

CHRIST CHURCH COURSES

LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH

SESSION 2: *THE BEAUTIFUL STORY 1*

Learning Aim: by the end of the session participants will have a good understanding of the current teaching of the Church of England by considering the CEEC statement on marriage and sex and the first half of *The Beautiful Story*.

Pastoral aim: that the group have explored the current teaching of the Church of England about being human, marriage and sexuality. With clarity on the current teaching and its pastoral implications we will be able to make an informed assessment of the case for change in these areas. Recognising that some of the teaching may be hard for some to receive we seek God's goodness in its purposes as well as an open mind to whether it is an accurate interpretation of God's will.

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1. Introduction and welcome (5m)
2. Aims and structure of sessions (5m)
3. Story Time (5m)
4. CEEC Statement on marriage and sex (5m)
5. Introduction to the Beautiful Story (10m)
6. A better story (15m)
7. True humanity (15m)
8. Fulfilled sexuality (15m)
9. An attractive story (15m)

LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH

0. Engaging Well

1. What does the church believe?
2. **The Beautiful story 1**
3. The Beautiful Story 2
4. Living out the Beautiful Story
5. The case for change
6. Implications of change
7. Gender

10. Story Time (5m)*

(NB: we may carry over some discussions to next week when we look at the rest of *The Beautiful Story*).

1. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

In the last session we looked at the wider biblical narrative that informs the doctrine and belief of the Church of England. This provides the context for the specific discussions we will have in the sessions that follow.

In this session we begin to look at what the Church of England teaches about being human, marriage and sexuality. We will be using the Church of England Evangelical Council (CEEC) video called *The Beautiful Story*.

We seek the Lord's face and an understanding of his will and ways.

Let us pray.....

We pray Come Holy Spirit. Grant us the openness to hear your voice. The wisdom to discern through your voice, your command and your heart. The humility to receive, to be challenged and to see things afresh as you lead us. In the name of your Son, our savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

2. AIMS AND STRUCTURE OF THIS SESSION

The primary background resource in this session is the Statement of Faith of the CEEC relating to marriage, relationships and sex. To discern the teaching of the Church of England in these areas would require looking at several documents published by the Church over the last 30 years. For simplicity and clarity, the orthodox view currently held by the Church of England, and upheld by the House of Bishops in 2017, is presented here using the video *The Beautiful Story*. Later in the course we will look at the case for change to this teaching.

In this session we will work through the statement and the first half of the video with the aim of doing 3 things:

- seeking clarity about what the beliefs are
- thinking through what the practical and pastoral implications are for members of the Church of England and
- considering the implications for churches

3. STORY TIME 1: Rachel and Seth

Watch the story of Rachel and Seth at

<https://llf.churchofengland.org/mod/videtime/view.php?id=585>

4. CEEC STATEMENT OF FAITH: MARRIAGE AND SEX

The CEEC constitution 4.1.2. states:

We acknowledge God's creation of humankind as male and female and the unchangeable standard of Christian marriage between one man and one woman as the proper place for sexual intimacy and the basis of the family. We repent of our failures to maintain this standard and call for a renewed commitment to lifelong fidelity in marriage and abstinence for those who are not married.

The Statement of Faith can be found at <http://www.ceec.info/basis-of-faith.html>

The rest of this session and the next one will explore this teaching, which is in line with the current teaching of the Church of England, by looking at *The Beautiful Story*.

This video was released by CEEC in October 2020, just before LLF was launched by the Church of England. It was not directed as a critique of the LLF materials, it was designed instead to give confidence to evangelical churches in what the current teaching of the church is as well as how to engage with discussion about the issues involved.

The whole video can be found here <http://www.ceec.info/the-beautiful-story.html>

We will be watching the video in segments over the following two sessions.

5. INTRODUCTION

Watch the video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8LOVJGdgiY>

Are we inheritors not inventors of faith?

What is Good News in word and deed?

What does it mean to be counter-cultural in the way that Jesus was?

How would you describe today's culture? What does it mean to be counter cultural now?

¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you

take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. (John 17:14-15)

6. A BETTER STORY

Watch the video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HpttybNUWBs>

How important is sex to life? How do you feel about the claim that the modern world both degrades and deifies sex?

How important is family life? Has the church historically over-emphasised "the nuclear family"?

Can singleness be a fulfilled life?

Does Jesus speak with integrity and authority on sex? Did Jesus have a sexuality?

¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:13-14)

7. TRUE HUMANITY

Watch the video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qiEfxHYKVTw>

Is it true that the first question we should ask in these areas is what does it mean to be human?

Was the world made good? Is it still good?

Is sexual difference in creation "good"?

In what ways is sex a gift from God and "good"?

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." (Genesis 1:26)

8. FULFILLED SEXUALITY

Watch the video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjQnkOBxv_E

Can sex obscure the purposes of God?

Does it speak less of God to change definitions of marriage or sex if we are made in his image?

How do you respond to the suggestion that the Bible is a romance between God and his church?

How do you feel about marriage being a trailer for the main event – the new creation?

Is marriage a social contract or is it something bigger and sacred?

In eternal terms is being a Christian believer the best thing we can be and live "all out for Jesus"?

Is the scripture story a "longing of the heart"?

³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5:31-32)

9. AN ATTRACTIVE STORY

Watch the video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFvCOkk13kw>

Is "living in sin" or adultery wrong?

Is Jesus a better story? Is it worth the cost to follow him?

Is this discussion about sex or love? Is Jesus the source of perfect love?

Is God's design the best way to live? Is that design for everyone? Is this an attractive prospect?

Is Ed lonely, living an unfulfilled celibate life and in denial or may he genuinely be at peace?

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. ¹² Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge. (1 Peter 2:11-12)

10. STORY TIME: Graham

Watch the video at <https://lfc.churchofengland.org/mod/videotime/view.php?id=589>

Next time we will consider the second half of the video *The Beautiful Story*.