

Relationships



The Fellowship of Overseas Christian Union Students

Introduction

Why do a series of studies on relationships? Relationships are all around us. Relationship is something which brings us joy as well as pain and sorrow. Why is this so? How can something so good bring us so much pain? This series of studies helps us explore God's purpose for relationships. It is a series of four Bible studies which will focus mainly on singleness, marriage and dating. However, it is important to take note that relationships are not just limited to male-female relationships but encompass a wide area of life. There are many types of relationships. Having said that however, the issue of male-female relationship is the main focus of our studies. The reason for this is because many of us are at the stage of life where we are looking for life partners. Some will find a life partner while others of us will remain single. There are many expectations and a wide range of issues to navigate, pitfalls to avoid, and also enjoyable experiences. The purpose of this series is to help us understand God's good purpose for relationships, why sometimes it is also difficult, and how God fixes the problems of broken relationships.

There will be two types of people doing this series. For followers of Jesus, I hope that this series will urge us to be godly in our relationships. My prayer is that the way we relate to each other will glorify Jesus, especially in the area of male-female relationships. For those of us who are yet to commit ourselves to Jesus, I hope that you will see what a great and awesome God Jesus is. I also hope that you see God's wisdom and love through the sacrifice of Jesus, and understand that the motivation to love God and our neighbours comes from Jesus' own sacrificial love for us.

The studies were written with the view that groups will talk about things at different speeds. Questions that are in black are for all groups to do. Questions in blue are for groups that have more time. (ie they're optional.)

Relationships 1

Aim

This study helps us understand God's purpose for relationship, why relationships are so difficult, and how God fixes the problem.

Discuss

Using a large piece of paper, spend a few minutes as a group and try to draw up as many types of relationships you can think of. (eg parent-child, boss-employee, etc.) Try to represent this in a drawing.

Structure of study

- a) Perfect relationships in God's creation
- b) How does sin corrupt relationships?
- c) How does God's love restore relationships?

Perfect relationships in God's creation

Read Genesis 2:4-25.

1. What kinds of relationships can you identify from this passage? (v7, 15, 20, 21-23)
2. How would you describe the state of these relationships at the end of this chapter?

How does sin corrupt relationships?

Read Romans 1:18-31.

3. What happened to the relationship between humanity and God? (v18-19, 21-23)
4. What happened to the relationship between humans? (v24, 26-27, 29-31)

Summary

In Genesis 1 and 2 all relationships were good; but sin corrupts all relationships.

How does God's love restore relationships?

5. Look at your diagram of the types of relationships from the beginning of the study. What do you find hardest when relating to other people?
6. Break into pairs and look at the following passages. How does love restore relationships? What is the motivation for human love?

John 3:16

Romans 5:8-9

Ephesians 5:22–33

1 John 2:1–6

1 John 3:16–20

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

Discuss

- 7a. What do you think are important ingredients for good relationships?

- 7b. What kind of person do we need to be so that we can have good relationships?

8. How does God's forgiveness through Jesus' sacrifice repair our relationship with God and with each other?

9a. Why is it hard to forgive someone who has wronged us?

9b. How willing are we to forgive such a person?

9c. What reasons might there be for not forgiving a person who has wronged us?

10. How does the understanding of God's forgiveness motivate us to love God and love our neighbour?

Pray

Relationships 2

Marriage

Aim

This study helps us understand God's purpose for marriage.

Discuss

What are some positive views that people have about marriage today?

What are some negative views that people have about marriage today?

Structure of study

- a) Marriage as God intended it to be
- b) Marriage in a fallen world
- c) How did God restore marriage?
- d) Marriage in God's kingdom

Marriage as God intended it to be

1. What is God's purpose for marriage?
Genesis 1:26-31

Genesis 2:18-25

Discuss

2. Do you think modern marriages today fulfil God's purpose for marriage? Give reasons.

Marriage in a fallen world

Because sin has entered our world, our relationships have become very difficult. Look at the following passages and answer the following questions.

- 3a. How does sin distort marriage?
- 3b. What are the warnings and dangers of sin?

Deuteronomy 22:13-30

Malachi 2:16

Leviticus 18:18

Leviticus 18:20

[Proverbs 7](#)

[Mark 10:1-12](#)

Sin perverts marriage in so many ways. Sin destroys what is good in marriage and we experience this in our lives, either in our own marriages or in our parents' marriage.

