Body Image (2):
Summer Study Notes
SUMMER STUDY NOTES July – August 2017

The notes:
These notes accompany the teaching from July 2, 9, 16, which can be listened to live or found on our podcasts. But, as there is a lot of material, small groups meeting over the summer might like to spread out the studies a little more and go deeper into the passages and ideas that are raised – it’s up to you!

The series:
This series has been called: Body Image (2). It builds on our series Body Image (1), which explored the erotic poetry of Song of Songs in the heart of the Bible. That book was seen not just as a love poem (which it is), but also as a way of helping us understand just how God wants to relate to his ‘bride’ the Church which we are all part of. We have a God who truly sees us, likes us, desires us, and wants to ‘know’ us deeply, as a lover knows their spouse.

From this platform, of knowing we are deeply loved, accepted and valued, we now turn to explore what else the Bible has to say about relationships, sex, singleness, sexuality, longing, desire and the mess it possible to make of our lives. In order to do this we start with looking at what God intended for us in the beginning; then what Jesus says the end will be like. These bookends then frame how we think about the mess in the middle in this confusing world we live in, and in a final section we look at Redeeming Love – how God again and again brings about beauty through our brokenness.

With love:
This is obviously a very sensitive series to be discussing. Hopefully there is something for everyone. As a church family we will be approaching this topic from very different life experiences and backgrounds. Some of you may have thought about this deeply before. Others may never have thought whether God cared about this part of your personality at all. Some may carry a sense of pain, others shame or failure, still others anger when the church seems to have got this wrong, hurt over things that have been done to them or confusion about where a rapidly changing world is heading. This is personal to us all, but for some it is more costly to consider than it will be for others.

With this in mind, please can I humbly ask that if you have strong opinions (in any direction!) on ethical issues, please consider
exercising loving restraint in not immediately offering them. Instead open yourself up to listening to God through the Scriptures and to others in the group, that together we might grow in understanding as well as in the grace and freedom that comes from a life lived in increasingly grateful obedience to the God who truly sets us free for now and for eternity.

My aim with the series is to offer you a framework for thinking these things through for yourself, in a way that pleases God and is therefore life giving for you. For those who would like me to tell (others) what to do, I’m going to resist that. For those who would like me to pretend that there is nothing here to discuss, I’m going to resist that too.
Beginnings and Endings:
Gen 1:26-31; 2:18-25; Mt 22:23-33

Welcome:
In general, do you prefer beginning a new task or completing an old one?

Word (1): Beginning Read Genesis 1:26-31
Glance through all the creation commands in the Genesis 1 ‘poem’. What is different about the way Gen 1:26 is phrased compared to all the other commands? Who might the ‘us’ be?

How does being made in the image of God explain our need for relationships? Why do you think God passes this ‘relationality’ on to us?

What is different about v.31 compared to all the other conclusions of each ‘day’ in the poem?

What does v.27 suggest about the relationship between male / female and God?

What is the first command given? v.28

Sum up where Genesis 1 says that humanity fits into God’s creation?

Word (2): Beginning Read Genesis 2:18-25
There’s an old joke that God actually made the woman first, and agreed with her to make a companion, on the condition that she’d have to tell him that he was their first, due to his fragile ego.

Why do you think total isolation is such an effective form of torture for humans? If you’ve seen Tom Hanks in the film Castaway what does he end up doing to try and keep sane, marooned alone on a desert island? Why does he need to do that?

Would you Adam and Eve it?
Denis Alexander (Cambridge Biologist) has written a detailed response – Creation or Evolution - Do we have to choose? He offers models that these chapters are not merely symbolic, nor literal, but as the manner in which God chose to reveal himself to homo sapiens at the point in their development where they were capable of becoming ‘homo divinus’ [John Stott]. He argues that evolution does not challenge the idea that God created humans in his image: ‘It is precisely the emergent properties of consciousness, language and moral responsibility that result from the evolutionary process that highlight humanity’s uniqueness.’

Watch: YouTube ‘Denis Alexander Evolution and the Church’ (5 parts)
What does this second creation story (Gen 2) add to the first one (Gen 1) with regards to understanding humanity?

To what extent is v.24 a helpful description of what came to be called marriage?

How is their ‘innocence’ expressed in v.25? Why did they not feel vulnerable?
How would it feel to us to be ‘known’ in that way.

Word (3): Endings Read Matthew 22:23-33
Jesus clearly teaches that there is no marriage in heaven [which in the culture clearly also means no sex], but there our relational needs – (it is not good to be alone - Genesis 2:18) will also be fully met...
Now we are ‘known’ in part, there we will ‘be fully known even as we fully know’ (1 Cor 13:12).

So the Bible opens with humanity being told to ‘have sex and multiply’ [Gen 1:28], but ends with saying that ultimately - in God’s presence - we won’t need / (want?) to have sex.

What might that mean for understanding a Christian view on sex, relationships and sexuality?

Does this make sense of Paul’s argument in 1 Cor 7, that for the Christian (who prays for heaven to come to earth) it is worth (remaining) single if they can?

