

SESSION 3 – PLAY

Say an opening prayer

This session is titled PLAY – but really it’s about sex, relationships, singleness, marriage – all that sort of stuff.

Now amongst us all we have got a real mix of relational situations here.

We have people who are married – and have children

We have people who are going out, who are dating someone.

We have people who are single.

And amongst the single – we will have people who are very content in their singleness and people that are finding it very difficult and would love to be married or at least going out with someone. [tailor this section to your group].

So lots of different categories – but I’m sure we are all united in the fact that at times we feel vulnerable when it comes to relationships, at times we struggle, and at times we know we have been hurt by or caused hurt in a relationship. We’ll all be united in that.

Now to start with this afternoon, we’re going to focus on the two predominant categories of married and single.

1. Marriage and Singleness

And it would be great in single-sex groups - if you could fill in the grid on your handout.

What are the positives of being married and what are the problems.

And then what are the positives and problems of being single.

BUZZ GROUPS: Fill in the table below:		
	Marriage	Singleness
Positives		
Problems		

Take lots of feedback – maybe write up responses on a flip chart for the four boxes.

This fits with what the Bible says. Both marriage and singleness are good. **Genesis 2:18/24** talks about marriage very positively – it is good. But so too is singleness seen as a good thing – **1 Corinthians 7:32**

So both marriage and singleness are good.

But the thing is – I know I did this when I was single – you look at singleness and you just focus on the problems and forget about benefits. And you look at marriage – and you think of all the wonderful benefits – but you ignore the problems.

And vice versa – when you are married. There are times when I can look at some of my single friends – charging around, being much more independent, more flexible, with less concerns – and I just think of the positives they have. And then I think of the negatives of being married – the effort of trying to do what is best for my wife rather than just being concerned about my own interests. When children come along – being exhausted by them and rarely having a night out together. [make this personal to you]

It's so easy to forget this. It is so tempting to think the grass is greener on the other side.

But the truth is that marriage has positives and problems and so too does singleness – it has positives and problems.

2. Sex

OK – let's think about sex itself – point 2 in this session - and the first thing to say is that

Marriage is the framework for sex (Ephesians 5:22-33)

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. (Ephesians 5:31).

Ephesians 5:31 is actually quoting Genesis 2:24 that we looked at earlier. The order is to be united as husband and wife, and then become one flesh. Sexual intercourse is to come within the context of marriage. The framework for sex – is marriage.

In fact, intimacy always goes with commitment in the Bible. How would Jesus feel if you prayed this: “Jesus I want you to know intimacy with you, I want you inside me by your Spirit, I want you to lead me and love me. But I don't want a commitment. I don't want to forsake all others and follow you alone. I don't to be that vulnerable to you. I want to make my own decisions sometimes.”

It's an offensive prayer to Jesus isn't it. Intimacy and commitment are always connected, and if it goes that way with your commitment with God, why would it be any different with someone else.

Marriage (commitment) is the framework for sex (intimacy).

But actually – there's another thing - marriage and sex is not what life is all about.

This passage in Ephesians shows us that marriage between husband and wife is meant to reflect the relationship between Christ and the church.

That's what life is all about. The relationship between Christ and Christians – the church.

In Revelation 19: 6-9 we see this – this picture of the relationship between Christ and His bride the church.

6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) 9 Then the angel said to me, Write: ‘Blessed are

those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb! And he added, These are the true words of God.

That's the big deal in the Bible.
That's what you and I are to be caught up with.
That's the marriage that lasts for eternity.
I won't be married to my wife in eternity.

And what sort of bride should each of us be?

V7 – his bride – Jesus' bride – us - HAS MADE HERSELF READY. Fine linen, bright and clean WAS GIVEN HER TO WEAR.

“Fine linen stands for THE RIGHTEOUS ACTS OF THE SAINTS.”

That's the context for understanding everything else.
The need to be pure and holy.
Just as a bride wants to keep herself for her husband.
Coming up the aisle in white, giving herself to her bridegroom, that's how we Christians should long to be for Christ, our bridegroom. Pure and holy.

That should be our longing when it comes to the whole of life.
And that includes the sexual arena.
And sex – as Eph 5 verse 31 says - is for marriage. Between one man and one woman.

Let's move to section 3

3. Dating

3 questions – why date, who to date, how to date.

Why date?

We can't turn to the Bible for an answer to this – because dating/going out with someone – whatever you want to call it – didn't really exist as a concept then.