In the OT the punishment for certain sexual sins were very strong. This was a way to limit the effects of sin. But threatening to punish people seldom changes people's hearts.

The Gospel, however, shows us how Jesus' death and resurrection destroys sin's power over our relationships.

How did God restore marriage?

7a. How does the Gospel restore our marriage relationships in these passages?

Colossians 3:18-19

[1 Peter 3:1-7](#)

[Ephesians 5:22-33](#)

7b. What are the motivations given for each of these passages?

Colossians 3:15-17

[1 Peter 2:11-12](#)

[Ephesians 5:1-7](#)

8. How does being a follower of Jesus motivate us to love our husband or wife?

Marriage in God's kingdom

9. What do these passages say about marriage in God's eternal kingdom?

Matthew 22:23-33

Revelation 21:1-4 (see also v9)

Discuss

10a. What kind of marriage is in God's kingdom?

10b. What happens to human marriages according to Jesus?

11. Where do we find our ultimate fulfilment?

Summary & Review

God created man and woman to look after his world. The husband and wife formed a partnership which was good until sin came into the world. Because of that, our experience of marriage is now a mixture of good and bad. But God shows us the way to repair all our relationships through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The ultimate reality for believers is our marriage with Jesus on the day he returns. That is what we all look forward to.

Pray

— Marriage —

Margie's story

Margie Mills is a leader at
International Friends.



David grew up mainly in Newcastle, where his father was a Chest Specialist, who had been a prisoner of war on the Thai-Burma Railway, and his mother a creative woman, with an active mind who really enjoyed the company of family and friends. He went to University of New England (UNE) in 1965 to study Science, and later did a PhD in Physics there. He became a Christian in third year, through the influence of godly friends and a mission on campus.

I grew up in Iran and Pakistan, where my parents served God as doctor (my Mother), and minister, airplane pilot, builder, dentist and hairdresser (my father). I went to Murree Christian School, where I invited Jesus into my life at the age of 10. I came to Australia aged 15, and lived in Rosedale in Gippsland where my mother was killed in a car crash in 1967. The same year I also went to UNE to do a combined BA and Nursing degree. David and I met at the small university chapel where we were involved in many activities together, and where we were married in Nov 1971.

We wanted to seek God's Kingdom first right from the beginning of our married lives—and had Matthew 6:33 engraved in our wedding rings. In Armidale, we had many international students in our home, and increasingly became aware of how great the resources in Australia were, and how few there were in some other countries... We started to think about serving God overseas. Our son Andrew was born in Armidale, and our daughter Kathy in Warrnambool, where we lived for one year before being accepted by the Church Missionary Society.

We were trained at St Andrew's Hall in Parkville, and then in 1976 went to Indonesia to work with a church in Medan, North Sumatera, specifically to do student and youth ministry, including establishing Bible study groups. David also taught Physics at the University of North Sumatera, while I ran a Bible Club at the kids' school, taught the Bible to Ladies groups in churches and had many, many people in our home over the years.

This was a growing time in our marriage—we had to support each other as we learned another language, and culture, we learned so much from our Indonesian Christian friends about the reality of their dependence on God for all their needs; we gradually learned that we were a good team, using our differences to complement each other; learning to depend on God, and make ourselves available to Him to use. I really appreciated the fact that David made the family a priority, setting aside regular time for family outings and family time: we climbed volcanoes, went swimming, and had holidays at beautiful Lake Toba. We learned how important it was/is to pray for each other and we learned to say sorry when we were in the wrong.

After our time in Medan, we spent 2 years in Makassar (then Ujung Pandang), South Sulawesi, and returned to Melbourne at the end of 1989.

David has lectured at Monash uni for the past 19 years. I have done pastoral work for CMS, and have been involved in IF and with many folk from Iran. We are members of Glen Waverley Anglican Church, where we have served and grown. Our children have married "Third Culture Kids", and are now serving God in Indonesia and Mauritius, and each have 3 children of their own. Praying for our scattered family and keeping in touch is a priority in our lives.

David and I continue to try to grow in godliness and holiness ("Holy Spirit, have your way in me, just for today" has been special in my life these last few years), and also to grow in love for each other—especially so that the beauty of Jesus may be seen in our lives.

