

CHRIST CHURCH COURSES

LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH

SESSION 4: LIVING OUT *THE BEAUTIFUL STORY*

Learning Aim: by the end of the session participants will have considered the implications of living out the current teaching of the Church of England on being human, marriage and sexuality.

Pastoral aim: that the group have explored what the pastoral implications are of living out the current teaching of the church for individual worshippers and what the church can do to support this discipleship.

CONTENTS

- 1. Introduction and welcome (5m)**
- 2. Aims and structure of session (1m)**
- 3. Story Time (5m)***
- 4. Being Human (10m)***
- 5. Identity (10m)***
- 6. Christian Marriage (15m)**
- 7. Singleness and celibacy (15m)**
- 8. Sex (10m)**
- 9. Same-sex attraction (10m)**
- 10. Radical inclusion (10m)**
- 11. Story Time (5m) ***
- 12. Time for reflection (5m) ***

LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH

0. Engaging Well
1. What does the church believe?
2. The Beautiful story 1
3. The Beautiful Story 2
- 4. Living out the Beautiful Story**
5. The case for change
6. Implications of change
7. Gender

1. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME (5m)

In the last two sessions we learned what the current teaching of the Church of England is through the video *The Beautiful Story*. This teaching is consistent with the declarations in the constitution of CEEC:

- Marriage and sex are gifts from God
- Marriage is between a man and a woman
- The rightful place for sex is between a man and a woman within marriage for life
- Those who are not married should exercise abstinence

This week we consider what the implications of this are for Christian marriage, singleness and for those who are same-sex attracted.

2. AIMS AND STRUCTURE OF SESSION

In this session we explore aspects of being human and identity using the LLF Resource Book. We then go on to consider Christian marriage by looking at the Common Worship wedding service. We consider singleness using resources from *Living Out*. We return to the LLF book to consider sex and same-sex attraction and we close by exploring ways in which the church can be radically inclusive using the *Living Out Church Audit*.

Let us pray.....

We pray Come Holy Spirit. Grant us the openness to hear your voice. The wisdom to discern through your voice, your command and your heart. The humility to receive, to be challenged and to see things afresh as you lead us. In the name of your Son, our savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

3. STORY TIME 1: Jenny

Jenny is 80 years old and is single having lived in Christian community for the last 50 years. Watch the Jenny's story at

<https://llf.churchofengland.org/mod/videotime/view.php?id=588>

4. BEING HUMAN

Chapter 10 of the Living in Love and Faith book (p187-215) tells *A Story about being human*. It is presented under four headings:

a) Dignity

"In creating humanity, God is giving a particular and most precious gift to the world: the divine image" (p189). This means that "each one of us is loved and valued by God

as fully, as lavishly, as every other...God calls us, challenges us and transforms us because God loves us – and nobody is outside the scope of that love” (p196)

Each person has dignity before God and so should be offered dignity by others.

Do you believe that every human being has the same God given dignity?

Have we always reflected that in the world and in church?

b) Diversity

“God has created materiality, difference, change ...and called it good. Diversity and distinction among God’s creatures is good. It is part of God’s gift of life to the world that God has made” (p197)

We are all different and equally loved and worthy of dignity.

*How important is a recognition of dignity **and** diversity to being a healthy community?*

c) Dying and rising

“One relationship precedes all others in enabling us to know and develop who we are: the relationship with God as creator and redeemer...our deepest identity is to be found in Christ”. (p211)

“..the very fact that God is love means that God stands implacably against all that rejects and betrays that love. ...God is judge because God is love. God is not indifferent to our distortions, rebellions and betrayals. God’s face is set against them...All of human life takes place against the horizon of God’s judgement” (p212)

Sin is :

- a breakdown of relationship
- failure to live according to God’s order
- rejection or disobedience to God’s voice and word
- idol worship
- not living in line with the gift of faith that comes from God
- denial of the God given dignity of another or of ourselves
- community failings as well as individual (including church failures)
- injustice to the poor and marginalised

- forces opposed to God (spiritual warfare)

When discussing sin, we must recognise our own sinfulness, not focus on some sins and not others, not assume that when someone else sins that they are worth less than others and recognise that we are a community of sinners, not an oasis of purity!

*How important is it to your faith to recognise **your** sinfulness? Do you find it easy or difficult to a) say it and b) to feel it?*

Do you truly receive forgiveness? Do you truly repent when you approach the Lord?

Does sin matter?

5. IDENTITY

Chapter 10 also considers identity.

*"..it is only as we look at God that we can truly understand who we are, individually and together. We cannot simply construct , discover or define our identity independently"
(p201)*

*"Jesus is the perfect image of God.....He is "Emmanuel", God with us, and he shows us what it looks like to inhabit in full the dignity that is the birth right of all human beings"
(p191)*

Jesus is the perfect human being.

28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

What are the things that help us define our identity?

In what ways might these things bring us closer to our identity as "in Christ" and how might they take us away from that identity?

6. CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Marriage is explored throughout the *Living and Love and Faith* book, but especially in p24-37.

In the Common Worship marriage service, we begin with a pastoral introduction, explaining the Church of England understanding of marriage¹. You may want to look at

¹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/marriage>

the whole service including the declarations, vows and prayers for deeper insight into the Church of England understanding of marriage.

The Marriage Service : Pastoral introduction

In the presence of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we have come together to witness the marriage of *N* and *N*, to pray for God's blessing on them, to share their joy and to celebrate their love.

How well does this sum up wedding days that you have attended? What strikes you as important here?

Marriage is a gift of God in creation through which husband and wife may know the grace of God.

Is God's gift of marriage about the grace he gives them or what they give each other?

It is given that as man and woman grow together in love and trust, they shall be united with one another in heart, body and mind, as Christ is united with his bride, the Church.

How well does this sum up your understanding of marriage? Does anything surprise you?

The gift of marriage brings husband and wife together in the delight and tenderness of sexual union and joyful commitment to the end of their lives.

How important is sex to a marriage? Does this life long commitment suggest that sex is preserved for marriage and so should be one partner for life and not before marriage?

It is given as the foundation of family life in which children are [born and] nurtured and in which each member of the family, in good times and in bad, may find strength, companionship and comfort, and grow to maturity in love.

Is marriage for procreation; to have and nurture children?

Marriage is a way of life made holy by God, and blessed by the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ with those celebrating a wedding at Cana in Galilee. Marriage is a sign of unity and loyalty which all should uphold and honour. It enriches society and strengthens community.

Is society less rich as the number of marriages have declined and the rates of divorce have increased? Would more marriages enrich society? What is it about marriages that would enrich society?

No one should enter into it lightly or selfishly but reverently and responsibly in the sight of almighty God. *N* and *N* are now to enter this way of life. They will each give their consent to the other and make solemn vows, and in token of this they will [each] give and receive a ring.

How important is it that couples are prepared for marriage?

We pray with them that the Holy Spirit will guide and strengthen them, that they may fulfil God's purposes for the whole of their earthly life together.

How should we pray for married couples?

Is this introduction consistent with the current teaching that marriage is a life long commitment between a man and a woman and is the place ordered by God for sex and the conception and nurture of children?

7. SINGLENESS AND CELIBACY

Being single has its challenges and its advantages. *The Beautiful Story* highlighted that Jesus was a single man and yet the church has over many years exalted marriage in a way that can make single people feel less valued and cared for.

The sexual ethic outlined so far requires abstinence outside of marriage. That means no sex before marriage and only having sexual relations with your spouse, to the exclusion of all others. To do otherwise is adultery.

The reality of the current culture is that sex before marriage is common place. Many children are born to unmarried couples and single parents. How realistic is it therefore to promote celibacy outside of marriage?

What do you think? Is the church being prudish to suggest abstinence outside of marriage or hypocritical by not promoting it?

Singles may be voluntary (eg a calling to live in community like Jenny in our video and same sex attracted Christians like Ed in *The Beautiful Story*) or involuntary, in that they would like a romantic partner and future spouse but are not yet in that relationship.

Vaughan Roberts wrote an article about Christian singleness ² in which he highlights four things about singleness:

- **Singleness as gift** : just as marriage is a gift from God so is singleness, it is not "second best" (1 Cor 7:7, Matthew 19:11)

² <https://www.livingout.org/resources/articles/36/vaughan-roberts-on-singleness>

- **Advantages of singleness:** Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 mentions two advantages of being single; a) the difficulties, responsibilities and distractions of marriage and living for and with another person are avoided (1 Cor 7:28) and b) devotion to God is easier to achieve (1 Cor 7:32-33).
- **Singleness is hard :** the temptation to sex and the need for close companionship do not disappear by making the decision to be single (Gen 2:18) and these need to be acknowledged and support available to help someone face these (eg accountability partners and other intimate relationships – see below)
- **Singleness is not permanent:** and neither is marriage to an earthly spouse! The marriage to come , between Christ and his church, is better and bigger than any earthly marriage. And all are involved, who enter the kingdom, as Christ joins with his bride. (Rev 7:17, 19:7)

To the church, Roberts says three things:

- single is not second best
- the whole church is a family, there should be no lonely people
- keep your eyes on heaven!

Is singleness a calling?

How well does church care for single people?

What could be done better?

Is intimacy only to do with physical touch that leads to sex?

8. SEX

The Bible's Song of Solomon celebrates the intensity of love between a man and a woman, its feelings of overwhelming desire and its consummation in physical delight. The love between them, the desire they have for one another, and the physical intimacy for which they yearn, awakens every dimension of their being and they are filled with life. "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave" (Song of Solomon 8:6)...God's good gifts of sexual desire and intimacy, with all the power and potential for good and harm, find their proper place and freest space in marriage" (Living in Love and Faith p32-33)

Quoting the 1999 Bishop's Teaching Document on marriage it goes on (p36):

"The reason that the church continues to insist on the highest expectations of married couples, when so many of our cotemporaries are content to treat the matter lightly, is

that much more than marriage is lost if we let the scope of the demand (to holiness) and generosity of God slip from our sight."

