



LEADER GUIDE

His Word—His Clay

*Devotions for people
affected by disaster*

by

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Therapeutic Art Activities by

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Discover Passion in Serving

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LEADER'S GUIDE

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF *HIS WORD—HIS CLAY*?

His Word—His Clay is a collection of devotions that consist of Bible study, therapeutic art activities, and ministry guides. Their purpose is to give people affected by disaster (1) assurance that God is with them through their disaster experience, (2) a safe haven in which to express emotions such as fears and doubts and difficult spiritual issues, and (3) an opportunity to receive prayer and other spiritual care. The purpose of these devotions is to address commonly occurring worries, concerns, and emotions; it is not intended to take the place of mental health services if they are needed.

WHO ARE THESE DEVOTIONS INTENDED FOR?

Adults who have experienced a disaster often are experiencing grief, fear, weariness, extreme busyness, and spiritual dryness. These devotions are intended for them.

WHY WERE THESE DEVOTIONS CREATED?

After conducting Bible studies among adults affected by disaster, it became clear that these people needed to hear special messages about and from God. Furthermore, adults need a way to process their disaster experience with people who have suffered similar experiences. This collection consists of five devotions, with salient messages that pertain to people who hurting from the effects of the disaster. These devotions are easily read and can be used with any group.

These devotions are not intended to take the place of regularly attending church, but using them with individuals or groups of people affected by disaster may be one mechanism of spiritual caring. After the devotions are completed, the participants need to be connected with a regular church body.

WHO SHOULD LEAD THESE DEVOTIONS?

These devotions are designed to be led by lay people or clergy who want to bring Christ's message to people affected by disaster.

WHERE SHOULD THESE DEVOTIONS BE CONDUCTED?

They can be conducted in homes, churches or other surroundings. In order for people to share, these devotions need to be conducted in comfortable surroundings with the ability for people to face one another during discussions. Seating at tables is required for the art activities.

HOW SHOULD THESE DEVOTIONS BE CONDUCTED?

The maximum group size for discussion and art activities is 8-10 participants. For larger groups, all participants may assemble in a central area for the opening and closing; then the Bible study and art activities could be conducted at small group tables.

These devotions can be carried out one session per week for five weeks or done in five sessions within one week. However, if the study is started, it needs to be completed.

People affected by disaster should not be left hanging after devotion 4 (pertaining to grief) and not complete devotion 5 (hope for the future).

If participants do not return after devotion 4, it is recommended that the leader make contact with them to offer additional services.

Prior to doing these devotions, it would be helpful to make contact with local mental health therapists and have their contact numbers available if needed.

These devotions can be carried out just as they are written or may be augmented with an environment that uses candles or Christian visuals and ceremonies such as communion. Laying on of hands or anointing with oil during prayer may be appropriate as well. We have suggested songs for each session, but feel free to choose others if desired. Songs can be accompanied by piano, CD or tape, or sung without accompaniment. Songs can be inserted before or after the Bible study and at the beginning or end of the closing. However, be judicious with using songs in terms of types and number of verses. Remember, “Singing to a person who is depressed is like taking off a person’s clothes on a cold day or like rubbing salt in a wound.” (*Proverbs 25:20; Good News Bible*)

Specific instructions for the Bible study and the art activity for each session are provided below.

GENERAL GUIDE FOR LEADING BIBLE STUDY DISCUSSIONS

As people assemble, allow a brief time for getting acquainted and visiting, but begin the session on time to assure that the devotion can be completed. Provide Bibles because the participants may not be able to bring their own. Additionally, set up a system so that you keep each participant’s devotions and art activities throughout the cycle, so they only have to come, not remember their supplies each time.

Each devotion is structured the same. In the opening, the Leader leads the responsive readings by reading the parts in normal print; the group responds with what is written in **bold**. All the Bible study discussions are structured so that the first question asks what happened in the reading. Next the discussion is about what characters in the stories experience. Each discussion ends with personal questions about what the participants are experiencing. After the Bible study discussion, the Leader leads prayers either in a group format or by praying individually for each

member. The session is closed with responsive reading in the same format as the beginning. The entire devotion session (including the therapeutic art activities) will take about 1 1/2 hours.