Relationships 3

Singleness

Aim

This study helps us understand the Bible's view on singleness, and how to cope with being single.

Discuss

How does your society or culture view singleness? Is it viewed positively or negatively? Give your reasons.

Are there significant differences between the way Asian and Western societies view singleness?

Structure of study

- a) What are the biblical reasons for singleness?
- b) How should we relate as single people?
- c) Thinking practically about singleness

What are the biblical reasons for singleness?

Read Matthew 19:1-12, focusing on v10-12.

1. What are some reasons for singleness given by Jesus?

The Bible doesn't say much about singleness. In the Old Testament singleness is not a preferred position. People were married early so young single adults were rare. Singleness was usually the result of divorce, death, illness or a poor economic situation. It was harder for women than it was for men, so certain provisions were made in order to look after them. In rare occasions people choose to be single; for example to be an eunuch or for ministry.

Paul speaks about being single in a letter to the Corinthian church. Read 1 Corinthians 7:6-9, 25-35.

2a. What are the benefits of singleness? (v28, 32, 33, 34).

2b. What is the motivation for singleness? (v29-31)

3. What are the dangers for single people? (v8-9)

Read 1 Timothy 5:3-16.

4. What advice did Paul give for people who are single because of circumstances beyond their own control?

Summary & Review

5. How does the New Testament view singleness?

6. What are some reasons given for people to remain single?

How should we relate as single people?

Read 1 Timothy 4:1-5.

7. What does the Bible say about forbidding people to marry?

Read 1 Timothy 4:6-10; 5:1-2.

8a. What advice does Paul give to Timothy as a young man leading a church?

8b. How is he to relate to other people? How do we make this a principle for our own relationships with people?

Thinking practically about singleness

For those who aren't Christians...

8a. With regards to male-female relationships, do the views of our society treat people with respect, or do they seek to take advantage of people? (Think through situations like dating, sex, marriage, cohabitation, singleness, etc.)

8b. How is the Christian view different, and what benefits (if any) can you see?

For Christians...

9a. How can I know if I should remain single?

9b. Can I live a fulfilled life even if I remain single for the rest of my life?

10. How can we relate as single young adults in ways that are pure and wholesome?

11. How does remaining single affect our relationship with our parents?

12. How can I use my singleness for God's service?

13. Read the section in the appendix on 'Cohabitation and living together', then answer this question: Why is it a bad idea for boyfriends and girlfriends to live together?

Pray

Singleness — Amy's story

Amy Just works with
Monash Christian Union.



Let me introduce this singleness story by saying that this is my life very much through the lens of marital status and expectations... I did think about other things, and there was a bit more to life, but this is to benefit our topic—it is true, just not a rounded picture. Hear it with that understanding—otherwise I fear for how you will view me here on in.

Well I'll say first up, I never expected to be here. My mother was married at 19 and a half, and she and Dad had had the four of us by the time she had reached my age.

At your age I had simply assumed that maybe I wouldn't get married at 19½ but it wouldn't be long after that.

I was a somewhat shy girl, but not impossible to know and occasionally funny... it was just a matter of time, surely. I was involved in CU at uni, there were guys there—one or two I thought were particularly good options, and occasionally we'd combine with the other uni's which was helpful for seeing there were other options also! I was studying nursing—that surely made me an attractive option too. I was also pretty committed to CU, to our mission breakfasts, prayer meetings and main meetings. I was on committee and helped to lead a small group somewhere in there. Clearly I was a serious young Christian woman, and wasn't I being told left right and centre that a godly man would be looking for someone just like me?

Uni days came and went, many of my fellow CUers hooked up and did the inevitable and were married within a year or two of finishing (including my 'good options'). That was fine, I was young, time on my side—the 'one' just hadn't come along yet. There had been one or two showing interest, but never the ones I was looking at. Besides, no rush, there were plenty enough friends who were still single. Plenty of fun to be had, plenty of friends to share it with. Married people, to a certain extent disappeared into the background... dealing with the pressures of married life, and the expected and unexpected pitter-patter of tiny feet.

I went overseas for a year, lived and worked in England. It was a great year of learning, I met lots of great people and enjoyed the experience—but no dashing prince charming there either.

