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GOSPEL SEXUALITY FOR STUDENTS

HARVEST USA

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FOR STUDENTS

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Study Guide with Leader's Notes

Harvest USA

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STUDENT'S GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Alive: Gospel Sexuality for Students is a ten-week, small group study that covers many of the major issues concerning human sexuality. All of us are clamoring for a steadfastness and a hope in the world in which we live, but despite the sexual chaos of the world around us—and the chaos we experience in our own sexuality—Jesus is Lord and Savior.

Here is the vision behind *Alive: Gospel Sexuality for Students*.

THE VISION

We can often feel as if the gospel has little relevance in day-to-day living, but we believe that the risen and ascended Lord makes all the difference in every area of our lives. This study seeks to unpack and apply the rich truths of believers' union with Christ to the particulars of human sexuality. In other words, believers have died with Christ and now live with him, and by his Spirit, Christ provides both the motivation and power for believers to use their sexuality for his glory. Nothing, not even our sexuality, is outside his transforming work and power. Here is the vision from the apostle Paul:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:1–4)

We want to talk about the issues that are part of our everyday world. But we also want to lead you toward robust, deep, and strengthening theological content that will help you follow Jesus in the area of sexuality. As you hopefully identify with the content, our prayer is that the content will in turn challenge you to grow further in your Christian walk.

THE STUDY

We have designed this study to be used in a small group that is conversational and interactive but also guided by a leader. There is no homework for you to do outside of each week's lesson, although it might be helpful for you to go over the next lesson a week in advance to write down your thoughts.

Each week focuses mainly on discussion and application. This means that you will get the most out of the study as you engage in the discussions. There will, however, be times of awkward silence and intense floor staring. Hopefully, through the intentional time set aside to address these issues each week, conversation and discussion will flow more naturally as the study progresses.

So, what can you expect each week?

EACH WEEK

Most weeks contain the elements listed below, though some do not. Here is a general outline of each lesson:

1. The Scenario

We begin each week with a scenario that sets up the main topic for that day. This scenario is meant to be a simple, quick way to break some of the tension and to introduce the issue at hand in a way that does not put everyone on the spot, hopefully creating a safer atmosphere to discuss it.

2. Scenario Reflective Questions

Each week we give some reflective questions on the scenario. The purpose is threefold: to help you think critically about the issues, to help you connect the scenario to topics discussed in previous weeks, and to help you enter into the scenario yourselves, connecting your own experience with that of the person(s) in the scenario.

3. The Issue

This is an opportunity for you to connect specific sexual issues with biblical, Christ-centered truth. The group will read and discuss several Scripture passages.

4. The Issue in Life

This section is very practical, helping you to think through how the Scriptures and Jesus interact with particular sexual issues in your own life. The goal is for you to think through ways you can walk with Jesus as you, or someone you might know, wrestles with particular sins and sufferings in everyday life.

5. The Point

This same question every week asks you to think through the week's main point. The group will have multiple answers, and that is okay.

KEY TRUTHS AND CONCEPTS

This study is based on certain key, biblical truths that guide our discussion of the gospel and sexuality. There is also a glossary in the back to further reinforce these truths. Spend some time familiarizing yourself with these concepts.

Key Biblical Truths

1. The Human Heart

In the Bible, it is the human heart that defines people as individuals and is the mover of faith and trust. What goes on in people's hearts is what the Lord is most concerned with in their lives. It can even be thought of as their nature. What people's hearts desire and love leads to their thoughts and actions. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." Romans 10:10 says, "For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."

Human hearts, naturally, have rejected God and have trusted in other things besides him for life and salvation. Beginning with Adam and Eve, people have rebelled against God. Their natural hearts are not neutral or basically good but are evil and corrupt (Genesis 8:21; Jeremiah 17:9). Not only are human hearts naturally evil, the Bible even calls people "dead in" their "trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1).

When people put their faith in Jesus, however, he makes them alive—new creations.

Their hearts are radically transformed. The new nature of a believer is holy and clean (Ezekiel 36:26), although he or she will still struggle with sin on this side of eternity.

2. The New Creation

When people come to Jesus by faith, they become new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). They are given the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9–11), who makes them alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:1–10). Believers are part of the new creation now, as they await the re-creation of all things in the future (Revelation 21–22).

