexuality?
3. What were you taught about sex growing up?
4. Did you recognise the half gospel story of: sex is bad but redeemed by marriage, or the quarter story of: Jesus loves you and doesn't care who you sleep with?
5. How does being a Christian shape your view of sex and sexuality?

Response

10 minutes

As a group make a list of the ways in which the cultural stories are shaping our world – perhaps in work, at home, or on social media.

Take time to pray for those spaces – that we can have the courage and the confidence to offer the goodness and beauty of the true God story.

Extra resources

To read more about the God story visit: beinghumanlens.com

Living Out help people, churches and society talk about faith and sexuality – livingout.org

Ed Shaw, What is sexuality for?

– livingout.org/resources/articles/56/what-is-sexuality-for

The Centre for Faith, Sexuality & Gender – centerforfaith.com

Rachel Gardner, *The Sex Thing* (SPCK Publishing).

2: The water we swim in –

how the cultural stories shape us

1. Introduce the session

5 minutes

Spend some time recapping from last week, checking in with how people are doing, and any reflections people might have had since the last session.

This week, you're going to have a crash course in culture; looking at some of the big stories that shape us and how we've got where we are as a culture.

2. Watch the video

15 minutes

Summary points

- There are three big trends that underpin our culture and have led us to where we are today:
 - Secularism: There is no God, keep your views private and don't push them on to others.
 - Expressive individualism: Being true and authentic to myself and my sexuality is key.
 - Postmodernism: There is no objective truth, power corrupts, and everything must be torn down so you're free to live your truth.
- Although many of Freud's theories have been rejected, his views on sex still hold today; our sexual desires define our identity, and you will only be happy if you are sexually fulfilled.
- There is a clash between the story that culture tells and the God story, looking at the building blocks of our society helps us to see how truly radical and life-giving the God story is.

3. Discussion questions

30 minutes

1. Read the recap summary of the three big trends above and then discuss the following:
 - Where do you see the secular story – the one that doubts God and privatises faith?
 - Where do you see expressive individualism – the one that tells us it's all about me and we should simply be authentic and true to ourselves?
 - Where do you see the postmodern story – the one that asks you to resist objective truths and power structures so you're free to live your truth?

2. Where have you noticed that sex has become linked to identity in our culture?
 3. Where is the culture clash between the God story and the culture story most apparent in your life/world?
 4. Personally, how has the God story made a difference in your life when it comes to sex and sexuality?
 5. What does submitting your life and desires to God look like for you?
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Response

The clash between the cultural stories and the God story looks different for each of us.

Share some of the times the two stories have come into conflict? Maybe times when you have witnessed disagreement or hurt from the clash of the two perspectives? Have you ever felt pressure from conflicting viewpoints? Pray for each other, that God will give us wisdom to know when and how to speak.

Extra Resources

Glynn Harrison, *A Better Story* (IVP).

Anne Witton, *Sexuality, Identity, Culture and the Better Story* – livingout.org/resources/talks/19/sexuality-identity-culture-and-the-better-story

3:

Sex & culture

– why culture and Christianity collide

1. Introduce the session

5 minutes

Spend some time recapping from last week. See if anyone can remember the three terms from last week (secularism, postmodernism, expressive individualism). Ask how people are doing and for any reflections people might have had since the last session.

This week, we'll be looking at five big shifts that have significantly changed the way we think and act towards sex and relationships.

2. Watch the video

15 minutes

Summary points

The five big shifts are:

- Sex separated from procreation (contraception).
- Sex separated from marriage (cohabitation).
- Sex separated from relationships (hook up culture).
- Sex separated from another person (porn).
- Sex separated from our bodies (choice over biology).

Thinkers that aren't Christians are noticing that hook up culture, and sex being separate from relationship is not helping society and is particularly bad for women. Statistics show that people are having less sex and are less happy than before the sexual revolution of the 60s.

In the video Katherine shares the start of her story; how she came to faith, and a bit of her journey with sexuality. She will share more in later videos, but if anyone in your group would like to explore more, you can find more stories in the additional resources section of this session.

3. Discussion questions

30 minutes

This discussion covers topics like porn, so you may want to split into male and female groups.

1. Did any of the five big shifts surprise you?
2. What do the non-Christians you know think about sex and marriage?
3. Louise Perry, who wouldn't describe herself as a Christian, is asking questions about whether hook up culture is empowering or helpful for women, do you notice people asking similar questions around you?

4. How do you think porn has shaped peoples' views on bodies and sex? (You could also ask how people have been affected by this personally.)
 5. What struck you most about Katherine's story?
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Response

There are lots of places where we can build bridges from the God story out into our wider culture – for example the desire of many to get married, worries about the pressure of hook up culture, and concerns about the sexualisation of childhood and the impact of pornography.

As a group, identify some of the areas you see opportunities to engage at a personal level to build bridges in your life/world and pray for opportunities for faith-filled conversations.

Extra resources

Louise Perry, *The Case against the Sexual Revolution* (Polity Press).