That's ok, mid twenties—later than I'd anticipated but not too late. I'll keep plodding along. God is clearly still working on the final details... or my 'special someone' is just stuck in a little traffic. While I'm waiting, I'll just make sure I keep busy. Plenty of people to care for at church, work responsibilities, might run a girls' Bible study group, take a chance and get involved in the music team—go on a few of those intense who-does-God-want-you-to-be-type camps.

Then one of my ministers asked me to come and do a ministry apprenticeship! This put the cat among the pigeons for me. You're asking me to think about ministry? Gee, do you think I could do it? I'd love the chance to try... but then... I'd always thought that if I were seriously involved in ministry it would be as a 'minister's wife'... and women in ministry, aren't they all single? I don't want to be single. We're approaching late twenties here and that is not my plan. All the guys will be scared away if I step up for ministry—that's pretty intense, and intimidating. I'm not sure I can risk it. It took some time and a lot of deliberating—but a friend or two kindly rebuked me, when I confessed some of the 'issues' holding me back... Is God trustworthy? Can I trust him with my future? Do I really believe he has the best in store? Besides, wouldn't I want someone who thought ministry was great?!

Relationships 4

Courtship and Dating

So with a little fear and a fair amount of trepidation... I dived right in. It was the best 'risk' I've ever taken. Five years later, here I am, trained and equipped for a lifetime of serving Jesus wherever I find myself. It could be easy to think that the risk I took I am paying for... after all here I stand, single. But singleness is not the thing to pity or be sad about—a life lived in purposeless waiting is. God wants us to live life to the full just as we are—he calls us individually to become part of his kingdom family. To join him in his purposes. God doesn't have a 'couple agenda' like the world, like our parents, or even our friends. We are adopted into a family—that is intended to be rich in relationships—brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers. God doesn't intend for any of us to be 'alone'.

God has grown me a lot, sometimes quite painfully in this journey, bringing me to new levels of understanding about his provision for me—as I have been willing to see. In it I have learnt to trust and depend on my heavenly Father more and more, with all my hopes and dreams. It has deepened my relationship with him. It isn't that it is always easy and there will always be days where it all feels pretty average. But the thing that helps is remembering the Colossians 3 stuff... given what Christ has accomplished for me, I am to set my mind on things above, not earthly things.

Living for God and knowing his plans for his world is a great freedom, that helps me know a worth and a satisfaction the world can never bring. These are the values and realities I seek to share with you, brothers and sisters in Christ, as a means by which I might encourage and build you up in the faith no matter how you are currently thinking about what the Christian life might mean for you.

Aim

This study helps us learn ways to court that are pleasing to God.

Structure of study

- a) What do people generally do for courtship?
- b) Biblical principles for relating to the opposite sex
- c) Topics relating to dating and courtship

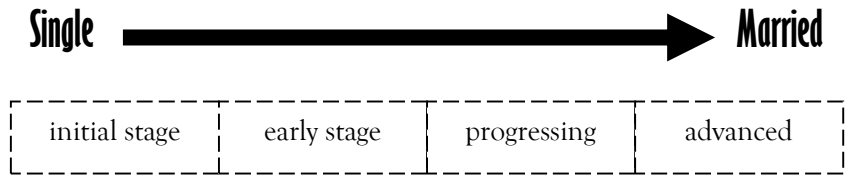
What do people generally do for courtship?

What different ways do people move from being single to being married?

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Does your culture or society practice any of these ways of courtship? Which of these ways are not well accepted by your culture?

We recognise that there are several stages in the process of moving from singleness to marriage. At what stage of the process of getting married would you place the practices above? Use the diagram below.



Biblical principles for relating to the opposite sex

In Bible times people were usually married at a young age. The Bible does not say much about courtship because the common practice of the day was betrothal. Betrothal was similar to an arranged marriage, which was usually organised by the parents. This betrothal (promise) between a young man and a young woman was almost treated as a marriage (except for sexual intercourse which was reserved for later).

1. Use these passages to complete the table.

	What does the Bible say about courtship?	How should we treat the opposite sex? What values are involved here?
Exod 22:16-17		

1 Cor 7:36-38		
1 Tim 5:1-2		

Today, some of us come from cultures which still have arranged marriages, but when we come to a Western country like Australia, we experience a clash of cultures. We see and observe practices that are strange to us. The question we have to ask ourselves is, are these practices acceptable or do they violate God's purpose for male-female relationships?

