

Series - Be Wise

Date/s - 21 July 2019

Topic - Redeeming Intimacy (1 Corinthians 7:1-24)

Speaker/s - Pastor Ernie Song

Welcome [15 min]

You may want to look up the following websites for *icebreakers* suitable for your cell.

www.thesource4ym.com/games/

www.christianitytoday.com/smallgroups/articles/icebreakersbeyond.html < go to LEAD, click on ICEBREAKERS >

Worship [15 min]

You may select songs like "This Is Amazing Grace", "God Is Here", "Stay Amazed" or "Build My Life".

Spiritual Objectives

At the end of the cell discussion, cell members will:

1. Understand the ultimate purpose for sex as designed by God, which points to the covenantal relationship between Christ and the Church.
2. Reclaim the holiness of sex from the world's distorted version, which cheapens its value and deceives the Church.
3. Commit to fight for sexual intimacy in our marriage because God delights in it.

Word [45 min]

Before Pastor Ernie delved into 1 Corinthians 7:1-24, he emphasised the importance of today's topic because:

1. We have neglected to teach about sex and sexuality from the pulpit for too long.
2. We are constantly besieged by a sex-crazed world with unbiblical views on sexuality.
3. We must redeem the true meaning of sex from the Enemy's perverted version.

Dividing his sermon into two parts, Pastor Ernie focused on *Marital Intimacy* (more than *Divorce and Remarriage*) as it is critical for the church to first understand God's purpose and intention for sex.

Marital Intimacy (vv 1-5)

1. Sex and sexuality from a biblical perspective

In Paul's teaching, he pointed out that husbands and wives have equal responsibilities and privileges in marriage, and one should not deprive the other of sexual intimacy. This is important because sex and sexuality was originally God's idea in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:24-25). It was intended for marital pleasure but it has a much higher purpose. Marital intimacy is actually a holy metaphor of Christ's covenantal relationship with the Church.

Sexual union then is a covenant renewing ceremony between husband and wife, and is therefore a celebration of that covenant (Ephesians 5:31-33). The goal of sex is oneness or *YADA* (Hebrew: *to know intimately*) or "one flesh" (v 31). Sexual intimacy is much more than physical, as popular culture would

have us believe. The “one flesh” principle of biblical sex involves sacrifice, commitment, exclusiveness, vulnerability, and emotions. As Christians, we must view sex from God’s perspective and not from the world’s. For us, sex is holy, not dirty. It delights God when a husband and wife renew their marital covenant through sexual intimacy. Even a whole book in the Bible, Song of Solomon, is dedicated to the celebration of sexual intimacy. God loves sex!

2. Sex from a biological perspective

Sexual intimacy forms intense physical, mental, and emotional bonds between spouses. This happens when four vital hormones are released during sex:

- i. *Dopamine* makes one feel good.
- ii. *Oxytocin* helps one to bond. It is found more in women but it is released more in men during sex.
- iii. *Endorphins* makes one happy.
- iv. *Vasopressin* helps one to commit to another. Primarily released in the men’s brain, it arouses loyalty and commitment, and inspires a protective sense over one’s spouse, after sexual intimacy.

In God’s design (as exemplified through these hormones), human beings are made biologically for a monogamous and committed marital relationship. The hormones released strengthen the marital relationship between spouses.

Hence, sex outside the covenant of marriage is not just wrong because the Bible says so. Illicit sex, including casual sex, adultery and pornography, creates an inability for spouses to bond vulnerably and intimately, and breeds selfishness between husband and wife (due to the re-molding of the brain). Pastor Ernie encouraged married couples not to withhold sex from each other as God is pleased with sexual intimacy in marriage.

Divorce and Remarriage (vv 6-16)

Paul’s teaching regarding the issues surrounding divorce and remarriage in the Corinthian church can be summarised as:

1. The Widowed and Remarriage (vv 8-9)
 - i. The single state and the married state are both gifts from God (v 7).
 - ii. Paul advocates remaining single for those who have lost a spouse but allows for remarriage (vv 8-9).
2. Divorce and Remarriage (vv 10-11)
 - i. Paul forbids remarriage after a divorce.
 - ii. Why? Because of the “one flesh” principle and to promote healing and reconciliation between the spouses.
3. The Multi-Faith Marriage (vv 12-16)
 - i. Paul forbids divorce because salvation of your spouse can happen through the testimony of your commitment to the marriage.