David Bennett, *A War of Loves* (Zondervan).

You can access a variety of stories from Living Out – livingout.org/resources/stories

For personal support visit True Freedom Trust: truefreedomtrust.co.uk

4: The big picture –

the narrative arc of the God Story

1. Introduce the session

5 minutes

After looking at the building blocks that have shaped our culture, this week, we're exploring the God story. We're going to give you an overview of what the Bible says about marriage and sexuality, before diving into specifics in later videos.

This week, we are looking at love – how would you describe or define love?

2. Watch the video

15 minutes

Summary points

- The Bible is an epic love story that tracks from a marriage in the garden of Eden between Adam and Eve and points to a wedding between Jesus and the church at the end of the Bible in Revelation.
- In the Bible, God's ideal for sexual relationships is marriage between one man and one woman. It's more than two people being in love, it's a covenantal life-long commitment. Christian marriage is a prophetic image pointing to God and the church; Christ and His bride.
- As Christians we haven't always told a helpful story around marriage; we sometimes elevate it, saying that marriage is the pinnacle of life, or we demean it, making jokes about marriage being restrictive or a burden.
- Jesus lived the most fully-human, fulfilled life, He never got married, He never had sex, but He did experience love. We won't all get married, but we all need relational intimacy and love.

3. Discussion questions

30 minutes

1. What did you think of what Peter, Damilola and Katherine said about love?
2. What stuck out to you most in the explanation of the big picture story of the Bible from creation to new creation?
3. Have you experienced Christians elevating or demeaning marriage, making marriage an idol or a joke?
4. Have you ever considered how marriage has a spiritual dimension or what it means for it to be more than a commitment and in fact a covenant? What do you think this means? How does that clash with our culture's view of marriage?

5. We each have a part to play in loving and welcoming people into our lives and homes so that they experience love and relational intimacy whether they're single or not. What does this look like in your life, have you ever been welcomed into someone else's home or opened your home like this?

Response

The God story is an epic love story – an invitation to us personally and collectively to receive God's life-changing love.

Thank God for His love of you and pray for those you want to see encounter God's love for the first time or in a fresh way.

Extra resources

Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture* (IVP).

Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex* (Brazos Press).

5: The key texts –

the clarity and consistency of the Bible

1. Introduce the session

5 minutes

In this session, we look at what are sometimes called the “clobber texts” – the verses in the Bible that specifically refer to homosexuality. We aim to show that the Bible provides a clear and consistent message on sexuality. We cover a lot of ground, so you might want to encourage your group to take notes as they go and write down any questions they have.

Have you ever thought about what the Bible says about homosexuality, or same-sex attraction?

2. Watch the video

15 minutes

Summary points

- In the book of Matthew, we see Jesus reaffirm the foundations of marriage set in Genesis – the union between one man and one woman for life.
- Christians have been accused by some of hypocrisy, of seemingly picking and choosing bits of Leviticus to obey or not. But Leviticus includes all different types of laws for different purposes. These are:
 - Civil law: These are for a specific people.
 - Ceremonial law: These are fulfilled in Christ.
 - Moral law: Still applies today.

If a law is ceremonial, it won't continue to apply in New Testament writings, if it is part of the moral law, it will.

- Paul's writing in the New Testament mentions homosexuality in a list of sins, and it's important to note that all sins are serious and homosexual sex is not elevated above other forms of sexual sin. These verses speak to all of us whether we experience same-sex attraction or not.
- The aim of Christianity is not to make people heterosexual; God wants all of us to live in obedience to Him, submitting all our sexual desires to Him.
- Some argue that these passages aren't referring to loving, committed gay relationships, they are about abusive relationships, but in all three of the passages Paul doesn't use language that in any way implies that these relationships are nonconsensual.
- As people of God, we have always lived in ways that are distinct to the culture around us following Jesus is costly and radical for all of us. We can all know God's amazing grace, and we all need it, because none of us are perfect in the area of our sexuality.

3. Discussion questions

30 minutes

1. What stuck out to you in that video? Were you challenged by anything?
2. Have you heard the suggestion that Christians seem to pick and choose which bits of Leviticus are relevant? What did you think of Katherine's explanation of the different types of laws?
3. How clear and consistent do you find the Bible's teaching to be in this area?
4. What questions have people asked you about Christianity and sexuality? How did you respond? Would you respond differently now?
5. How is following Jesus costly in your life? In what ways is the way you live distinct to the people around you?

Response

At the end of the video Katherine asked, "what does it look like for us to love like God loves us, living sacrificially, allowing this love to reorder and reconfigure our values and lives?"

Take time to reflect on this question individually or as a group. This might involve silent reflection or group discussion.

Pray that God would help us each on our journey of becoming more like Him, living sacrificially and loving as He loves.

Extra resources

Sam Allberry, *What Does the Bible Say About Homosexuality?* livingout.org/resources/articles/18/what-does-the-bible-say-about-homosexuality

Ed Shaw, *The Plausibility Problem* (IVP).