PRINCIPLES FOR LEADING BIBLE STUDY DISCUSSIONS:

- The group needs to be cautioned that whatever is said in this group is to be kept confidential.
- Group members may be encouraged to pray for each other between sessions.
- People affected by disaster may be struggling with their relationship with God. Do not scold them for their lack of faith. Lovingly accept them and pray for them.
- Do not expect participants to prepare before each session. The Bible study is designed so that it can be used without participant preparation. Leaders, however, should prepare before each session.
- These lessons are designed to show God’s love and grace and steadfastness during every situation. It is not appropriate to blame people or communities for the occurrence of a disaster or to talk about the disaster occurring because God wanted to punish someone.
- Do not attempt to have all the answers. These people may have experienced great loss, and we do not know why some people lose more than others.
- Do not say “I know exactly how you feel.” You may have had similar experiences, but you do not know how they feel. Instead encourage them to talk by listening quietly.
- Do not be impatient if people do not move from the beginning (session 1) to a new life (session 5) in the short time you are meeting. You are planting seeds, but God waters and nourishes.
- Do not allow one person to dominate all the discussion.
- While the discussions are designed for sharing, some people may not feel comfortable sharing their innermost thoughts with the group. Do not “force” them to respond in the group.
- Be careful when you are working with people of the opposite gender. Do not meet them individually outside of the sessions without another person in attendance.

GENERAL LEADER INSTRUCTIONS FOR ART ACTIVITIES

Making art can enhance our understanding of life events and offer opportunities for change. The art activities for each lesson in His Word—His Clay are designed to assist in the healing process and promote increased self-awareness. Every effort should be made by the Leader to encourage self-expression in an atmosphere of acceptance. There is no “right way” to

complete each art activity. Directions will serve as guidelines, but each person should be encouraged to find their own creative response that is suited to their current needs. People who are not artists may feel intimidated by the thought of doing ‘art work’ so it may be helpful to reinforce this message every time you meet. You might say, “Remember, this is no ‘right way’ to complete each art activity. Rather, the important thing is that you create or use pictures or other materials to express your feelings. Many of us who have used this study have used stick figures or other designs that we felt were elementary, but the designs were really only a vehicle for telling our story.”

Allow approximately 30 minutes to complete the artwork during each lesson and another 15 minutes for discussion. More time may be necessary for the clay bridge project. Read over the questions prior to discussion and encourage each person to share their artwork with the group, responding to the questions if possible. The Leader should not make an attempt to interpret or analyze the artwork. The art activities are meant to complement the Bible Study program and are not intended to be therapy. Referrals should be made to a trained clinician if someone participating in the program requires professional help. If anyone feels uncomfortable sharing artwork or answering questions, there should be an option to “pass”. Answers to questions can be written on the back of the art or in a notebook/journal.

Provide plenty of good quality art materials for each art activity. Encourage participants to remove rings and wear older clothing, especially when working with clay. After completing each piece of artwork, make sure the piece is signed and dated. Store completed Bible studies and artwork in plastic envelopes described below so that participants can take all completed work at the end of the devotions.

All the supplies for the art projects and sources to obtain the art supplies are listed on the following page. The supply sources are not meant to be an endorsement, just places that one can get these supplies. They may be available at other discount department stores. Art supplies will cost less than \$5 per person.

LIST OF ART SUPPLIES

- 11” x 14” heavy weight white drawing paper (60 lb. minimum)
 - 30 11” x 14” sheets spiral bound available at Wal Mart
- Boxes of 24 crayons
- Colored markers (set of 12 assorted colors)
- Variety of paper in assorted colors (construction paper, origami paper or specialty scrap packs of papers, tissue paper)
- 25-50 lb. of gray, water-based sculpting clay, moist
 - available at Highwater Clays, PO Box 18284, Asheville, NC 28814, phone (828) 252-6033; get purged clay that is white or gray, not red; available daily;

25 lbs	\$ 6.25
shipping for 25 lbs	\$ 9.70
- Wire for cutting clay into sections (clay tool for cutting or heavy, pliable wire)
 - available from Highwater Clays

	\$ 2.19
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- Paper or plastic sheeting to cover tables – masking tape to hold cover down (if needed)
- 12” x 15” manila folders for storing and taking home art projects
 - Available at Office Depot; 100 envelopes for

	\$ 15.99
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- Scissors
- Pencils and erasers
- Glue sticks
- Used magazines and magazine pictures
- Unlined 3 x 5 index cards (packet of 100)
- Clay tools such as plastic knives, tongue depressors, wooden chop sticks, etc.
- Paper towels/hand wipes/clean-up supplies

LIST OF OTHER SUPPLIES

- *All Things New* book to be given out at first session
 - Available at discounted price from All Things New Ministry (866) 797-9825

LEADER SUGGESTIONS FOR EACH SESSION

SESSION 1: THIS DISASTER OVERWHELMS ME—LEADER GUIDE

OVERVIEW

While it is not uncommon for God's people to experience disasters, God is faithful to see His people through their trials. It is important that people affected by disaster realize that God's people in the Bible are the same as they are. People in the Bible often were stunned, afraid, and without a plan for solving their dilemmas. They had to learn to trust God without knowing how He would address their needs. The goal of this lesson is to assure people affected by disaster that, while God may not have changed their circumstances, He has promised to be with them every step of their lives.