Having looked at the Bible passages, we see that preserving sexual purity before marriage is of utmost importance. Therefore in application, let us consider how we should conduct ourselves while courting and seeking to move towards marriage. Discuss the following topics:

- How can we meet a potential partner? What should we do or not do?
- How can we maintain godliness when dating? What are the boundaries while dating? eg Is kissing, touching OK? What are things are OK and what are not?

4. How can we be faithful during engagement and marriage? What are some potential dangers and pitfalls? What does being engaged mean?
5. How can couples keep being loving and considerate towards singles? What things are helpful and what things are unhelpful?

Topics relating to dating and courtship

Consider the following practices again. Select one or two of the topics below to discuss.

Cohabitation / De Facto relationships

It is now very common in western societies for couples to live together for long periods of time and to be sexually active without being married. Is this an acceptable cultural difference, or do you think it violates God's purpose for marriage? Give reasons.

Social networks / Friends / Church / Workplace

These are the most natural places for "romantic" relationships to develop. Why are these places the best environment for cultivating "romantic" relationships and what kind of difficulties may arise?

Dating / Going steady / Engagement

Most modern marriages result after some kind of process of meeting and getting to know each other. What are the pros and cons of this kind of process?

Blind dates / Dating agencies / Matchmaking / Classified ads

Sometimes opportunities to meet potential partners are rare and become increasingly difficult without outside help. So there are several other ways for people to meet others. Third parties come into play to help with the process. There is sometimes a stigma associated with these ways of meeting people, but what are your opinions on them? Are these ways right or wrong or just neutral? Give reasons.

Arranged marriages

As mentioned before, many cultures still practice this. Parents arrange marriages for their children and the children have little or no say in the matter. What kinds of difficulties are associated with this practice and what kinds of family expectations are involved with this?

Pray (in same gender pairs)

Share with the group what you have learnt about relationships.

What things are we doing well and can thank God for?

What things do we need to improve?

What things do we need to drastically change?

What things do you need to confess (privately) to God, and ask for his forgiveness?

A Relationship Lesson

by Dickey Tang, Wing Ho

In my whole life, there were a few pieces of memory when I experienced the great love from God. One of them is about a love relationship.

I could still remember that in the last dating I had, the girl was not a Christian. We met at a combined club function, and we found that our tastes were perfectly matching with each other. She fitted with my requirements: study well, good in sports, brilliant appearance. And more unexpectedly, she had the same date of birth as mine. After I realised all these things from her, I thought that, “Um... She must be my soul-mate, and she is given from my Lord” – even though she was not a Christian.

In the first few months, we had really great memories in many places. Just like, all happiness was come from each other, and we could face every difficulty in our lives. I had thought of our differences in belief and religious behaviour, however, I did not face that a lot. In fact, “Who cares?”, while I was having a woman that I thought was perfect for me. Sometimes, because of her, I skipped the services in church and escaped from my responsibility in faith. I gripped this relationship as hard as my heart towards the Lord.

Another few months passed, I could still remember that it was the day before Valentine’s Day. I received a phone call. All of a sudden, it was her. And she cried in the phone telling me that she would like to break up. I kept asking for the reason, and tried to comfort her. However, it didn’t work. Just like this, I let a girl leave me without doing anything.



And a week passed, one of her friends could not stand it anymore and told me the truth. The truth was that she went to my friend’s place, and they were together already. The truth was always embarrassing. It was funny that my friend kept trying to get into the relationship, and more ironically, my ex-girlfriend received his “love”.

At that moment, I found that the difference in values could be a “make or break” issue for a relationship. As a reason that I spent most of my time and love with her, even more than with God, losing her felt like I lost the whole world. Finally, I turned up in church, and I shared this with my church leader. While I thought that the whole world, even the Lord had given me up, but during the prayer, I could feel that I was filled with great love from God. And even further, I realised how stupid I was to leave God because of a person.