But I would propose this as a reason for dating.
We date to get to know someone better to see if they would be a good person to marry.

If you're over 18, which we all are - I don't think you can go out with someone without it having any implications for marriage.

Please don't mishear me – I'm not saying you must propose on the second date – but you must be honourable and honest. The whole point of dating someone is to get to know them better to see whether you might marry them. If you know there is no conceivable way that you could ever possibly marry the person - either because of who you are or who they are - then do not date them. There are bound to be confusions down the line.

Who to date?

If dating is connected to thinking about marriage – then the criteria for who to date must be the same as for who to marry.

Two negatives

Someone who is Not married already.

Someone who is Not a close relative.

Those are legal requirements as well as Biblical ones.

And then two positives

Someone who is of the Opposite sex. Mark 10:6-7 clearly links marriage being between a man and a woman. And in law there is for the moment still some distinction between marriage and civil partnership.

Someone who is a Christian. (1 Corinthians 7:39 and the Christological application of the Old Testament discouragement for people to marry people from other nations who worshipped other gods)

If you have some personal testimony about dating those who aren't Christians, could add it here. For example, I say:

When I was 18, I had been a Christian for a year and I started going out with someone who wasn't a Christian. It was a disaster spiritually. And thankfully I realised it was a disaster pretty quickly and I stopped the relationship after a couple of months.

I was thinking that she would become a Christian, and I have to say I do know some situations where this has happened. But, it is a huge gamble. Are we prepared to risk the effectiveness of our lives for Christ and all the joys of being married to a Christian on the fact that someone may become a Christian? They may do – but the chances are pretty slim.

How to date?

People often say - How far can I go?

But it's the wrong question.

The Christian should be asking – how can I be holy?

Again, you could give personal testimony here. I generally say:

I'll tell you how it was for me and my wife when we were dating – but I'll also tell you I don't think we got it right. We kissed, but we wouldn't kiss lying down. But after a bit we realised that there were times when we aroused each other too much – and the line between sitting kissing and lying down kissing got a bit blurred as you slide down the sofa. So – there came a point, actually when we got engaged, when we said no kissing on the lips at all until we got married.

Above all - when you start going out with someone, will you sit down and have a chat about boundaries. If you haven't done it already, talk about how you can please Jesus.

Help each other. Know your weaknesses. Late at night – resistance is often low. Avoid alcohol if you are going to be alone. Don't spend a long time alone in a room – particularly if there is a bed in there. Be accountable to someone of the same sex outside of your relationship, etc.

Maybe it's a help to remember we don't want to grieve the Holy Spirit – and He – the Holy Spirit is living in us. We are temples of the Holy Spirit. So – when we are with our boyfriend/girlfriend – just think – am I acting in a way that is pleasing the Holy Spirit who lives in me.

Questions – gone fast – you probably know all that. May find some difficult. But know it – want to spend more time on dating going well and badly.

Dating Going Well

BUZZ GROUPS:

Picture the scene. You've got to know someone for 6 months, started going out with them and now you've been going out for a year. All seems to be going well. You are both Christians. How do you know whether this person is right to get married to or not?

Here are some questions it is helpful to ask yourself to answer whether it is time to get married to someone.

a) Am I prepared to be a husband/wife to this person in the way the Bible sets out?

So look at the Bible passages about being a husband or wife – I guess most well known – Ephesians 5:21-33 and ask yourself. Am I prepared to do what the Bible tells me to do for this person. For the husband – am I prepared to love her and give myself up for her even unto death. For the woman – am I prepared to submit to him.

And for men and women – we need to ask am I prepared to do that for the person I am currently dating – for life – till death do us part.

Do I feel I am prepared to choose to keep loving her or him – not just now when she looks like Angelina Jolie or he looks like Brad Pitt, but in 20 years time when let's face it they may well look like a bit of a moose.

Could add personal testimony. For example, I often say:

For me, one of my wife's close biological family suffers from bipolar manic depression, and I had to ask myself quite seriously before I got married. Would I be prepared to continue loving my wife and stay committed to her – even if she were to start suffering from bipolar depression?

So that's the first question – am I prepared to be a husband/wife to this person in the way the Bible sets out?

Second question to ask is

b) Are our goals for life compatible?

