

Urban Angel

Group Discussion Notes



How to provoke a *great* discussion in your small group

These notes have been produced for use in small groups with the novel **Urban Angel**. There are three topic areas:

1. A Godly perspective on identity and self image
2. Godly calling versus human ambition
3. Valuing your God given sexuality

There are discussion points for each topic area, and all of these points are grouped into five sessions. Each session starts with an indication of the chapters that are covered, so everyone in your group knows how much of the book to read for each time you meet. The sessions cover the following chapters:

Session	Chapters covered
1	1 – 3
2	4 - 8
3	9 - 13
4	14 – 19
5	20 – 27

You can, of course, choose which of the topics you want to cover. You might also want to spend a couple of weeks on one session, or skip another all together; just work through the material at a pace that suits your group..

For the discussion leader there **topic introductions**; these are there to give you some background context; you may wish to share some of the content with your group.

The key to getting the most out of the discussions is firstly to get the answer to the question from the group, and then to encourage group members to share or comment from their own personal experience. Ask your group to talk about anything they have experienced that is similar to the experiences of the characters.

Finally there are some **additional activities** – use these if you feel they are appropriate as suggestions for further activities.

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Topic Introductions

1. A Godly perspective on Identity and self image

Does identity and self-image matter? Does the bible treat them as important issues?

The answer to these questions is a definite 'yes'! Identity and self-image are vitally important, and scripture shows us that Jesus treated them as *fundamental* issues. Establishing *His* identity was one of the first things that our Saviour did, and like Him, we also need to be able to answer the question: "Who are you?"

To see how Jesus dealt with this issue, we can look at two events that occurred before His public ministry started.

1. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we read that, as Jesus was baptised, God the Father spoke out through the Holy Spirit and *identified* Jesus as His son whom he loved:

"As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment, heaven opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said 'This is my Son, whom I love, with Him I am well pleased.' (Matt. Ch 3 vv16-17)

2. The devil also knows how important identity is; in the gospels of Matthew and Luke we have accounts of the temptation of Jesus in the desert. Matthew Ch 4 tells us that Satan tempted Jesus three times. Notice that in two of those three attempts Satan starts by challenging Jesus with these words:

"If you are the Son of God..." (Matt Ch4 v 3 and v6)

See how Satan tries to undermine the very identity that the Father sought to reinforce in the preceding chapter. We know that Jesus resists these temptations and returns from the desert to start His ministry; in part He was able to do this because He knew who He was.

These things were important to Jesus, and they should be important to us to. We all need to be able to give an answer to the question: who are you?

2. Godly calling versus human ambition

One of the most important questions that we ask ourselves is "What is my purpose in life?" For those who believe that life is just a random accident there is no ultimate purpose, no reason to exist; but for those of us who are Christians there is the certain knowledge that in God we have a destiny.

Throughout the history of mankind, people have sought a sense of relevance for their lives; they have done this through the pursuit of pleasure, money, sex, power, and even wisdom. There is nothing new in all of this. Writing more than 2,500 years ago, the writer of Ecclesiastes said this:

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"I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward of all my labour. Yet when I surveyed all that my hand had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 2 w10-11)

People have always chased after human rewards, and the result has always disappointed. These kinds of rewards are nothing compared to the kind of love and security that comes from God and fellowship with others. Talking about love in marriage, the billionaire John Paul Getty, said this:

"I hate and regret the failure of my marriages. I would gladly give all my millions for just one lasting marital success."

So, we need to turn away from chasing after whatever the world has to offer, and instead look for what God has to offer. And here is the good news – God does have something to offer each of us, God has a plan for every person, and if you are a disciple of Jesus, you are in a good place to discern what that plan is! The prophet Jeremiah, speaking God's word to His people said this:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah Ch 29 v 11)

In this topic we will look at how different characters in **Urban Angel** deal with ambition and purpose; some of them are focused on the world's standards, others are focused on God.