(Note to leaders: Some may have questions regarding our stance on marriage, remarriage and divorce. We do encourage them to write to the church office (office@riverlife.org.sg) to have their questions answered. It is important to note that when Pastor Ernie presented the church’s position on this matter, its goal was not to condemn those who do not live up to these positions, but to communicate the church’s stance so that the

holiness of God is protected in the church, and to inform those who are considering divorce or remarriage. Our approach towards divorce and remarriage must not be to find a loophole so that one can proceed but rather to give marriage and reconciliation **every chance** with proper counseling and guidance from the church. For those who feel offended due to our church's positions, do encourage them that the church is not condemning them or ostracising them. They are still part of our family and we love them the same as everyone!

Conclusion

In conclusion, Pastor Ernie encouraged the church that in whatever marital status we find ourselves in – whether single, married, divorced, or widowed – we are to steward it well and run our race with our eyes fixed on the Giver and not the gift (vv 17-24). For married couples, he urged us again to keep fighting for intimacy within our marriages and for the sexual intimacy within the marital relationship, because it is a gift as well as a divine picture of Christ's covenantal relationship with us.

Discussion Questions

1. **What thoughts and feelings do you bring to a discussion about sex? In what ways has your personal experience, family background, or religious upbringing influenced your comfort (or lack of comfort) in discussing this topic?** [15 min]

Leader's Notes: An ice-breaker and recap question. Pastor Ernie pointed out that there were two camps in the Corinthian church in their approach toward sex. One group was pro-celibacy (asceticism or self-denial) while the other was pro-pleasure (hedonism or self-indulgence). And these were Christians in Paul's time! Although they had been redeemed by Christ, their past lifestyle and upbringing had inevitably influenced their beliefs. Likewise, all of us who have been saved, bring to RiverLife our own baggage and worldviews on matters like sex. We may not be extreme like those in Corinth – denying sex even in marriage or engaging in sex with anyone – but we have our own ideas, theories and emotions attached to this sensitive subject. Reassure members that the cell is a safe place and all exchange of ideas are welcome. If the Bible talks about sex, and we are the people of the Book, we must open up to Paul's teaching and learn what God says about this topic, no matter how uncomfortable it may seem at first.

[Leaders can summarise the discussion by stating that we have to address the world's patterns of thinking with regards to sex and sexuality by reclaiming God's design, that is, the holiness of sexual intimacy within a marital relationship:](#)

- "Sex is dirty and ungodly. It has to do with the flesh."
- God created sex for the married couple for the purpose of intimacy with one another and as a way to renew the marital covenant.
- God takes delight when a married couple renew their covenant through sexual intimacy.
- Sex outside of marriage has negative consequences on our mind, body and emotions.

2. **[For married couples] Read 1 Corinthians 7:3-5. Share from your heart after you have read this passage. What mutual obligation do a husband and wife have to each other? Have you been fulfilling this obligation to your spouse? If so, share your story. If not, why?** [15 min]

Leader's Notes: A relate question. Also a very personal question. However, do not be afraid to ask as this is an important question for married couples. The thrust of Pastor Ernie's message is about sexual intimacy in marriage. Sexual union or "one flesh" points to the relationship between Christ and the Church

(Ephesians 5:31-33). Pastor Ernie's challenge – and the Bible's commandment – to couples in RiverLife is to fight for intimacy in marriage for it delights God and it demonstrates His everlasting covenant with us.

According to verse 3, within the marriage bond, each partner is responsible to fulfil his or her obligations to his or her spouse. The obligation that the apostle emphasised here is primarily the sexual obligation: each partner must seek to meet the other's sexual needs, so as to avoid causing the spouse to fall into the temptation of committing fornication. Just as verse 3 speaks of a mutual obligation (a duty) each spouse has to the other, so verse 4 speaks of a mutual submission (a delight) each spouse must exhibit towards the other. Within marriage each spouse relinquishes the exclusive rights of his or her body to the other in a mutual self-giving love.

Leaders can encourage members to examine their lifestyles and habits within their marriage. Husbands and wives must intentionally create time for physical intimacy to renew their covenant in marriage. For marriage to work, husbands and wives must take time to develop oneness (YADA) within their marriage.

For couples who want to rediscover or improve their sexual intimacy, read Song of Solomon together. This book in the Old Testament is a wonderful description of the ecstasy, the delight, and the pleasure that sex is designed to give. It's an eight-chapter feast of unbridled and joyous immersion in verbal and physical expressions of passion between a man and a woman within the covenant of marriage. For couples who are deeply struggling, they may consider RTF ministry in RiverLife. There is no shame or embarrassment in seeking help. Healing begins when we acknowledge there is a problem. If the Bible we read is so forthright in talking about sex, we will do well to talk about it in church as well.

[For unmarried individuals] After hearing the message, what are some mindsets do you have concerning sex that have been shaped by culture rather than by God's Word that need to be corrected?

