

GOALS FOR THE GROUP LEADER

Help the group members to gain insight into:

1. the important things God says about man-woman relationships
2. the greatest commandment: to love one another with agape love

I. WORSHIP (14 min.)

1. Prayer

Pray that God will guide us through his Spirit; that we will be aware of his presence and that we will listen to what he says.

2. Meditation

Worship is also expressed with hands and knees.

Theme: Body postures in worship

Read the Bible verses mentioned below (especially those marked *) and the explanation. Or explain the verses in your own words.

In the Bible various body postures are recorded in connection with worship. Although these postures have significance and express certain attitudes, nowhere in the Bible are Christians taught, commanded or prohibited to make use of these postures in worship and prayer! Believers in Jesus Christ may therefore make use of these postures, but these postures are not prescribed in the Bible! Therefore Christians may not be forced to make use of these postures.

➤ Eyes in worship.

In the Bible eyes are not closed during prayer or worship, but are lifted up towards the LORD who is enthroned in heaven (Psalm 123:1-2*; cf. Psalm 121:1-2).

➤ Clapping hands in worship.

Clapping hands expresses joy and accompanies singing (Psalm 98:8*) and rejoicing (Isaiah 55:12b*).

➤ Spreading out hands forward.

- *Stretching out hands* (probably forward with open hands making 'a stop sign') expresses anxiety (Jeremiah 4:31).
- *Lifting up the heart with hands* (probably forward with hands closer together) expresses begging for forgiveness (Lamentations 3:41-42).

- *Lifting up hands* (towards temple in Jerusalem, the earthly dwelling of God during the Old Testament period) (1 Kings 8:38-39*; Psalm 28:2) or *spreading out hands* (probably forward with arms stretched sideways and with open hands) expresses a prayer request (an appeal) to the LORD or receiving something from him (1 Timothy 2:8*; cf. Psalm 77:2,10; 119:48; 141:2; 143:6; Lamentations 2:19).
- *Holding out hands* (probably forward with open hands somewhat downward) expresses offering help to the poor (Proverbs 31:20).
- *Holding out hands* (probably sideways with open hands) expresses invitation or welcome to unworthy people (Isaiah 65:2; cf. Romans 10:21).

➤ Lifting hands upward.

- *Holding up hands* was a sign of victory in the LORD's battle (Exodus 17:11).
- *Lifting up hands* (probably upward with open hands facing forward) expresses praise to God (Psalm 63:4*; 134:2*) or giving a blessing to people (Luke 24:50*).

➤ Laying on of hands.

See lesson 22, Hebrews 6:2.

➤ Kneeling in worship.

The posture to kneeling before someone and kissing his feet, the seam of his robe or the ground on which he stood (thus with head and hands on the ground) was an ancient custom in several nations. It was the sign of the lesser bowing before the greater, the posture of a slave before his master and of a citizen before his king. The Persians bowed down before their divine king and the Greeks before their idols.

- *Kneeling in respect.* From early times people knelt and bowed with their face and hands on the ground as a sign of submission and respect before a high official. Examples in the Bible: Leah and her children bowed down before Esau (Genesis 33:7). David knelt and bent before king Saul (1 Samuel 24:8). King Saul knelt and bent before the evil spirit that pretended to be the departed spirit of the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 28:14*). Bathsheba knelt and bowed low before king David (1 Kings 1:16). A captain of fifty soldiers fell on his knees before the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:13). All the royal officials in the Medo-Persian Empire knelt down and paid honour to Haman, but Mordecai refused (Esther 3:2,5).

Jesus says that the Jews (and people like them who oppress and persecute Christians) would fall down at the feet of Christians and acknowledge that

Christians are the beloved of Jesus Christ (God) (Revelation 3:9).

○ *Kneeling in worship.*

From early times people knelt and bowed with their face and hands on the ground as a sign of worshipping an idol (1 Kings 19:18) (860 B.C.). Those who were believers in the LORD, the God of the Bible, also bowed before the LORD when they worshipped (Psalm 95:6).