Does it explain why Jesus is single?

Does that mean I won’t see my spouse in heaven?
What Jesus did not say was that “all earthly relationships will be nullified in heaven.” There is no good reason to put such a negative spin on His words. We will most certainly be together with those we love in the next life. We just don’t know precisely what form that “togetherness” will take.

Look at it this way. Human relationships will certainly be different in heaven. But they cannot possibly be less than what they have been on earth. They will have to be different in the sense of being something more, something better, something far more fulfilling and satisfying than we can presently imagine. That’s part of the glory of the resurrected life. The apostle John hints at this glory when he says, ‘Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is’ (1 John 3:2).

[read more](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/family-q-and-a/faith/marriage-in-the-afterlife)
The Mess in the Middle:
Gen 3:1-20; Rom 1:18-32

Self-righteousness (recap from 25 June)
“The chief point is that there is only one thing that separates us from God, and it is not our sin. It is our self-righteousness. Our self-righteousness does not turn God from us, but us from God. It is not my sin that moves me away from God, it is my refusal of grace, both for myself and for others.”

James Bryan Smith

Why might self-righteousness be a common trap to fall into when it comes to issues of personal purity?

How does Jesus burst that bubble? Cf. John 7:53-8:11

Sexuality and gender are two of the most emotionally charged topics that have faced the Christian church today. They touch on core areas of identity, and have to power to divide, and harm us, as well as lead us into shame and guilt.

The picture in Genesis 2 is alluringly simple. A man is alone. He needs company. There’s nothing in creation quite right for him. Though he has the company of God walking in the garden with him still he longs. Still he needs. He is needy and he needs help!

God then arranges a marriage for him. He does this by making him a ‘helper’ or helpmeet. He uses the man as raw material in his cosmic surgery and the two are biologically and genetically compatible. This is one of the most straightforward ways of getting a wife in the Bible, and only cost a rib:

Others are not so simple;

- Adam’s son Cain had to wander around in the desert to find one. (Gen 4:16-17)
- Jacob worked for fourteen years to pay for two of them (Gen 29:15-30)
• Moses watered the flocks for a man with seven daughters and that impressed his future father in law enough to give him a bride. (Exodus 2: 16-21)
• Boaz bought some land and a woman came with the title deeds. (Ruth 4: 5-10)
• The Benjaminites grabbed some dancing girls at a party and forced them to marry them (Judges 21: 19-25)
• David slew 200 warriors and ‘bought’ his wife by giving her father King Saul their foreskins. (1 Samuel 18:27)
• Hosea married a prostitute who kept cheating on him (Hosea 1-3)
• And in the pagan world Xerxes held a beauty contest and simply married Miss Jerusalem. (Esther 2:3-4)

The law (Torah) allowed that you could either:

• Find an attractive prisoner of war, bring her home, shave her head, trim her nails, and give her new clothes. Then she’s yours. (Deut. 21:11-13)
• “Lay hold on” a virgin who is not betrothed to another man, and “know” her, but afterwards pay her father a sum of money. Then she’s yours. (Deut. 22:28-29)
• or if your brother died then you had to marry his widow and give her children to carry on his name. (Deut. 25:5)

Several of Jesus’ ancestors were born because of sordid tales:
• Judah slept with his daughter-in-law Tamar, who had disguised herself as a prostitute. (Gen 38)
• David had an affair with Bathsheba that led to him killing her husband. (2 Sam 11)

Questions:
What do you make of this array of humanity? What do these stories teach us about God, love, the human condition, power dynamics between men and women, lust and sin?

Wouldn’t it be better if the Bible was a long list of inspirational characters for us to try and live up to? Why/why not?

To explore this further we’re going to look at what happens in Eden and how things progress from there, according to the book of Romans.
Word (1): After the beginning: Genesis 3
What do Adam and Eve immediately realise after the fall? (v.7). How did they feel? Why is this significant even for us today?

What do they both seek to do in order not to take responsibility?

What are the consequences for relationships between men and women (v.16)?

Looking forward
It may be helpful to note Song of Songs 7:10 shows how love can break this curse... This word ‘desire’ only occurs twice in the Scripture: In Genesis 3:16 the woman’s desire is for her (dominating) husband. The sense is that she will try and hold on to her man even when he might not be good for her. In Song of Songs love subverts this and it is the groom’s desire for the bride that is expressed. Love allows you to ‘give yourself’ to the other, the curse leaves you trying to ‘grab them’.

Word (2): The descent of humankind: Romans 1:18-32
You’ll quickly see why this is a controversial passage given current debates, but don’t lose the explanatory power of its argument as you look at the detail. It matches our outward behaviour to our theology and our worship... In other words, what you believe and who/what you ‘give worth’ to will affect how you act. The descent is described in three stages:

Stage One: Marriage
God is obvious to everyone; clearly seen; easily understood.
Response: people ignored him, didn’t worship him, worshiped idols.

Stage Two: Affair
God ‘gave them over’ to sex / sensuality to see where that got them – would they miss him?
Answer: No – instead they worshiped created things...

