



LESSON 1

'MALE AND FEMALE, HE CREATED THEM'



BIBLE READING

Genesis 1–3



TEACHING POINT

God created men and women. His original plan for our relationships was perfect.



LEADER'S PREPARATION

This study goes back to the beginning of the Bible, to creation, and looks at the way God created men and women. In particular it looks at the relationship between them. When God looked at all he had made his assessment was that it was 'very good' (Genesis 1:31). That includes relationships between men and women and sex.

However, the Fall is characterised by doubt and disobedience. Doubt that the way God has created us is actually in our best interests and disobedience towards God and his will for us. But we soon see that this leads to a break-down in relationships.

The wonderful 'flesh of my flesh' (Genesis 2:23) relationship is gone and in its place is a competitive and painful relationship that has the potential for destruction. That is lesson one about relationships: God's blueprint was good and perfect, but now it is spoiled.

QUESTIONS

In whose image is humankind created? What is their role?



1:26 God made humans in his own image. It is worth noting that both men and women are mentioned in this context. Not until Chapter 2 do we read that the woman was made out of the man.

The man and the woman have the role of filling the earth and subduing it. They are to rule over creation as God's stewards on earth.

Why do you think that the bit about image is repeated in verse 27? What else is emphasised?

1:27 The fact that we are made in God's image is mentioned three times. Repetition in the Bible is a way of writing in bold and underlined, so this is meant to stand out as important. None of the animals is described in this way.

The word 'created' is also emphasised. Men and women are at the pinnacle of creation, but they are still not equal with the Creator. They are subject to his rule. 'Rule' is the third repeated idea. That is our job and it is repeated to show us that it is important.



Why does God make Eve?

2:18 Eve is going to be a companion and 'suitable helper' for Adam. In other words women are designed especially to pair with men. That is God's blueprint.

How did God create Eve? And how did Adam relate to her?

2:21-23 Eve was created, by God, 'out of man'. She is literally a part of him. Adam clearly thought highly of Eve as he recognises where she has come from and his unique relationship with her as opposed to any other creature.

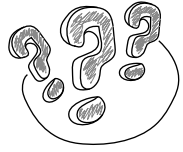
How are a husband and wife described in verse 24?

2:24 This verse is a very important one for understanding God's original blueprint for our relationships. Jesus himself quotes it (Matthew 19:4-6). It tells us that the right place for sex is in marriage.

Husband and wife are described as 'one flesh'. The closeness of their relationship, the fact that they are 'suitable companions' designed for one another, and the nature of a sexual union between husband and wife is all summed up in that phrase.

The older versions of the Bible, like the King James, translate verse 24 as leaving (father and mother) and cleaving (to his wife). The blueprint for relationships is 'family'. When a man leaves his father and mother he does not go alone, he starts a new family with his wife.

Based on Genesis 1 and 2, what similarities and differences are there between men and women?



Similarities

Both made in God's image
(1:26-27)

'flesh of my flesh'
(2:23)

Instructed to rule creation
(1:26,28)

Naked and feel no shame (2:25)

Differences

woman for companionship
(2:18)

woman made out of man
(2:21-22)

woman is 'suitable helper'
(2:18)

Conclusions

Men and women are created equal and both have the instruction to rule over the earth, that is, to be stewards under God's rule over creation. However, their tasks differ when described in Chapter 2 – woman is created to provide companionship, to be a helper.

Two other important things to remember are that men and women are designed to be together; and that man was created first, his authority further established by the fact that man alone names the animals and he names the woman.

How do the following verses show that the relationship between men and women has changed?

3:6-7,10 These verses tell us that shame and guilt have come into the world. The innocence of Chapter 2 is gone and now there are secrets and lies. Secondly, we see the pro-active role of the woman that reverses the order of creation (headship of the man).

3:16-17 All the established relationships of creation are now spoiled. In particular, verse 16b tells us that

the woman now desires to rule over her husband instead of submitting to his rule (the same word 'desire', meaning desiring to rule, is used in Chapter 4:7 about Cain). The man's response is to 'rule over' his wife, implying that he will even throw his weight around.

God's perfect blueprint is lost and in its place is the world as we still know it.

How do we experience the spoiled relationships between men and women today?

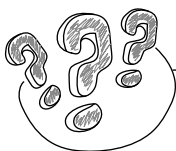
Answers could range across a number of very sensitive issues, so be very careful. Things like marital abuse, divorce and even rape might be discussed. The general sense should be that we do not experience either relationships or sex as God first intended.

Do you need to find out more about God's good plan for you and for creation so that you don't doubt it? Think of ways that you could do this.

This is an opportunity to talk about the gospel and to follow it up with those who need to know more.

Are there areas of your life when you are disobedient even though you know that it is wrong to ignore God's rule? What are you going to do about them?

This is again a question to treat sensitively. Bring all the things that are talked about to God in prayer. It is important from the outset to emphasise that, whilst we are all guilty of sinning in the area of sexuality (see Matthew 5:27-30), none of us is outside God's grace. God will forgive all those who honestly and earnestly repent (1 John 1:9).



PLANNING THE SESSION

Welcome

- Introduce yourselves.
- Start the meeting with prayer.

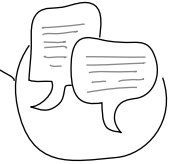
Getting to Know You

Play a game that involves matching celebrity couples (make sure you check the newspapers to make sure they are still together!). When all the pairs are matched talk about what makes those couples good or bad examples.



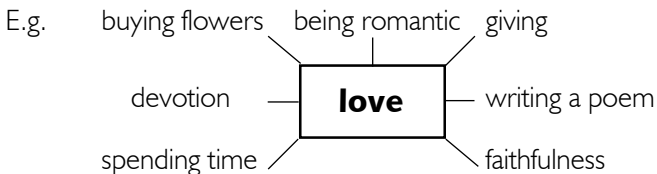
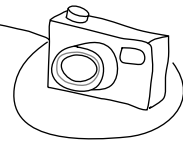
Talk Time

What sort of things make up a perfect relationship? You could jot the ideas down on a big bit of paper or post-it notes. You could also interview a married couple from the leadership team.



Focus Time

Either take the perfect relationship ideas from Talk Time and put them each in the centre of a piece of paper. (This is easy if they are on post-it notes. Then draw a spider diagram for each one, writing down ideas of how it might work out in practice.



When you have completed several ideas, look for ways that they overlap.

Or if you have a very dramatic group you could act out a famous scene from a romantic play, e.g. the balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet.



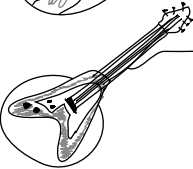
Bible Time

See the worksheet on pages 68-69 for the Bible study questions and running order. Photocopy these pages for each group member for use during the study. You might want to do the comparison question on a flipchart or OHP.



Prayer Time

Divide into small groups and pray through some of the ideas that came up in the last two questions.



Praise Time

Sing some songs that praise God the creator. You might want to choose some songs that have male and female parts to highlight the point of this study about equal status, but different roles (see www.kingswaysongs.com or www.emumusic.com for words and music).

If your group doesn't usually sing then you could read Psalm 8 together, particularly focussing on men and women's place in creation.



Extra Ideas

Invite a Christian couple to be interviewed or answer questions from the group about their own marriage. This couple could be leaders in the group, but they should have been married for a few years and both be Christians. In particular brief them to talk about the good things and the difficult things.