Preston Sprinkle, *Does the Bible Support Same-Sex marriage?* (David C Cook).

6: Jesus' story –

the gospel and the first sexual revolution

1. Introduce the session

5 minutes

In this session, we're looking at the first century sexual revolution – how Jesus's teaching and practise is the reason we have the understanding of marriage that we do and why ideas like consent and equality have become commonplace. We'll look more at Jesus' life, and what that means for us. Katherine will share a bit more of her story and help us think through what this all means for same-sex attracted people.

Check in with your group after the last session, ask if they have any further thoughts or reflections since you were last together.

2. Watch the video

15 minutes

Summary points

- When we follow Jesus and submit our whole lives, including our relationships and sexuality to Him, it requires all of us to make sacrifices and potentially stick out in the culture we're immersed in by going against the status quo. We can be tempted to think that this resistance is a new experience, that Jesus wouldn't really understand what it is like for us to talk about sexuality in our modern world. But the reality is that Jesus' words were just as controversial and challenging when they were first spoken as they are now.
- Female equality and sexual ethics quickly became a distinctive of the early church. The early church promoted consent and commitment teaching that sex is a sacred act, rather than the act of power Roman culture saw it as.
- Jesus' life goes against the cultural story that says to live a good and full life you must have sex. His life shows that singleness is not a sentence to be endured, acting like life is on pause.
- We are Jesus' bride, so He is single, but He is also betrothed. Not all of us may be married now, but marriage is our collective future destiny.
- You can live faithfully as a Christian and experience same-sex attraction. The gospel is wonderfully good news for the LGBT and queer community.

3. Discussion questions

30 minutes

1. Have you ever experienced any resistance for your faith and beliefs?
2. What impact did the first century sexual revolution have on our culture today?
3. How can the church help people live fulfilling single lives like Jesus did?
4. Have you ever thought about the reality that you're betrothed to Jesus? How might this impact your life?
5. What did you find most helpful in listening to Katherine's story?
6. What does sharing your faith look like for you?

Response

The Bible's teaching on marriage and relationships shouldn't be an awkward issue we try to hide from but can be a place of encounter and transformation.

Share where you find talking about sex and sexuality most difficult and take time to pray as a group that God would give you wisdom and confidence to navigate difficult conversations.

Extra resources

David Bennett, *A War of Loves* (Zondervan).

Rachel Gilson, *Born Again This Way* (The Good Book Company).

Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex* (Brazos Press).

Jackie Hill Perry, *Gay Girl, Good God* (B&H Publishing Group).

For personal support visit True Freedom Trust: truefreedomtrust.co.uk

7: A better story – renewed relationships

1. Introduce the session

5 minutes

This is the final video in our series, but our prayer would be that it's not the end of your conversation about sexuality. As the group leader, consider how you can follow up with people and keep the conversation going. People may share more of their own stories in this session, so create an environment where everyone feels comfortable doing so – start by sharing vulnerably yourself first.

Ask the group what they have learnt, or found helpful, from the course so far.

2. Watch the video

20 minutes

Summary points

- We all carry pain and brokenness when it comes to relationships, sex, and sexuality. The Holy Spirit is purposefully remodelling our lives to make us look like Jesus. It's not always an easy ride – demolition and reconstruction take time, care, and consistency.
- Some of the very worst of us comes to the fore in relationships – showing us where we are not yet like Jesus. Through recognising and properly responding to this, we are further shaped into the likeness of Jesus.
- The church at its best is a multi-generational, multi-ethnic, socially diverse extended family gathering; a community that welcomes the single, married, divorced, and widowed disciples; those wrestling with pornography; invests in marriage preparation and development, and builds community based on deep friendship, prayer, small groups, hospitality, informal connections, and intentional gatherings.
- We need to create cultures within our churches where people feel able to share their stories, their struggles and confess their sin.

3. Discussion questions

30 minutes

1. How is and has the church been family in your life?
2. Do you think we struggle with discipleship and formation around sexuality and relationships? If so, why?
3. What does friendship look like in your life, how are your friendships similar and different to those that Jesus had?
4. Peter, Damilola and Katherine each shared their takeaway, did any resonate with you in particular or were you struck by something else?
5. Is there any part of your story around relationships or sexuality that you would like to share?
6. What's one thing that you will do differently as a result of this course?

Response

We have covered a lot of ground looking at sex, sexuality, same-sex attraction and relationships. These are hugely personal topics and each of us process differently.

Perhaps take some time to write down areas you want to think more about or address. If people feel comfortable, they could perhaps share and pray in pairs or triplets.

It might be helpful to read Psalm 51:1-12 in closing, highlighting that we all carry brokenness in our lives and while David is reflecting on things he has done, the passage can still minister to those who have had things done to them.

Extra resources

Living Out – livingout.org

Andrew Bunt, *Finding Your Best Identity* (IVP).

Jo Frost and Peter Lynas, *Being Human: A New Lens For Our Cultural Conversations* (Hodder & Stoughton).

Glynn Harrison, *A Better Story* (IVP).