

Mental Health

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In the Psalms

GROUP GUIDE
NOVEMBER 2022

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Mental Health
In the Psalms

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

The Psalmist, Psalm 34:18

Anxiety. Depression. Bipolar. PTSD. Schizophrenia. Paranoia. Eating disorders. Dissociative disorders. Neurodevelopmental disorders.

Our list of titles for mental health disorders is growing increasingly long. And this may be for good reason: estimates make claims that somewhere between 21 - 26% of American adults are wrestling with a difficulty of this kind. A quarter of our population are navigating the challenges that come alongside these illnesses.

The authors of the Bible were not unfamiliar with the mental toll of living in a broken world. The prophets lamented. The Apostles wrestled with fears. And King David - he sang. In the Psalms that David wrote, we find the familiar themes of depression and anxiety; but we also find strength.

We find answers.

We find hope.

In this series, we will join David as he intones songs through sorrow, with the goal of discovering truths that will lead us through as well.

Ground Rules

Here are some guidelines for your gatherings.

Confidentiality

If the group is going to move towards authenticity, then what's shared in the group should stay in the group (note: for situations that you are not qualified to speak into, use a referral to Cornerstone Counseling).

Don't Rescue and Don't Fix

Let people openly share without trying to solve their problems. Only give advice if they request it.

No Crosstalk

People feel valued when we listen. The opposite is true as well: people will feel devalued if they are constantly interrupted. If someone has the floor, no other conversations should be happening.

Give Everyone a Chance to Share

Everyone has something to contribute and everyone should feel heard. Don't be too quick to provide all of the answers. Give others space to share.

Use Humor Responsibly

Our conversation should build up rather than tear down. Humor can be a great thing provided it is not used as the expense of others.

Use 'I' Statements

Groups are an opportunity for self-reflection. We should be quick to reflect on how what we are studying should shape us personally, and slow to tell others how it should shape them.

Fight for the Relationship

Real relationships only thrive when we commit to 'fight' for the relationship. We will not hide from conflict or disagreement, but will instead discuss them in an open and healthy way.

Leader Guidelines

Thank you for taking the time to invest in others by leading a group. As a leader, your task is to create an environment where real relationships can thrive. Here are some things to keep in mind as you do that:

Multiply.

The mission of the church is to multiply disciples. Groups are one of the environments where this occurs. You are involved in the discipleship of each person in your group. We ask that each of our group leaders has someone who they are equipping to be a disciple-maker.

Create a safe environment.

When we say 'safe', we mean an environment where participants can freely share without feeling belittled or that what they share will get spread beyond the group. When we say 'safe', we also mean a group where participants can encounter Jesus and His plan for their life.

Recognize that your group is unique.

This booklet is designed to be a general guide, but every group is unique. So when you're planning, take into account what does and doesn't work for your group and shape the session to their personalities and needs.

Review the ground rules.

Periodically, remind your group about the ground rules for the group.

Ask lots of questions.

Engaging leaders draw participants into the discussion. Ask many questions and lead your group into self-discovery. Follow the 70/30 rule: your goal should be to talk for less than 30% of the time. If you're going over that, then people in your group are going to feel limited in their ability to engage!

Get feedback.

Improve your group by asking others for feedback.

Seek wise council.

There are some questions you won't be able to answer and some situations you aren't trained to handle. That's OK! Know who your wise council is (whether a coach, minister, or another disciple-maker) and turn to them in your time of need.

For more on this topic, check out *Servant-Leadership Training* and the *CCW Group Leader Training 2.0* resource on RightNow Media.

Before the Session

Prepare for the Session: As a group leader, it's essential to be prepared. Before the group session:

1. **Pray.** God is the one doing the transformation.
2. **Take time to read over the Bible passage.** Write down questions and observations.
3. **Preview the session guide.** Highlight important questions to ask and add your own.
4. **Tap into study resources.** Check outside sources to expand your understanding of the topic. Some recommended resources include: The BibleProject, RightNow Media, and the CCW Resource Center.

During the Session

Share: Take time to review the content from last week. Use this time to check on:

- **Prayer Requests:** Follow up on any prayer requests that were made the previous session.
- **Application and Challenges:** Take time to provide accountability for any goals that the group set the previous week ('This week, I would like to...').

Transition: Introduce the topic (we give you an example each session).

Read It: Read through the Scripture passage. If it's a larger section of scripture, break it into smaller sections and ask questions throughout.

Talk About It: Make sure the passage is understood by:

1. *Retelling* the story in your own words.
2. *Asking review questions.*
3. *Seeking additional questions.* Check to see if your group has additional questions about the passage.

Apply It: The apply it section may have both (a) application questions and (b) challenges. Challenges are real-life ways to put Biblical Truth into effect this week.