Examples in the Old Testament: The servant of Abraham fell on his knees and bowed before the LORD (Genesis 24:26). Moses fell on his knees and bent before the LORD (Exodus 34:8). Balaam knelt and bent before the Angel of the LORD (Numbers 22:31*). Believers in the LORD may never bow down before other gods because the God of the Bible does not tolerate the worship of any other god besides him (Exodus 20:4-5*). Believers in the LORD may also not kneel before the sun, moon and stars (Deuteronomy 4:19). In spite of these clear commandments Israel (Jacob's descendants) filled the land with idols and bowed down before the works of their hands (Isaiah 2:8) (about 740 B.C.).

At the dedication of the first temple (961 B.C.), when the Israelites saw fire coming down from heaven which consumed the burnt offering and saw the glory of the LORD filling the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground and they worshipped and gave thanks to the LORD (2 Chronicles 7:1-3*). At the cleansing of the temple in the time of king Hezekiah (713 B.C.), during the burnt offering, the whole assembly (Greek: Church) of the Israelites bowed (with heads and hands on the ground) in worship, while the singers sang and the trumpeters played) (2 Chronicles 29:28-30).

The custom to pray on one's knees was also combined with the custom to pray with uplifted hands. At the dedication of the first temple king Solomon first stood with spread out hands and then knelt with spread out hands before the LORD (2 Chronicles 6:13; cf. 1 Kings 8:22). During the evening sacrifice, Ezra (458 B.C.) tore his clothes, fell on his knees and prayed with hands spread out to the LORD. But he was too ashamed of the sins of Israel to lift up his face to the LORD (Ezra 9:5-6).

Examples from the New Testament: A man with leprosy knelt before Jesus (Matthew 8:2). A ruler of a synagogue knelt before Jesus (Matthew 9:18). A Canaanite woman knelt before Jesus (Matthew 15:25). A father of a boy with a demon knelt before Jesus (Matthew 17:14). The soldiers of the Roman

governor knelt in front of Jesus to mock him (Matthew 27:29), etc.

In the New Testament period Jesus Christ (in his human nature) prayed on his knees in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:41). The apostle Paul and the Christians in Ephesus knelt and prayed together on the beach (Acts 20:36). From prison in Rome Paul wrote to the Ephesians that he knelt in worship before God the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and one earth (the Church) derives its name (Ephesians 3:14-15), that is the name 'children of God' (John 1:12; Romans 8:16).

The Roman centurion fell at the feet of the apostle Peter in reverence, but Peter disapproved and said that he was only a man (Acts 10:25-26). Jesus Christ clearly teaches that this posture in worship (of kneeling and bowing the face and hands on the ground) (Greek: *proskuneò*) should only be employed in worship to the God of the Bible (Matthew 4:10*; cf. Exodus 20:5). But Jesus allowed his disciples to bow down before him to worship him as 'the Son of God' (which means: 'truly God') (Matthew 14:33), because Jesus Christ is God (cf. John 5:18; John 8:24; Exodus 3:14-15)!

3. Worship

Choose a posture that expresses the attitude that you have for God and silently worship God for a few minutes.

II. INTRODUCTION THEME (1 min.)

The theme for this meeting is: Relationships

Read or explain in your own words.

Human life and living together is about various relationships. There are relationships with your family, friends and enemies. There are relationships with Christians and non-Christians, with believers and unbelievers, with men and with women, with children and with adults, with people of your own human culture and people from a foreign culture, with colleagues and competitors, with neighbours and fellow-citizens, with classmates and members of the club, and especially with God.

This study deals with the relationship to the opposite sex.

III. SHARING OF QUIET TIMES (30 min.)

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to share (or read) what he has learned from one of the assigned quiet times.

Theme: Relationships

Day 1 Romans 12:9-21
 The relationship with all people

- Day 2 1 John 2:6-11
The relationship with all Christians
- Day 3 Proverbs 23:22-26
The relationship with your parents
- Day 4 Ephesians 5:22-33
The relationship with your spouse
- Day 5 Luke 6:27-35
The relationship to enemies
- Day 6 1 Corinthians 5:9-13
Avoid wrong relationships
- Day 7 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1
Intimate and binding relationships with unbelievers are forbidden (cf. also 1 Corinthians 7:39)
- Day 8 1 Corinthians 7:36-40
Marriage is no sin, but marry only to a born-again believer
- Day 9^{BS} 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8
Marry only with someone who has self-control (choice of translation)¹
- Day 10 Matthew 6:25-34
Marry only with someone who has the same goals in life (cf. also Amos 3:3)

IV. ADDITIONAL SHARING (15 min.)

Part IV is optional.
If after sharing quiet times there is still time left over, the following may serve as subjects for conversation.