So you might get on really well and be attracted to each other and everything seems right. But when you actually start discussing where you might see yourselves in 10 years time, one of you wants to be a missionary in Africa, and the other one of you is adamant you should stay living within 2 miles of where you grew up.

If your goals for life are not compatible, you shouldn't get married.

Could add personal testimony. For example, I often say:

For me, my wife grew up in Australia. I am a bit of a homeboy at heart. I had to think through whether, if we felt it was what God wanted, whether I would be prepared to go and live in Australia. That was a big consideration for me before getting married.

Third question to ask is

c) Does he/she encourage me in godliness?

Yes – we can marry anyone as long as they are Christian, single and the opposite gender to us. But why go for any old marriage partner. We're free to eat MCDonalds all the time – but there is better available. And similarly we should marry someone who will be good for us in growing in godliness.

So rather than dwell on why you shouldn't go out with an unbeliever, think about what you want in a marriage partner: someone who shares the same passion for Jesus, the same desires and visions for how to serve God in life, the same interests.

Don't be fixated by the physical. Of course, marry someone you find physically attractive. But don't just marry someone for their looks. And be realistic about your own looks, too. As they say - **if you drive a mini metro you probably won't marry a Rolls Royce.**

Above all - marriage should be a partnership not just for sex, not just for friendship, but a partnership for serving the Lord together. And so you want to look for a wife or husband who will be a good ministry partner as well as a good friend and a nice play mate in bed.

And then the fourth question to ask is

d) What's stopping me?

If there hasn't been a reason to think you should stop going out rather than get married from the other three questions, then I would encourage us to ask this question – what's stopping me getting married?

If when you look at yourself honestly, the thing that is stopping you is just a fear of commitment, then I would tell you to stop being an idiot and get married.

Particularly I say this to the blokes. Although I got a single girl at HTB to read this – and she said it applied to the girls too. I think lots of blokes go out with someone for a while, but they aren't prepared to get married just in case they might find someone better round the corner. Lots of us men – if we're honest – we are looking to marry Barbie – and if the person we are dating doesn't quite measure up to Barbie then we are always wondering if Barbie will suddenly appear around the corner. She won't.

If what is stopping you getting married to the person you are dating is fear of commitment, and your responses to the other questions are fine, then I would say the godly thing to do is step up to the plate, propose and be a man about it and choose to commit to that person for life. Don't be spineless about it.

But if the thing stopping you is not your fear of commitment, but fear that you cannot choose to love the person you are dating till death do us part. If it is more about fear of their character, than fear of your commitment, then I'd say wait – you are not yet ready to commit to marriage.

But I would add this caveat, personally I think if you haven't got to a point of being able to commit to the person you are dating after about 2 or 3 years of going out – then you do need to ask questions about whether you will ever be at a place of being able to commit to that person. And if you're never going to be at a place of committing to marry that person - well it would probably be wise to just stop going out with that person, rather than dragging it on and never committing and causing more pain in the future.

Above all getting married to someone is about whether we can choose to love a person for life. Love is not so much a feeling as a choice. Listen to what Don Carson writes about marriage.

“In God's Word, marriage and love are for the tough minded. Marriage is commitment; and, far from backing out when the going gets rough, marriage partners are to sort out their difficulties in the light of Scripture. They are to hang in there, improving their relationship, working away at it, precisely because they have vowed before God and man to live together and love each other for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness as in health, until death separates them.”

OK – so that's dating leading to marriage – dating going well.

But let's now think about

Dating Going Badly

Dating can go badly for two reasons. The first reason is if we muck up physically.

1. If we muck up

Give personal testimony. For example I often say:

I think back to the only time I've ever cried while giving a Christian talk. I was giving a talk on sex and relationships to a group of teenagers. In the group there were about three or four boys, about 14 or 15 years old, who thought they were pretty cool and tough, and they were asking all sorts of questions like if it wasn't ok to have sex before marriage was it ok for their girlfriends to give them blow jobs.

And I just burst into tears.

It was rather embarrassing. But do you know why I cried? I cried because I knew how much hurt would be caused by the actions of these boys. Hurt to other people and hurt to themselves. And it pained me. It pained me because I knew how much hurt it had caused my wife and I – that both of us in various ways, although we had never had sex before we were married, had done things sexually which were too intimate and which had hurt other people and hurt ourselves. And I didn't want these boys to make the same mistakes.

And that's really the problem when we muck up and get too physically intimate before marriage.