28 God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth (Genesis 1:28)

Do you think of sex as a gift from God to be enjoyed?

Is sex about deepening a relationship or for conceiving children or both?

What is sex not for?

9. SAME SEX ATTRACTION

Current Church of England teaching is that:

- Marriage and sex are gifts from God
- Marriage is between a man and a woman
- The rightful place for sex is between a man and a woman within marriage
- Those who are not married should exercise abstinence

This means that someone who is wholly same sex attracted and believes they should abide by this ethic:

- cannot marry someone of the same sex
- should not have sex but remain celibate

This teaching asserts that attraction to people of the same sex is not sinful. Acting on it in a sexual way is.

Are these implications the logical outcome of this understanding of the bible?

In what way do they reflect God's love for his people?

How would you explain this to someone outside the church (who has not studied the last 4 sessions of this course!)

10. RADICAL INCLUSION

In February 2017 the General Synod of the Church of England debated GS2055, a paper from the House of Bishops about Marriage and Same-sex Relationships. General Synod "refused to take note" of the report which reiterated the current orthodox teaching of the church.

Afterwards the Archbishops issued a letter that said:

"we need a radical new Christian inclusion in the Church. This must be founded in Scripture, in Reason, in tradition, in theology and the Christian faith as the Church of England has received it; it must be based on good, healthy, flourishing relationships, and in a proper 21st century understanding of being human and of being sexual" (LLF vii)

Living Out is a website of resources provided by same-sex attracted Christians who seek to live out the ethic outlined above. Their aims are:

Our aims

We want to:

1. **Encourage** our Christian sisters and brothers – especially those who experience same-sex attraction – to flourish through faithfulness to biblical teaching on sexuality and identity.
2. **Equip** churches and their leaders to more effectively teach and live out God's Word on sexuality and identity so that we all flourish in response to how He both comforts and challenges us all.
3. **Engage** the wider world with God's better story for human flourishing in which all our questions and desires about sexuality and identity are best met in him.

One particular resource for churches is their **Church Audit**³ to help churches become biblically inclusive. We will take some time now to look at this to find ways in which we can become more biblically (and radically) inclusive.

How biblically inclusive is your church?

10 statements to help you audit your church family (answer true / false / not sure to each question) :

1. Your church family meetings include people who could be labelled LGBTQI+ / are same-sex attracted.

2. Derogatory language or stereo-typing attitudes towards anyone would not be tolerated either up-front or in conversation between church family members.

³ <https://www.livingout.org/resources/articles/65/how-biblically-inclusive-is-your-church-the-living-out-church-audit>

3. All in your church know that we all experience sexual brokenness and all are being encouraged to confess their own sexual sins.

4. Same-sex sexual relationships are never mentioned in isolation from other sinful patterns of behaviour, or from the forgiveness offered to all through faith in Christ crucified.

5. All in your church are hearing the same call to radical self-sacrifice of themselves in response to God's giving of himself in Jesus.

6. All in your church are encouraged to develop an identity founded first and foremost on their union with Christ.

7. A godly Christian's sexual orientation would never prevent them from exercising their spiritual gifts or serving in leadership in your church

8. God's gifts of either singleness or marriage are equally promoted, valued and practically supported in your church family's life together.

9. Church family members instinctively share meals, homes, holidays, festivals, money, family life with others from different backgrounds and life situations to them.

10. No-one would be pressurised into expecting or seeking any "healing" or change that God has not promised any of us until the renewal of all things

By looking at each of these questions consider how we are doing, how the church in general is doing and what 2 or 3 actions (or more!) need to be taken to be more biblically inclusive?⁴

8. STORY TIME: Luke

Luke is an ordinand training for ministry in the church. He is same-sex attracted and lives a celibate life. Watch the video at

<https://lfc.churchofengland.org/mod/videotime/view.php?id=581>

9. TIME FOR REFLECTION (2 m)

Together we sit in silence and ask God to guide us through what we have explored so far. We may wish to repent of how we as a church or individually have treated people

⁴ For two talks about holding an orthodox view of sexuality while reaching out in love to the LGBTI+ community see the following <https://youtu.be/yhcrMyRv3wg> and <https://youtu.be/k52WoXBCesU>

in the past. We may pray for individuals on our hearts. We may want to pray for wisdom for the church to be more radically inclusive in the future. We may also want to pray for the church to be more confident in the gospel and the implications that it has for discipleship for all people – to avoid moralism while encouraging obedience.

Next time we will turn to the case for change in the teaching and practice in the Church of England in the areas of being human, marriage and sex. **Please read the notes for next week before we meet so that we can spend more time in discussion.**