1. Discussing the study

Discuss the study with reference to the questions mentioned below:

Theme: Relationships

- What is the difference between infatuation (being in love) and the love of which the Bible speaks (Greek: agape)?
- What are the responsibilities of Christian brothers and sisters with respect to one another?
- Which practical steps could brothers and sisters take to get to know one another better?
- Which decisions are good and wise to make before you seek a life-partner?

2. Commitment

Let the group members consider the following question and record their answer:

- “In which respect must I change my view about men-women relationships?”

3. Personal sharing

Discuss personal growth and commitment. Who would like to share a difficulty or blessing in his/her personal life? What are your thoughts or feelings?

V. MEMORISATION (5 min.)

1. Review of previous Bible verses

Let pairs of group members review each other's previously memorised Bible verses (the last memorised Bible verse or the last 5 memorised Bible verses).

2. Memorisation of the new Bible verse

Explain the meaning of the new Bible verse.

RELATIONSHIPS Proverbs 27:17

As iron sharpens iron,
so one man sharpens another.

Proverbs 27:17 (NIV)

3. Review of the Bible books

All 39 books of the Old Testament

The 5 books of the Law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

The 12 historical books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, 1&2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

The 5 poetical books: Job, Psalms, proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs

The 5 major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel

The 12 minor prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

All 27 books of the New Testament

The 4 Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

The 1 historical book: Acts

The 13 Letters of Paul: Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon

The 8 General Letters: Hebrews, James, 1&2 Peter, 1&2&3 John, Jude,

The 1 Apocalypse: Revelation

VI. BIBLE STUDY (45 min.)

Theme: The relationship to the opposite sex

1. Bible Study

Make use of the method of studying parables in the Bible:

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

¹Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order

to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.²For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.³It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you should learn to control his own body (or: learn to live with his own wife; or learn to acquire a wife) in a way that is holy and honourable, ⁵not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; ⁶and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. ⁷For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. ⁸Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

2. Emphasis

The Bible clearly teaches that healthy men-women relationships are possible!

3. Explanation for the group leader

4:1-3a. God's will is sanctification

People must know "how to live in order to please God". People are not allowed to live as they please (cf. Judges 21:25*). People have been created to glorify God (Isaiah 43:7) by living for Jesus Christ (Romans 14:8; 2 Corinthians 5:15; Colossians 1:16*). This is also true in respect to the other sex. What pleases God is our sanctification.

'Sanctification' with respect to the other sex involves three important things:

- avoiding sexual immorality in all its forms (verse 3)
- learning how to acquire (win) his vessel (life-partner) (verse 4)
- and not wronging or taking advantage of his brother in this matter (verse 6).

4:3b. Avoid sexual immorality

➤ *The spirit of the world*

We live in a time when sexual immorality is practiced openly and without shame. More and younger people experiment with sex. Pornography is brought into homes via television, internet, magazines, books, films and bad friends. Even governments make propaganda for 'safe sex'. Yet the number of abortions among teenagers is rising dramatically in the world and so are the numbers of violence within families and divorces!

Traditional ways of relating to the opposite sex is replaced by limitless licentiousness in the area of sex. Young people and even adults do not realise the dangers of free sex and often do not even want to know it. 'Safe sex' is from a physical point of view and from a spiritual point of view never 'safe'! Young people can hardly find a

good example of how to relate in a good and healthy way with the opposite sex. Most of their knowledge about sex is gathered from the mass media, their immoral friends and their own foolish experimentation with sex. Nevertheless, the Bible has much to say about sex!

➤ *Sexual immorality and adultery*

The difference between sexual immorality and adultery is taught in the Bible. 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 teaches that sexual immorality (Greek: porneia) is when a person relates to another person with passionate lust, something which is common among unbelievers in the world. Every form of sexual immorality is 'impure' in God's eyes (verse 7).