Pray Together: Find creative ways to engage your group in prayer.

After the Session

Follow Up: Be present with group members throughout the week by: (1) Reminding them of their application/challenge commitments, (2) Checking in on needs and prayer requests and (3) Finding opportunities to do life together.

Input Group Attendance: Fill out your Group attendance in the ChurchTeams email that you receive.

SONGS FROM THE PIT

Icebreaker

Spend some time opening conversation with this question:

- What songs have special meaning to you?
- Think back on the darkest moment of your life. What are some words that you would use to describe this period?

Transition

Transition your group into the study by saying something like:

This week we're starting into a new series called Songs Through Sorrow. In it, we will be exploring the book of Psalm and how it addresses the mental health crisis that our world is facing today. Each chapter of this book records a song that the Israelites used in worship. Some spoke of praise and hope; others of despair. In this session, we'll look at the words of King David as he speaks from a place of pain.

Read It

Scripture reference: **Psalms 38**

Talk About It

- (1 - 3) How does David describe the discipline and anger of God? When have you experienced the discipline of God?
- (4) What word picture does David use to describe his guilt? When have you encountered sin and shame that have weighed you down?
- (5 - 10) How does David describe the state of his body and heart? How have you seen your emotions shape how your body

feels (or vice versa)?

- (11 - 12) How have the people around David reacted to his pain? In your darkest moments, how did people react to you?
- (13 - 14) Why does David compare himself to the 'deaf' and 'mute'?
- (15 - 20) Why is David confident that God will answer his plea? When you encounter dark seasons, how might you have this same confidence?
- (21 - 22) What is David's final plea in this Psalm? What do you like about this prayer?

On Sunday, we talked about mental health and the key steps that we need to take in order to move towards healing.

- What has been your experience with mental health issues?
- What were the key steps towards reclaiming wholeness?
- Even if you have never experienced a disorder of this type yourself, we all will encounter people who have and will have dark moments of our own. What steps will you take to stand against this darkness?

Pray Together

SONGS OF SORROW

Icebreaker

Spend some time opening conversation with this question:

- What was the worst storm that you have ever experienced? How did you weather the storm?

Transition

Transition your group into the study by saying something like:

As we continue to read the Psalms, we see that even in the moments of deep despair, the psalmist sees a glimmer of hope. He wages war against pain, anguish, and discouragement - but He recounts the moments that God's promises held true.

Read It

Scripture reference: **Psalm 31**

Talk About It

- (1 - 5) What names does David give to God? What sources of refuge do you have in your times of sorrow?
- (6) Why would David choose to voice his rejection of idols and their worshippers?
- (7 - 8) How is the refuge of God different than that of idols? What have you relied on that ended up disappointing?
- (9 - 13) What words does David use to describe his state of mind? How does this contrast against his previous statements about God being his refuge?
- (14 - 18) What requests does David make of God?

- (19 - 22) What are the 'good things' that God pours out on those who take refuge in Him? What 'good things' have you experienced while taking refuge in God?
- (23 - 24) What final encouragement does David give in this Psalm?
- **Review:** What reasons did David give for placing his hope in God?

We can't have a conversation about mental health without also giving the reason for our hope. As we saw in this Psalm, where we choose to find refuge makes an incredible difference to our outcome.

- What do you see people commonly taking refuge in in our culture? How might these refuges be acting as idols?
- Why is hope so difficult to grasp while wrestling through a crisis?
- What reasons would you give for placing your hope in God?

Pray Together

SONGS OF HOPE

Icebreaker

Spend some time opening conversation with this question:

- What skill do you have that you could confidently teach to another person?

Transition

Transition your group into the study by saying something like:

Even if we have never personally wrestled through the challenges of mental health, we are still called to be a source of love, encouragement, and hope to those who are navigating this difficult road. We may not always have the answers; but we have a God that does.

Read It

Scripture reference: **Psalm 23**

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,

3 he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I will fear no evil, for you are with me;

your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,

and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Talk About It

- (1) What does it mean for God to be our 'shepherd'? What does it mean to 'lack nothing'?
- (2 - 3) What are the things that God does as he leads us? When have you experienced these things in your own life?
- (4) Why does the psalmist reject his fear of evil? How might God act as a source of comfort?
- (5) The psalmist speaks of blessings that have flowed from God. What blessings in your own life would you point to as a product of God?
- (6) What is the 'house of the Lord' that the psalmist speaks of?

Rarely does our advice solve the problem - because we aren't the Good Shepherd. Instead, we commit to being a source of light to those struggling for answers by: being present, practicing empathy, and pointing them to hope.