My church leader explained a lesson in this relationship. The message went like this:

It is important for us to find our partner who is a follower of Jesus, as the value of Christ is much different from the worldly passion. Also, picking up a relationship is not just a work we can easily handle, we should keep praying and we should leave the right of choosing in the hand of Lord, so that we could meet the one whom is decided by God. Sometimes, we may get lost in a relationship, but if we know that the one is assigned from God who is full of love and never changes, both of us can be more confident to face the problem together without doubt. And lastly, we should not leave God because of anyone or anything, as God would not assign a person to live with us in order to separate us from him.

Although my heart was broken, God rebuilt it with love. Although my wound was hurtful, God healed it with care. “For the grace of God who brings salvation has appeared to all men, it teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passion” (Titus 2:11-12). By this lesson, I think, I know what to do for my relationship in the future.

Appendix

Here are some relationship issues which are not specifically mentioned in the Bible but are important matters for Christians in terms of doing the right thing. Our motivation to do the right thing comes from our desire to live to please God. These are areas which are potentially harmful to relationships and we don't want to be ignorant about them. We recognise that some of these may be areas of real struggle for many people. We all need to acknowledge our own weaknesses in these areas and seek God for forgiveness if some of these things have resulted in sin. God is gracious and merciful and He will forgive.

Is it OK to live together while dating?

Is it ok for someone to live with or share a house with their boyfriend or girlfriend? Girlfriends and boyfriends living together is a very bad idea and should be avoided by Christians. The reason is that it puts people into situations where they will be tempted to sin sexually. Living together puts people in compromising situations and makes it harder to resist sexual temptation. There are just too many opportunities for temptation leading to sexual intercourse. Sex is a precious gift which is reserved for marriage and is not to be “unwrapped” before marriage.

Sometimes unmarried Christian couples claim that they are not having sex even though they are living together. Although that may be true, their Christian witness has been severely compromised because it's not just their claims that matter but how they appear to others as well. The sad fact is that people will think differently no matter what you claim. The benefits of maintaining each other's sexual purity by living apart far outweighs any practical reasons you can give for living together (eg for economic reasons or convenience).

If you are already living together with your girlfriend or boyfriend and are engaged in sexual intercourse, then you need to stop. This will require a certain amount of self control and discipline. If it has been going on for sometime it will be harder to stop and it will require care to handle the situation. It's not too late to stop—and remember God's grace and mercy. Nothing is too big for God to forgive.

What about masturbation?

As humans we all have sexual desires. It is part of being a normal and a healthy person. However how we deal and cope with sexual desire is important and there are good ways and bad ways of dealing with them. While many sexual sins are mentioned in the Bible, masturbation or self stimulation is not listed as one of them. However, masturbation can be the source of a lot of guilty feelings because of the fantasies associated with them even though the practice is not condemned by the Bible.

Do not make masturbation a regular habit as a way to relieve sexual desire. Many of the fantasies which accompany it are unhelpful and may lead to ongoing lust and greater sinful desires. That's why it is also good to avoid watching or reading unhelpful materials (pornography) that will sexually arouse you. There are many other ways to deal with sexual desires when they arise. Some of these include diverting your mind to other things like thinking of pure and wholesome things, prayer, keep yourself busy and not let your mind be idle, spending time with friends and exercise. By not resorting to masturbation every time we have sexual desires we are training ourselves to be self controlled and godly. Find other more helpful activities that will take your mind off the urge to masturbate.

Can I go out with a non-believer?

This is another problem area for many Christians. Some hope that their non-believing girlfriend or boyfriend may come to know Jesus as result of the relationship. For others the attraction for someone is so strong that their differing spiritual beliefs do not matter. Whatever the reason, it is a bad idea to go out with someone who doesn't share the same beliefs as you.

For university students going out together, dating is a process of finding potential life long partners. That is because university students are at that stage of life where marriage is a possibility. So the way someone behaves in courtship will naturally carry through to the marriage relationship. The godly thing for a Christian to do in seeking a life partner (and hence having a boyfriend or a girlfriend) is to find someone who also puts Jesus first in their lives. The importance of this cannot be overstated.

Why is this so important? If Jesus means so much to you then it is only natural that you also want your partner to have this same priority as you do. Being a follower of Jesus is not just a hobby to you but is the fundamental core of you life. A committed Christian will not entertain the idea of going out with a non-believer. This is not because one is superior than the other, but rather because a believer and an non-believer do not have the same priorities in life. This will later affect your decisions on things like your finances, lifestyle choices, how to raise your children, etc. Having Jesus as our King and Saviour is an absolute priority, so sharing our lives with someone who doesn't share that priority doesn't make any sense.