In Matthew 19:4-6 Jesus Christ teaches that God created the male and the female body; that God determined that one man may only become one with one woman after they have been united by God in marriage. At a Christian marriage service God unites one man to one woman. That is the moment they are inseparably united to one another to form one body.

Hebrews 13:4* teaches that sex may only be practised inside a marriage relationship! 'The marriage bed' excludes every form of sexual immorality (sex before marriage) (Greek: porneia) and adultery (sex outside marriage) (Greek: moicheia)! Thus, people who argue that sex before marriage with the same (steady) partner is not 'sexual immorality' are contradicting God's Word! God warns everyone that he will certainly judge all sexual immoral people and all adulterers.

'Sexual immorality' (Greek: porneia) is thus every form of sexual activity before and outside the Christian marriage. This includes the following: impure thoughts, fantasies and desires (Matthew 5:28*), dirty jokes about sex, flirting and sexual acts before and outside the Christian marriage.

'Immorality' even includes every form of spiritual immorality towards God: like idolatry, occultism and unfaithfulness, and social immorality towards people: like violence and maltreatment of the opposite sex.

'Adultery' (Greek: moicheia) is a part of sexual immorality and consists of every form of sexual acts outside one's own marriage. This includes the following: flirting with someone you are not married to, sex with someone that is not your marriage partner and divorce.

➤ *The goal of sex*

God's Word clearly teaches that every form of sex before or outside your own marriage is illegal and forbidden in God's eyes! God has created sex with the following three-fold purpose:

- to bind (glue) the husband and the wife to one another for life. Sex is a very strong binding force (Matthew 19:5-6*).
- that the husband and wife admire and enjoy one another in every area, including the physical area (Song of Songs)
- and to procreate children who may grow up in the protected environment of a healthy and well-knit family.

4:4-5. Control yourself and win the other

The words:

- (1) “that each of you should learn to control his own body”
 (2) or “that each of you should learn to acquire a wife”
 are both possible translations from the Greek original of verse 4.

➤ *How does a Christian control his own body “in a way that is holy and honourable and not in passionate lust?”*

- *Learn to control your eyes*

Job 31:1

“I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.”

Especially men are quickly tempted to fantasize and sin by what they see with their eyes. That is why women should dress themselves beautifully and in a way that does not tempt men. That is why men should completely avoid all kinds of sex magazines and video’s, etc. Men must learn not to ‘undress’ women with their eyes. When men by accident see something that excites them sexually, they should immediately set these thoughts out of their mind. They should not dwell on them or have a second look. Men and women who love Jesus Christ learn how to look at one another in a holy and honourable way, without lust.

- *Learn to control your tongue*

Ephesians 5:3-4

“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be any obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place ...”

The word ‘sexual immorality’ is used in relationship to speaking. The word ‘obscenity’ refers to immoral language as double talk, gossiping about people’s sex life or using strong sex words in swearing. The word ‘foolish talk’ refers to all kinds of speaking that is not wise. The word ‘coarse joking’ refers to telling dirty jokes. Christians ought to give their children a healthy sex education and always speak about sex in a respectful way.

- *Learn to control your body language*

Proverbs 6:25

“Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes.”

God has created men handsome and women beautiful so that they would be attractive to one another. This is certainly important in the process towards marriage. But God does not want women to misuse their beauty or men their strength to seduce one another to sexual immorality. Male and female prostitutes in the whole world know that people can be weak in the area of sex and they take advantage of this weakness. Certain women try to catch men with their eyes or body movements. Certain men try to catch women by chatting them up. Christian men and women must immediately shut the door against such temptations (1 Corinthians 10:13*; 2 Corinthians 10:4-5*) and call in the help of the Holy Spirit.

- *Learn to control our feet*

Proverbs 5:8-10

“Keep to a path far from her, do not go near to the door of her house, lest you give your best strength to others, and your years to one who is cruel, lest strangers feast on your wealth and your toil enrich another man’s house.”