- Why do we so often attempt to fix people with our advice or words? How might this backfire?
- In your moments of darkness, how have people helped you in a meaningful way?
- How might you need to change the way that you interact with those who are hurting?

Pray Together

SONGS OF HEALING

Icebreaker

Spend some time opening conversation with this question:

- What is the worst wound that you've ever had to recover from? What was that healing process like?

Transition

Transition your group into the study by saying something like:

As we wrap up this series, we need to remember that healing is a process. It takes time. It takes love. It takes intentionality. And authentic healing starts in God.

Meditate On It

It's time to move towards reading God's Word. Transition your group into the study by saying something like:

This session is going to be a little different than the previous, because we're going to practice some guided meditation together. This is how it works:

- *We start with prayer; asking God to speak to us thru what we're about to read.*
- *We will minimize distractions by turning off phones and creating a quiet space (this may include dimming the lights).*
- *You will close your eyes as I slowly read over the following Scripture.*
- *We will have one minute of silence as we strive to listen to God. Try to hold on to a phrase or idea that sticks with you from what we've read.*
- *I will read over the Scripture a second*

time.

- *We will have a second minute of silence.*
- *I will read over the Scripture a final time.*
- *We will go to God in prayer, thanking Him for what He has revealed to us.*

This may be different than other ways that you have interacted with Scripture, but it's a practice that is firmly rooted in Christian practices throughout the centuries.

Read It

*The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?*

*The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?*

*2 When evildoers assail me
to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,*

it is they who stumble and fall.

*3 Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;*

*though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident.*

*4 One thing have I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after:*

*that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,*

*to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord
and to inquire in his temple.*

*5 For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;*

he will conceal me under the cover of his

tent;

he will lift me high upon a rock.

6 *And now my head shall be lifted up*

above my enemies all around me,

and I will offer in his tent

sacrifices with shouts of joy;

I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

7 *Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud;*

be gracious to me and answer me!

8 *You have said, "Seek my face."*

My heart says to you,

"Your face, Lord, do I seek."

9 *Hide not your face from me.*

Turn not your servant away in anger,

O you who have been my help.

Cast me not off; forsake me not,

O God of my salvation!

10 *For my father and my mother have forsaken me,*

but the Lord will take me in.

11 *Teach me your way, O Lord,*

and lead me on a level path

because of my enemies.

12 *Give me not up to the will of my adversaries;*

for false witnesses have risen against me,

and they breathe out violence.

13 *I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord*

in the land of the living!

14 *Wait for the Lord;*

be strong, and let your heart take courage;

wait for the Lord!

Apply It

- What were some specific words or phrases in these passages that resonated with you?
- What do you feel that God is saying to you through the Scripture that we meditated on?
- How will you live out this message from God this week?

Pray Together

NOTES

Take time to complete your ChurchTeams group attendance sheet (found in your email).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **RIGHTNOW MEDIA**

Get a free RightNow Media account to get access to thousands of study resources. Some potential resources include:

- **Get Out of Your Head (Jennie Allen):** In Get Out of Your Head, Jennie takes groups on a study in Philippians, inspiring and equipping us to transform our emotions, our outlook, and even our circumstances by taking control of our thoughts. When we submit our minds to Christ, the promises and goodness of God flood our lives in remarkable ways. It starts in your head. And from there, the possibilities are endless.
- **Facing Anxiety (Jonathan Pokluda):** Anxiety is inescapable in today's world. When stress overpowers us and fear infects our minds, it can feel like the peace the Bible talks about is impossible to find. And no amount of pretending, overworking, or isolating ourselves will offer us the peace we need. In this four-session series, pastor Jonathan Pokluda explores how Christians can face anxiety head-on. With real-life stories from people facing various kinds of anxiety, this series helps us see that peace can be found on this side of eternity.
- **Depression and the Gospel (Scott Mehl):** Depression is all around us, more common than most of us imagine. It is also notoriously difficult to understand, and most of us feel inadequate to help the depressed people in our midst. This course is designed to help you understand what depression is, what it is like, what causes it, and how God can use you to walk with people who are experiencing some form of depression.
- **Crash Course on Mental Health (Bobby Conway):** This Mental Health Crash Course was designed to help you know...
 - How to recognize the difference between mental health issues and moral issues.
 - How to be a part of the solution to addressing the mental health crisis in our culture today.
 - How to discover a practical formula for healing mental health issues.
 - How to discuss mental health issues in the context of a small group community.
 - How to help those struggling with mental health issues to feel safe in the church.
 - How to confront mental health issues with both truth and grace.
 - How to find hope in the midst of so much hopelessness!

- **THE BIBLE PROJECT** (www.thebibleproject.com)

The Bible Project offers a variety of amazing resources. These videos expand on many of the ideas that we have touched on in this series.