Leader's Notes: A lot of our mindsets about sex have been shaped by culture because the church has largely been silent on the matter. Encourage your members to dig deep within their hearts and to allow the Holy Spirit to expose the lies of the enemy concerning sex that they have unknowingly embraced. Some common mindsets shaped by culture are:

- "Sex outside of marriage is good" – Biologically it re-molds your brain and destroys your future marriage.
- "The effects of sex before marriage is negligible." – (As above)
- "It doesn't matter as long as no one gets hurt." – As a Christian, it does matter because the act of sex represents God's covenant with His church.
- Sexual intimacy within marriage is always natural and requires no effort as portrayed in TV shows and movies." – In reality, it takes a lot of effort to build intimacy within a marriage (YADA). Sexual intimacy stays aflame when there is YADA within the marriage.

3. [For everyone] Read 1 Corinthians 7:7-24. Whether you are married or single, how might you "live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned" (v17) and be "responsible to the Lord" (v24) in your present circumstances? What practical steps can you take in your present state in life to grow in holiness? [15 min]

Leader's Notes: A response question. Pastor Ernie demonstrated our calling as a "runner for God" in whatever capacity or role God has assigned us, whether we are single or married, divorced or widowed, husband or wife, son or daughter, mother or father, pastor or waiter, CEO or homemaker. Our first calling is to Christ as a child of God, a disciple, a bride, a servant. The life that He has called us to – our second calling – may not be easy. We may think that we don't have what it takes to complete the mission as a

“called-out one” (Romans 8:28-30) but God doesn’t ever give us a surplus of strength. He gives us just enough for the day. Sometimes God gives us giant tasks that we feel unqualified for so that we stay humble and dependent on His strength and not our own. Our life is not an accident of God but is the design of God. We may sometimes think we are missing out on something but we are never missing out on God. (Matthew 28:20, Hebrews 13:5) Remain where we are and flourish where we are. As someone once said, “Bloom where you are planted.”

“Our primary calling as followers of Christ is by Him, to Him, and for Him...Our secondary calling, considering who God is as sovereign, is that everyone, everywhere, and in everything should think, speak, live, and act entirely for him...The vital distinction between primary and secondary calling carries with it two challenges: To hold the two together. To ensure that they are kept in the right order...The truth of calling means that for followers of Christ, “everyone, everywhere, and in everything” lives the whole of life as a response to God’s call.” (Os Guinness)

Read “Your Job as Ministry” by John Piper <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/your-job-as-ministry>

Resources

The following are resources that your members can refer to deal more with the topic discussed.

For those struggling with sexual issues ranging from pornography to sexual addictions or a wounded past:

Restoring The Pleasure – Clifford & Joyce Penner

Yes, Your Marriage Can Be Saved – Joe & Michelle Williams

<https://2.bebroken.com/>

<https://www.covenanteyes.com/>

Biblical Perspectives on Sex & Sexuality:

Rethinking Sexuality – Dr. Juli Slattery

Passion Pursuit – Linda Dillow & July Slattery

Unmasked – Ps. Ben KC Lee

Passion & Purity – Elizabeth Elliot

God Loves Sex – Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III

“5 Surprising Things That the Bible Says about Sex” by Paul Carter

<https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/columns/ad-fontes/5-surprising-things-that-the-bible-says-about-sex/>

Marriage Resources

Strengthening Marriages – Paul David Tripp

Focus On The Family Resources – <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/church/promos/building-a-thriving-church-marriage-ministry>

You And Me Forever – Francis & Lisa Chan

The Meaning Of Marriage – Timothy Keller

Works [10 min]

Let’s pray:

1. (If majority of your cell consists of married couples, divide the groups into females and males and encourage them to share their struggles to cultivate intimacy within their marriage before praying for each other.)
2. For every married couple to work towards passionate intimacy within their marriage (YADA).
3. Every RiverLifer sees sexual intimacy as God defines it, not as the world portrays it.

Announcements

1. **We Belong**

RiverLife Conference

23- 24 Aug 2019

Sign up online at www.riverlife.org.sg/webelong by Sun, 4 Aug

2. **Marriage Preparation Course**

8, 15, 22, 29 Sep & 6 Oct (Sundays, 1.45pm-5pm) and 12 Oct (Sat, 9am-5pm)

\$260 Per Couple | Faith Chapel, RiverLife Church

Register at the Information Counter by Sun, 1 Sep. For enquiries, please contact Christine Tan at

christinetan@riverlife.org.sg or 65114141

3. **No Cell Guide for 2 Aug cell**

All cells are encouraged to attend Pre-Conference Prayer Meeting on 2 Aug.

Church Vision:

“A radiant disciple-making church catalysing Kingdom transformation in our communities and the nations.

Mission:

We exist to make disciples who behold Christ and reveal Him.