You see getting too physically intimate before marriage

1. It is anti-God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

Don't turn there now but the passage in 1 Corinthians assures us that sexual sin is not worse than any other sin, and that like other sins it can be overcome. But let's not pretend that

being too physically intimate before marriage is anything other than going against what God wants.

2. It is anti-social

I think the best way of explaining this is that when we are too physically intimate with someone, we are involved in stealing. We are stealing from what rightfully belongs to that person's future marriage partner. It is anti-social.

Even if we are the ones who end up marrying the person we are dating – we are stealing from ourselves in the future. The intimacy that should be reserved for when we are married, we are taking it now.

3. It is anti-self

As I've already said, sexual sin is just like any other sin. But in another sense it is different from any other sin. 1 Cor 6:18 says **Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.**

You see if you or I steal from the tax man – we can put it right, we can make amends, but what I do with my body I do to myself, I can't change it, I'm never the same again. It is anti-self. It hurts us.

None of us can be judgemental about this. We will all have blown it in some way or other in the sexual arena.

But the amazing thing is we can know forgiveness. Satan wants you or I to feel unforgiven. He wants to keep us enslaved in our guilt and unable to move on from the past.

But Jesus Christ offers us a fresh start today and every day which is never an excuse to carry on sinning, but it's a wonderful chance to start again. We are not tainted for life.

So if you're in a relationship that's wrong or where you have got too physically intimate – can I encourage you to deal with it now. Speak to the person you are going out with and say just that, "We've gone too far." "We must redefine our boundaries".

So dating can go badly if we muck up, but it can also go badly when we **break up**.

Breaking up with someone will never be easy – whether you are the one stopping the relationship, or whether you are the one spurned.

I've got just two comments to make.

1. **Don't say "Let's still be friends"** and carry on spending lots of time with each other.

It sounds all lovely and Christian. But it never works. The one who has been spurned is always thinking – perhaps there's a chance to get back together again. The one who has decided on the break up is thinking – I don't want to hurt the other person, and this is the best way to do it. But it isn't.

People are raw and need time to heal and need to do that separately from each other. Hopefully in time you can be friends again – and that is great when it is like that. But that won't be for at least quite a few months.

And it can be very difficult in a church setting – when we may have lots of similar friends.

And then the second comment is **Do say “Jesus, you fill the hole”**

In the pain of splitting from someone, we need to try as much as we can to run to Jesus for comfort and fulfilment, rather than running in the direction of shopping or alcohol or work or another relationship straight away. We need to not let those things fill the hole that has been caused by splitting from someone who we have been very close to. We need to let Jesus be the one that ministers to our hurt.

And it's great if we are able to get to a point of looking back at a relationship we had which finished and say I can see how that was a really positive relationship for me – how it has caused me to grow in my faith, even if he or she wasn't the right person for me to marry.

Starting going out with someone and not ending up married to them is not a failure in any way. The whole point of going out is to see whether it is right to get married to the person - and sometimes it won't be right.

So let me conclude. The Christian life is not about a list of rules and regulations, but it is a response of love for all that the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. The only way we have a hope of living rightly in this area is if we are living by grace. Longing to please the Lord for all he's done for us.

As I've already said – we can't be judgemental. We will all have made mistakes in some way or other. And Jesus offers us forgiveness and a fresh start in this area. In fact all of us will need to seek forgiveness from Jesus for something – because none of us are perfect.

- the single person struggling with loneliness or rejection and it causing them to sin
- the going out person struggling with pleasing Jesus in how they conduct themselves with their boyfriend or girlfriend
- the married person struggling with pornography, or struggling to actually put their spouse before themselves, or struggling because they keep on taking a second look at the good looking person on the other side of the street

And we need to say sorry to the Lord

Remembering this – what do we really think about Him?

Do we think the Lord is out to make life difficult for us? In my heart of hearts do I think he's a great celestial killjoy? Or do I think of Him as the most loving and kind person who longs for the best for me? He's not out to ruin life, but to give us life itself. The Christian views on sex are there to protect us, not frustrate us.

The cross tells us how it really is. Jesus Christ is the most loving Lord, who died for you and for me. He wants what is best for you and for me.

MINISTRY TIME:

Have a centrally led time of quiet response to God, and praying for individuals to know God's forgiveness where they have been convicted of sin.

Then, in single sex groups, ask people to share what aspect connected to the talk they would most value prayer, and then encourage people to pray for one another.