Stage Three: Divorce
God ‘gave them over’ to shameful lusts and gave them over to a depraved mind so they couldn’t even tell right from wrong any more, ‘inventing ways to do evil.’

Romans then carries on to make sure we all realise that we are complicit in this. Where we judge others, we are usually pointing
three fingers back at ourselves, and culminates in 3:23 with the statement that ‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’.

Questions:
If Romans is right, if we simply follow our impulses / drive when it comes to sex are we likely to get it right?

What might God’s ultimate purpose be in ‘handing us over’? Has he given up on us? [hint: check out talk three!]

If not worshipping God contributes to a descent into a moral fog, what might get us out of that fog?

What, if anything, would be worth sacrificing to regain that intimate relationship with God if there has to be a trade off?

Can we do that on our own?
**Redeeming Love: Hosea 14: 1-9**

Hosea is one of the few great heroes of the Old Testament. He is given a task and a job few would volunteer for. It was his job to show the people of Israel just how much they were hurting God. He was called to be a living parable, by marrying a woman who would cheat on him repeatedly in humiliating manner.

He was called to visually represent on earth exactly what is going on in God’s heart every time you and I commit our spiritual adulteries, and turn our backs on God. He was called to be like Christ is to us.

My favourite rendition of this story comes in a novel by Francine Rivers set in New England in 1835. Sarah, a beautiful young six year old is the product of her absent father Stafford’s adulterous affair with her mother, Mae. Her mother refuses to abort her ending the relationship, but ends up in prostitution in order to live. Sarah suffers extreme rejection from those around her and is taught at the brothel that no man ever cares for a woman and all they want is sex.

A few years later, Mae dies to a terrible illness, and a drunken man named Rab unwittingly takes the child Sarah to Duke, a rich man, not knowing he runs a pedophile ring. Duke informs Sarah (renamed by him Angel) that there are many things he wants to teach her. He gives her first “lesson” that very night.

After about 10 years with Duke, Angel finally escapes and boards a ship bound for California. Robbed and forced to the option of prostituting herself instead of being raped by the mostly male passengers, she disembarks with nothing more than the clothes she is wearing. Angel is taken in by ‘The Duchess', the owner of The Palace, a brothel in Pair-a-Dice and becomes an exclusive, high-priced prostitute. Employed by the Duchess, Angel is guarded constantly, her meager earnings kept from her. Her only solace is Lucky, a fellow prostitute that is often drunk. Lucky reminds Angel of her mother.

Michael Hosea first sees Angel on a trip to Pair-A-Dice to sell his farming goods. He is ready to leave when God tells Michael she’s the
woman he is meant to marry. Michael soon discovers to his shock that Angel is a prostitute. Still determined to heed God’s command and marry Angel, Michael pays the high fee for her services in hopes of convincing her to leave with him. She stubbornly rejects his offer. Discouraged, Michael questions God, but still obeys. He pays Angel’s fee for three successive nights, talking and reasoning with her until his time and money are up. Angel keeps her cold, sarcastic front to dissuade him, wanting to escape the pain his words cause her. Meanwhile, she cannot seem to escape thoughts of Michael and her rising hope of life outside the Palace.

After the last night with Angel, Michael grows frustrated and leaves Pair-A-Dice. A few days later, he returns to Pair-A-Dice, unable to ignore God’s command any longer. He finds Angel almost dead from a brutal beating given her by Magowan, Duchess’ bodyguard. Willing to use any means to preserve Angel’s life, Michael asks her to marry him so he can take her to his cabin. Barely conscious, Angel agrees, muttering "Why not?"

The story then continues through twists as sagas as both characters undergo significant healing. But Michael Hosea faces repeated rejections and heartaches from his wife before finally winning Sarah’s heart and redeeming the girl beneath the masks and hurt and pain.

**Word (1): 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20**
What do you make of the story of Hosea?

Does Francis Rivers’ retelling help you understand it at all – from Michael Hosea’s perspective? From Angel’s perspective?

In 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20 Paul is very clear that we shouldn’t ‘be untied with a prostitute’ – even though for a Christian everything is permissible...

What is the difference between something being permissible for us as Christians and being beneficial? (v.12).

Who are our bodies for? (13)
Who are we united to? (17)
Who/what are we a temple for? (19)
Who do we as Christians belong to (19)
Who has bought us? (20)
What point does he make so forcefully in verse 15-16 because of this logic? Is it a revelation to think that you could hurt/grieve the Holy Spirit inside you through sexual practices?

**Word (2): Hosea 14:1-9**
If being united to a prostitute is so wrong, why does God unite himself to us when we regularly ‘prostitute ourselves’ by worshipping other ‘idols’ – be they career, fame, materialism, sex, power, self?

Even when we have failed what does God long to do for us? Why?

What does that mean for you today?

**And finally: Rules verses heart**
At the end of this series do you feel God is interested in you keeping rules, or captivating your heart? Why?

If needed, what might healing look like in this area of your life? Who could you turn to for help?

What one thing might God want to say to you today about his fierce, passionate, redeeming love?