3. 'Not even a hint...' – Valuing your God given sexuality

The bible reflects the wonderful and challenging state that we live in as whole people, with all of our emotions, feelings and passions. The Song of Solomon celebrates the sensuality, intensity and sexuality of the marriage relationship. At the same time in his letter to the Ephesians Paul reminds us that amongst Christians:

"...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." (Ephesians Ch 5 v3)

It is worth reading the whole of Ephesians Chapter 5 to see Paul's direction in context; to identify those attitudes and practices that are unworthy of Christians and also to see how these things are a form of idolatry.

The challenge we face is made more difficult by the fact that we live in a society where sexual messages and stimuli are thrown at us constantly, through television and film, through advertising, and other media. In the face of this onslaught we must grasp hold of three truths:

1. We can be fully balanced, healthy, sexual beings, as God intended us to be
2. To be tempted is not the same as sinning
3. We can *choose* to be holy, we *do not* need to succumb to sin.

In fact, we can often help ourselves by not putting ourselves in a position where we will sin! A number of the encounters in **Urban Angel** that lead to sexual temptation could have been avoided

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by the parties involved; they have not helped themselves by putting themselves in a vulnerable position.

We can also defend ourselves by making sure that we have a high view of others around us, especially those of the opposite sex. This does not mean that we should not have fun, or spend time with others, but we need to remember who we are, and who they are, in Christ.

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Discussion Points

Session 1 – Chapters one to three

Identity and Self Image

- The bible says that we are made in the image of God (Genesis Ch 1 v27) and describes each of us as “fearfully and wonderfully made”; (Psalms 139 v14). What does this say to each of us about our identity?
- We are told that God “so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3 v16) What does this say about God’s attitude to us?
- In Chapter 2, page 27 Daisy sees a vision of Caleb Wicks uttering the words “I love you”. Who is actually speaking these words to her? Who is it who loves her?
- In response she utters the words “I just want to be loved”. How do you think Daisy feels at this moment?
- In Chapter 3, page 42, Bridget polishes the boardroom table after an encounter with Martin, (see pages 61-62). Why does she do this? What does this tell you about Bridget’s image of herself?

Godly calling versus human ambition

- In Chapter 2 page 21 Alex receives some inheritance money and Caleb Wicks tells her to “Be bigger than the money,” What does he mean? How can the love of money deflect us from our God given purpose?
- In Chapter 3 the directors of SLaM meet together and Martin presents his ideas for the SEEKA project. What are his ambitions? What does he want to achieve?
- Look at Chapter 3 page 36; Alex has to clear up after the meeting and begins to wonder about her job with SLaM. What do you think motivates Alex? Why is she unhappy at this moment?

Valuing your God given sexuality

- In Chapter 2, page 27, Daisy is touched by the Spirit of God and utters the words “I just want to be loved”. How has Daisy tried to find love before this moment? What does this tell us about the difference between love and sex?
- In Chapter 3, page 42, Bridget and Martin have sex in the boardroom of SLaM. How do each of them approach this activity? How do they feel afterwards? What can we learn from this?

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Session 2 – Chapters four to eight

Godly calling versus human ambition

- In Chapter 4 pp 44-45 we see Alex having pity on two girls she sees going out for the evening. She also feels a sense of jealousy, Why is this? What do they have that she has not got?
- In Chapter 5 we begin to understand some of the issues that motivate Bridget. Look at page 60: what is it that drives her? Why is this kind of motivation so destructive?
- Later in the chapter we are introduced to Darius Lench. Look at page 66: what is it that motivates Lench? Could we learn anything from Lench's attitude?
- Alex Master's senses that God has spoken to her of his provision (Chapter 8 p110) Can God provide all that we need? How can we find comfort in Him when we have lost someone precious, or have been hurt in some way.

