

GOING DEEPER
DISCUSSION GUIDE

GREAT **EXPECTATIONS**



March 2, 2014

Discussion Guide

Please, Please Me

1 Corinthians 6.12-7.8

Connecting:

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they answer that they have held back.)

Getting Started:

10 minutes

- What would you say are the largest shaping influences on how we think about sex? What impact do these have on our understand of sex and sexuality?

Diving Into the Text:

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Use the notes to explain the context and background of 1 Corinthians 6.12-7.8.
- Read 1 Corinthians 6.12-7.8 aloud, slowly.

- Paul addresses two opposing viewpoints regarding sex within the Corinthian congregation. What are these two viewpoints? How might you summarize Paul's message to those who held these viewpoints?
- In what ways do you understand Paul to be highlighting the sacredness of sex within the relationship of marriage?
- According to Paul, what role does mutual submission play in addressing differing expectations with regard to sex?
- Where, if anywhere, do you see today the viewpoints regarding sex which Paul outlines today? How might you frame these in terms of expectations?
- In what ways, if any, have you seen these expectations cause conflict within marriages? What approaches are taken to address these conflicts? In your mind, how effective are these approaches? Would you elaborate?
- Paul outlines the choice of mutual submission as the path which navigates differing expectations with regard to sex within marriage. Does this seem to be an easy or difficult path to follow? Would you explain?
- React to the following statement, "If we are to mutually submit with respect to sex, we need to work toward redefining what culture has labeled as sex." Could you elaborate upon your reaction?
- Sex is an important part of marriage but it is also a very private and intimate part of the marriage relationship. Conclude your time as a group by praying for one another and then challenging one another to spend some time as couples discussing what sex is and isn't and what the sexual needs of your spouse are. As individuals, consider ways to work toward the meeting of the needs of your spouse with an attitude of mutual submission.

Context and Background

Redefining Sex

In our modern context, sex is often defined as a physical act, and, as we saw in a now infamous Presidential scandal, is culturally limited to the physical act of sexual intercourse. "Hooking up," "doing it," or "getting it on" are sexual activities while other activities such as sharing, romance, and intimacy are just means to the desired end of sex. While this may be the cultural understanding of sex, one finds a different understanding of sex within Scripture. Throughout Scripture, sexual intercourse is seen as part of the sexual experience, but it is not defined as the entirety of such. In Scripture, sex involves the intimate connection between a man and a woman and is prescribed for the marriage relationship. Because sex is about intimate connection, it includes everything from basic communication, which strengthens this connection, to the physical consummation of this relational connection. Basically, sex is about relationship. This idea of sex as relationship is actually rooted in God's creation of people as sexual beings. When God created people, he made them sexual beings with the intention of them living together in relationship (Genesis 1.26-27; 2.19-25). From the beginning, God's primary emphasis behind sexuality was relational. Further, God intended that people's sexuality teach them something about his own relational character, nature, and existence (Genesis 1.27). His life is one of relational unity and mutuality among the God-head with three becoming one in much the same way that people in the sexual relationship become one. When sex is defined as a physical act alone, it loses its relational dynamic and becomes self-centered, primarily focused on the experience of pleasure. While pleasure is certainly a part of the sexual experience, sex as relationship focuses on the unified experience of intimate connection;

that is, sex is about "us" rather than "me." When sex is redefined in this manner, the pursuit of a sexual relationship centers upon an attitude of mutual submission in which the priority becomes the meeting of the intimate needs of one's spouse and the experience of these needs as a training ground for intimacy with Christ (1 Corinthians 6.12-7.8).

The Text

1 Corinthians 6.12-20:

All the sex, all the time

Paul's first letter to the congregation at Corinth was primarily written to address factions within this young congregation. As one reads this letter, he will discover Paul combatting several fronts and positions on almost every single issue addressed. The issue of sex is no exception. As a port city, the city of Corinth was highly sexualized. There have been some arguments made that the dominant cult of Aphrodite helped to foster this sexual climate with some ancient authors claiming Corinth's Temple of Aphrodite boasted over one thousand prostitutes. More than likely, this was ancient propaganda aimed at slandering the Corinthians, probably originating from the rival city of Athens. It is enough to note that Corinth was no different from any other port city, ancient or modern. The clientele of the city created a demand that entrepreneuring individuals were more than happy to meet.

Within the Corinthian congregation, a specific faction was arguing that their freedom in Christ gave them the right to indulge in sexual activity outside of the marriage relationship, something Paul defined as sexual immorality. The argument followed that even if it was not beneficial it did not matter, for God would destroy the body. This demonstrates the influence of Greek dualism on the congregation. Paul argued that the use of one's body did matter because God

intended to raise the body; that is, people keep their present, though remade, bodies in the resurrection! Paul noted that bodies are important because they are united with Jesus in a very real way. This reality made sex a sacred act. In the sexual experience, people became one. This unity was meant by God as a training ground for the experience of a person's physical union with God. Therefore, sex was sacred, something meant to be experienced, but only experienced within the mutuality and exclusivity of the marriage relationship, and this exclusivity and mutuality was meant to serve as a training ground for the exclusive relationship with God.

1 Corinthians 7.1-8: No sex at any time

While some within the Corinthian congregation argued for a no-boundaries approach to sex, others argued for complete abstinence. Because sex was meant by God to serve as a training ground for one's intimate relationship with God, some were arguing for the need to skip the sexual experience altogether so that one might jump straight to intimacy with God. Paul noted that this too was a problem because it was forcing some within the congregation to engage in sexual acts outside of the marriage relationship. This may, in part, be what lay behind Paul's previous statements. Standing between these two groups, a highly sexualized group and a group promoting sexual abstinence, Paul sought to strike a mediating position. First, Paul stated that the sexual experience was, out of necessity, to be part of the marriage experience. The sexual relationship was not to be viewed as what was owed to one's own self but what was owed to one's spouse; that is, sexual intimacy was to be approached with an attitude of mutual submission with each spouse seeking to meet the sexual needs of the other. Paul noted that spouses were not to make unilateral decisions about sexual intimacy but these decisions were to be made in dialogue with the abstinence from sexual intercourse being a mutual decision. This decision was to be one that did point one to intimacy with God. However, this decision was to have an end for many partners were not ready to fully abstain from sexual intercourse and would find themselves struggling with temptation.

Paul agreed that sex is not necessary for some, but labeled this as a gift from God.

Application:

One of the primary causes of conflict in marriages today involves differing expectations surrounding sexual intimacy. Our prevailing culture emphasizes the notion that sex is physical and that marriage should be a virtual sexual romp. This cultural notion tends to foster self-centered thinking within relationships, thinking primarily focused upon physical gratification. When one spouse does not feel satisfied sexually, conflict arises as the expectation is that the other partner should have the same physical expectations. These potential conflicts arise, in part, because of our cultural definition of sex which emphasizes the physical component of the sexual act. However, sex is much bigger than the sexual act. Sex is relational and includes non-sexual touch as well as the sharing of thoughts, words of affirmation, and the expression of devotion. Further, sex is about the experience of unity and mutuality with another which serves as a training ground for understanding the life of God and one's life with God. When viewed in this manner, sex is much bigger than being physically intimate with another person, and is a means of learning about God and what it is to be with God. This sharing in the life of God leads us to think in terms of mutual submission which breaks the experience of isolation and leads us to serve rather than demand.

Want to know how this looks in real life? Check out Blake's blog at BlakeShipp.blogspot.com



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP

 blakeshipp.blogspot.com
 twitter.com/blake_shipp