Every city has its professional male and female prostitutes; red-light districts, nightclubs, massage parlours, sex bars, sex disco’s, sex clubs, sex bioscopes, escort services and lover boys. These are traps set before the feet of men and women. Christians must keep their feet far away from all these places! Avoid so-called ‘friends’ who make dishonourable suggestions to have sex. When a man says to a girl: “If you love me you will go to bed with me”, she must answer: “If you love me you will never ask this of me!”

- *Learn to control your hands*

Proverbs 5:15-23

¹⁵ Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well.

¹⁶ Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares?

¹⁷ Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers.

¹⁸ May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.

¹⁹ A loving doe, a graceful deer— may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.

²⁰ Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man’s wife?

²¹ For a man’s ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths.

²² The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast.

²³ He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly.

There are people who cannot or do not want to control their hands. They continually try to touch a woman's body in order to seduce her. They cannot keep their hands at bay. Couples who date one another often try to see just how far they can go without the actual deed of sex. So they touch one another above and under the clothes. Men as well as women are tempted by what they see and feel. But Christians who love (obey) Jesus Christ will learn to relate to one another in a holy and honourable way, not in passionate lust. In this way they create trust and feelings of safety in one another's presence. If you want to gain trust you must exercise self-control!

➤ *How does a Christian win his life-partner in a way that is holy and honourable and not in passionate lust?*

○ *Winning in holiness and honour*

Christian men and women must relate to one another in a different way than unbelievers and non-Christians. The Bible teaches that a Christian man may win a Christian girl as wife, but not in the way of this world. He may not win her in passionate lust, but in holiness and honour (verse 4).

'Holiness' means separation from the sinful ways of this world and dedication to whatever is pleasing to God. 'Honour' means whatever the God of the Bible approves and whatever gains the respect from other Christians. Make this your goal!

Going out with a person of the opposite sex (getting acquainted and courting) is a process in which two people of the opposite sex get to know one another and possibly win one another with a view to marriage. Therefore Christian young people should always and everywhere relate to one another in an attractive and enjoyable way and control themselves. They exercise self-control with their eyes, tongues, body language, feet and hands. GOD HIMSELF created male and female and therefore has the right to set these limits in the relationship between people of the opposite sex.

○ *Winning within limits*

That is why Christians who go out with one another need to set practical limits together and agree to maintain those limits in their relationship. These limits could include the following areas:

- *Time.* When do you go out with one another? How often do you go out with one another? How long do you go out with one another? At what time do you leave and go home?

- *Places.* Where do you meet one another? To which places do you go? To which places do you definitely not go?
- *Activities.* Which things do you do together? Which things do you definitely not do? Say to one another that God sees and knows everything you think, say and do.
- *Physical contact.* Make an agreement with one another how you will touch one another and how you will not touch one another. Touching one another should consider three standards: What kind of touching does God (the Bible) approve? What kind of touching is good from a biblical point of view, but maybe is offensive to the culture in which you live (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:20)? Which kind of touching is good from a biblical point of view, but maybe is not building up your girlfriend or boyfriend?

4:6a Do not deceive your brother

The 'brother' is someone who is deceived and gets hurt by your unholy and dishonourable behaviour and passionate lust (sexual immorality).

This 'brother' may be the father of the girl who still feels responsible for the girl until she is out of the house. He may be the leader of the youth fellowship or congregation who feel responsible for what happens at the youth fellowship or in the congregation. Or he may be the future husband of the girl who would love to marry a virgin instead of someone that has been misused.

4:6b-8 Do not reject God

This instruction in the Bible, namely, how men and woman should relate to one another in the sexual area may not be rejected by anyone!

Whoever rejects God's instruction as something that is old-fashioned or outdated culture rejects God himself. Our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and we may not misuse the temple of God for sexual immorality. God will certainly judge sexual immorality in all its forms (Hebrews 13:4).

VII. PRAYER (8 min.)

Pray with one another in response to what God said to you during this gathering. Let every group member take a turn to pray one or two sentences about what God taught him during this meeting.

Pray with one another for one another (Romans 15:30) and for other people (Colossians 4:12).

VIII. THE NEXT MEETING (2 min.)

Hand out the preparation for the next gathering.