3. Union with Christ

This might be the most important concept of this study. The reason why believers are new creations in Christ is because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, the “first fruits” of new creation (Romans 6:4; 1 Corinthians 15:20). He has passed through death into a new, transformed, imperishable life. Christians are united to Christ by the Spirit; their identity with the old creation and with Adam is broken as they share in Christ’s death, and they are raised to new life with him (Colossians 3:1–4). Christians have a resurrected life in Christ now (Romans 6:1–4), and they will be resurrected in glory when he comes again (1 Corinthians 15). Christians are seated with Christ now (Ephesians 2:6), and they will reign with him for eternity. This can be put into a simple saying: So goes Christ, so go all who put their faith in him. As Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Because of what Christ has done for his people, and who they are in him, believers have undergone a fundamental identity shift from sinner to saint. Christians are brought back into relationship with God through Jesus (John 14:6). They are adopted as sons and daughters through the blood of Christ. He paid for their sins, and now they are fully forgiven (1 John 1:9; 4:10–11). They are set apart

for him now and have peace with God for eternity (Romans 5:1), giving them total access to God as their Father (Romans 8:15–17).

4. Flesh and Spirit

Within believers, there remains something of the “flesh” (their old desires, their old sin patterns). Paul explains, “the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do” (Galatians 5:17). But the flesh does not define a believer like it does an unbeliever. The Holy Spirit in the believer will have the upper hand and will complete the work that God started (Philippians 1:6).

Key Concepts

1. The Tree Metaphor

The Scriptures give us many places to go to understand people. In Luke 6:43–45, Jesus gives a helpful metaphor about people, where the most fundamental part of who they are is the heart, or seed of the tree.

We can expand Jesus’s metaphor to take into account other aspects of human existence as well. The tree’s seed is planted in soil that it cannot control. In the same way, people live in contexts that they cannot always control—and these correspond to the sufferings, hardships, and general things people can’t control in life.

From people’s hearts flow their desires (James 1:14–15). These can easily correspond to the roots of the tree. People seek to be nourished and fed through what they desire, just as roots seek out nutrients.

People’s hearts, the context in which they live, and their desires ultimately form their worldview, corresponding to the tree’s trunk. The trunk of the tree holds the tree up. In the same way, people’s worldviews about God, themselves, and others hold them up and transform the way they live (Romans 1:22–25). People’s behavior (the fruit) flows directly from their worldviews. What people really think about God, themselves, and other people always produces their actions and behaviors.

2. The Triad of Life

The Triad of Life is the way we live the Christian life. The Triad of Life consists of three things: faith, repentance, and love. When Jesus comes on to the scene, he says, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Repentance from sin and faith in Jesus are flip sides of the same coin. Both are required for people to be saved and transformed in Christ, and both are required every day in the lives of believers. Following from the first and second great commandments (Matthew 22:37–40), love for God and others forms the outward expression of the Christian life. Turning from sin and to Jesus in faith, as well as loving and serving God and others, characterize a believer’s life.

One more thing before you jump in: The issues discussed in this study are extremely sensitive. You, or other students you know, will have baggage, fear, and shame when talking about them—as many, if not most, of the group has already experienced firsthand what will be discussed. We pray that the good news of Christ—that he has come to make new what was broken, to give life where there was death, to offer forgiveness and grace where there is sin, and to transform sinners into people who treasure him above all—becomes our sole hope as we journey forward.

We hope that as you discuss these matters, Christ will become more and more beautiful to everyone, and that your desire to follow him with your sexuality will increase week after week.

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Hebrews 13:20–21

WEEK ONE: WHAT DOES GOD HAVE TO DO WITH SEXUALITY?

These first three weeks will be different than the weeks to come, as they lay a broad foundation for understanding our sexuality and the complexity we experience as human beings. First, to understand our sexuality and what went wrong, we have to understand where it all began.

THE SCENARIO

Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed (Genesis 2:23–25).

SCENARIO REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. Genesis 2:24 is the first mention of marriage in the Bible. Christians refer to this as the “covenant” of marriage. What might be the difference between a covenant and two people who make a commitment to live together? Which is safer, covenant or commitment? Why?

2. In the covenant relationship, “the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” What does this tell you about life in the garden?

THE ISSUE: GENESIS 1:26–31; 2:15–17

1. Before God creates the covenant of marriage, what does God create in Genesis 1:26–27? What difference does it make to sexuality that God himself created, and created things “very good” in verse 31?

2. In Genesis 1:28, were sex or our sexuality created for a purpose or as an end in themselves? Explain.

3. What does Genesis 1:29–30 tell you about the character of God? What does God's character have to do with sex and sexuality?

4. What is a worldview? How might Adam and Eve have viewed each other, God, and the world around them given Genesis 1:26–31?

5. What does Genesis 2:15–17 tell us about the original relationship between Adam and God?

THE ISSUE IN LIFE

1. According to our culture, how do Christians view sex and sexuality? Looking back at question 3 in “The Issue,” how does God’s Word present sex and sexuality? Compare and contrast God’s voice and our culture’s voice on sex and sexuality.

2. Do you normally think about sex and sexuality with God in the mix? Explain.

3. What can we expect from life since God created human beings with sexual desire? Explain.

4. Practically, how can Christians live godly lives in light of their God-given sexual desires and sexuality?

THE POINT

Summarize, in your own words, one point from this week's lesson.