I hope that our friends at FOCUS who are not followers of Jesus will not misunderstand us and will not take offense at this. We are not saying that Christians are better people than non-believers; we are just trying to be honest in saying what is important to us.

However, someone may also ask "What about the possibility of converting the non-believer through the relationship?" While this may happen in some cases, it has only happened by the tremendous grace and generosity of God. There are no promises or guarantees that it will happen and more than often the opposite happens. ie The Christian gives up their faith as a result of the relationship. In the OT , God warns the Jews not to marry foreigners because doing so will lead them astray from God. In the NT, Paul commands people who have a choice to marry a believer (1 Cor 7). In other words, where we have a choice to pick a partner, let that person be a follower of Jesus.

A more comprehensive answer is available in an article written by Sandra. See your group leaders for a copy.

What about arranged marriages?

For situations where students' parents have arranged their partners for marriage then things are more complicated. A Christian being set up with a non-believer by his or her parents makes the situation very tense. Many factors come into play. For example, are the parents willing to compromise? Or are they determined to do what they want? If they are willing to listen and change their minds then it is worth some effort to try to reason with them and help them see your point of view. However in some extreme cases a student's life may be in danger because parents and family turn against them. It may cause the family to lose face or lose honour if the engagement is broken off. In such cases,¹ the Bible advises Christians who are not able to break off from their obligations to do the right thing by not giving up their duty. In other words they are urged to carry out their obligations but at the same time persevere as followers of Jesus. It won't be an easy life, but the hope of heaven and Jesus' love for us will carry us through life no matter how difficult it becomes.

¹ The Bible speaks of similar circumstances: Christians working under unjust masters (1 Peter 2:13-25), Christians already married to non-believers (1 Peter 3:1-6).

How should we think about homosexuality?

There is a lot of sensitivity and misunderstanding surrounding homosexuality. Advocates defend homosexuality on a number of grounds. The most common defence for it is along the lines of mutual attraction. It is often argued, "What is wrong with a man being sexually attracted to another man (or a woman to a woman) as long as they are sincere and faithful to each other?". We have long argued that sincerity alone is not enough, sincerity must be guided by truth. Merely having feelings for someone else doesn't make those feelings right. There are many situations where feelings of sexual attraction can be considered wrong. For example, the attractions a married man has for a woman who is not his wife (adultery), or an older man for a young child (paedophilia), or for a sibling (incest) are all wrong. No matter how strongly one feels the attraction these feelings cannot be justified as right. God did not make humans for homosexual, adulterous or incestuous relationships. There are specific conditions for relationships and for sexual union which God has built in to human beings. This purpose involves a man and a woman for marriage, sexual union and procreation.

However the message of the Gospel is not judgment and condemnation but rather of mercy and forgiveness. Even so, we need to recognize that homosexuality goes against God's purposes and plans, along with adultery, sex before marriage and incest. The advice to someone who struggles with these issues is to exercise self control. Do not give in to these feelings when they arise. Do things which will help prevent you from making those feelings of attraction worse. But if you do fall into temptation or find yourself caught in such a relationship please understand that there is healing and forgiveness. While we wait for Jesus to come failure is not final—there is healing in forgiveness. All Christians have failed one way or another, we are seeking God's help to live the way he designed us.

Focus Mission

At the end of each year we run two major events. The first is the Focus Mission, and the second is the National Training Event.

This year the FOCUS Mission will run from Wed 25 – Sat 28 Nov. Mission is a time when we run a number of activities to share the good news of Jesus with students at Monash. (Students can learn about Jesus anytime at FOCUS, but the mission is a concentrated time of reaching out to newcomers.)

Below are some photos from last year. This year, like last year, will be a great time of getting trained in ministry, and reaching out to others.



National Training Event

Our final event for the year is the *National Training Event*. Over 1000 Christian Union and FOCUS students from all over Australia and from overseas come together for a fantastic 5 day conference in Canberra.

It runs from Sat 5 – Wed 9 Dec, the week after FOCUS Mission. So come and learn from the Bible, grow in ministry skills, and meet heaps of other Christian students from around Australia and the world.