Valuing your God given sexuality

- Looking back at scripture, why do you think that Paul tells the church at Ephesus in his letter that amongst them there must not be 'even a hint of sexual immorality'?
- In Chapter 4, John comes to visit Alex in her flat. How does John put himself in a vulnerable position? Did John go to her flat with the intention of seducing Alex? If not, what does this say about the way temptation can start?
- In Chapter 5 page 58, John begins to notice some of the women on the train as he travels to and from work. Have his feelings for Alex aggravated this situation? If they have what does this say about the way temptation works?
- In Chapter 5 page 70, John and Alex embrace and their physical contact has an impact on both of them. What does this moment tell us about the power of touch? How can physical contact be used appropriately in male / female relationships amongst Christians?

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Session 3 – Chapters nine to thirteen

Identity and Self Image

- In Chapter 12 we are introduced to Conner Adams. How would you assess his sense of identity and self worth? Why is this?
- In Chapter 13, page 171, Alex and John reach a crisis point. How does Alex's perception of herself help her to resist temptation?
- Some people try to find a sense of identity by getting a partner. What does the passage on page 171 tell us about that desire and its place in God's plan for us?

Godly calling versus human ambition

- In Chapter 10 and page 127-128 Alex talks about her ambitions, Can you identify with Alex's intensity at all? Is there anything that you are desperate to do for God?
- In Chapter 13 and page 171 the intense relationship between John and Alex comes to a head. How does temptation force us to make choices about what we really want in life?

Valuing your God given sexuality

- In Chapter 12 Daisy and Conner meet and flirt together. Is it okay for Christians to flirt? Does it matter what is actually going on, or who else is present?
- In Chapter 13, John and Alex narrowly resist the temptation to start an affair. How did they contribute to their own danger? What were the factors that made the temptation more likely? What were the factors that stopped the temptation turning in to sin?

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Session 4 – Chapters fourteen to nineteen

Identity and Self Image

- In Chapter 19, one of the girls in Alex's youth club runs away from home. She eventually makes contact with her mother and returns home. Look at the second half of page 247; what aspect of Alice's identity does she 'remember'? How does this help her to cope with what has happened?
- How might your Christian friends help you to deal with issues that you face at home with your family?

Godly calling versus human ambition

- At the start of Chapter 16 we find Daisy working at Alex's café. What is Daisy trying to gain from doing this? What do you think she needs most at this stage of her life?
- In chapter 17 Alex's café successfully opens, but she calls this a "terrible day". Why does she say this? What does this tell you about Alex?

Valuing your God given sexuality

- In Chapter 16, Conner and Daisy also suffer some temptation. This time one of the parties involved is not a Christian. Could that have made the situation more dangerous? How?
- Do you behave differently with your Christian and non-Christian friends?

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Session 5 – Chapters twenty to twenty seven

Identity and Self Image

- Towards the end of the book, Conner and Daisy become more relaxed with each other, and their relationship becomes more platonic. Why do you think this is? What has changed in their relationship to make this happen?
- On page 326 Daisy has an experience of the power of God, and she hears some words from scripture. What is God's perception of Daisy? What is His perception of you?
- On the very last page of the book, Caleb Wicks prays for Alex. Why does he do this? Have you ever had someone pray for you as you start on a new phase of your life?

Godly calling versus human ambition

- During the course of the book Lewis Ashbury seems to lose interest in SLAM. Why is this? How do his priorities change over the course of the book?

Valuing your God given sexuality

- At the start of Chapter 21, John and Aiden talk more openly about Alex. How can honesty and accountability with someone else of the same sex help in this area?
- More generally, what can we all do to help us have a high and Godly view of each other, especially members of the opposite sex.

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Additional Activities

- Take some time to think of and pray through some of the statements from the bible that describe your identity in God, and His view of you; write them down in a journal if you have one.
- If you have not already done so, resolve to take some time out to seek God about his purpose for your life. You may find it helpful to fast for a period of time as you do this. If you have not fasted before or unsure about how to go about this, seek advice from your pastor.
- Is your sexuality an area of life where you need to be reminded of God's standards? Take time on your own to reflect with God on your attitude to people of the opposite sex, and your vulnerability to temptation. You may need to repent of certain things. You may also find it helpful to get with others of the same sex after this to explore ways of establishing support and accountability. If you have been challenged by this study, or you find this area particularly difficult, talk to your pastor.

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