This Bible story involves lots of names and words that may be hard to pronounce. The leader may want to read the Bible story; if a participant volunteers to read, give him/her 'permission' to pronounce them as best as he/she can.

SUGGESTED SONGS

- ❖ Be Not Afraid Copyright 1975 by Robert J. Dufford, S.J. and North American Liturgy Resources
- ❖ You Are My Hiding Place Maranatha! Music *Praise Chorus Book, expanded 3rd edition*, p. 205.
- ❖ Rock of Ages *Lutheran Book of Worship*, p. 327.
- ❖ There is a Balm in Gilead *With One Voice*, p. 737.
- ❖ I Am Jesus' Little Lamb *Lutheran Worship*, p.517.
- ❖ Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen

SESSION 2: I CANNOT UNDERSTAND—LEADER GUIDE

OVERVIEW

We do not have answers regarding why disasters occur in our lives, but most people have questions. Many people may be questioning themselves—were they really so bad that God had to bring a disaster into their lives? Others may feel betrayed by God. We sing “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” but what kind of friend allows His friend to be hurt like this? Furthermore, the participant is likely to feel that these doubts cannot be verbalized because others will think that he/she is a “bad” person to question God. Others may still be numb. The goal of this lesson is to reinforce that we cannot understand the ways of God but we can trust that His desire is only for our good.

SUGGESTED SONGS

- ❖ Because He Lives *Maranatha! Music Praise Chorus Book, expanded 3rd edition*, p. 20.
- ❖ Awesome God *Maranatha! Music Praise Chorus Book, expanded 3rd edition*, p. 161.
- ❖ What a Friend We Have in Jesus *Lutheran Book of Worship*, p. 439.
- ❖ My Hope is Built on Nothing Less *Lutheran Book of Worship*, p. 294.

SESSION 3: MY SALVATION IS SECURE—LEADER GUIDE

OVERVIEW

This lesson is different from the others because the reading is not about a Biblical character but instead is the very powerful argument of Paul about God’s absolute faithfulness to us. One of the fears that people experience is that they may lose their salvation because they cannot shake their doubts. Focus the discussion on the powerful evidence that God is faithful to us because He sent Jesus to save us. This relationship depends on God, not us, so we can have absolute confidence in it—even when we are assaulted by earthly troubles or spiritual powers.

SUGGESTED SONGS

- ❖ Oh How He Loves You and Me *Maranatha! Music Praise Chorus Book, expanded 3rd edition, p. 238.*
- ❖ Thy Word Is a Lamp Unto My Feet *Maranatha! Music Praise Chorus Book, expanded 3rd edition, p. 234.*
- ❖ It Is No Secret What God Can Do *Hymns for the Family of God, p. 581.*
- ❖ A Mighty Fortress Is Our God *Lutheran Book of Worship, p. 229.*

SESSION 4: IT'S OKAY TO BE HUMAN—LEADER GUIDE

OVERVIEW

People affected by disaster victims experience all kinds of signs of grief. These can include physical symptoms such as sleep disturbances and gastric effects, depression, excessive fears, anxiety, difficulty with concentration, and the list goes on and on. They often cannot control their emotions as they did before the disaster occurred, and they may be worried about their ability to control themselves in the future. The Bible has many examples of people with similar experiences. The message of this lesson is that we are human, and it is normal to go through the grief process when a disaster occurs. While the process is painful, God is faithful to go through it with us. Furthermore, not everyone progresses through the grief process in the same time frame or exhibits the same symptoms (notice in the story the difference between the 200 left behind and the 400 that went to rescue). David had mercy on those who needed to stay behind and did not consider them inferior soldiers. God has the same mercy on us.

SUGGESTED SONGS

- ❖ He is Our Peace Maranatha! Music *Praise Chorus Book, expanded 3rd edition*, p. 102.
- ❖ Something Beautiful Maranatha! Music *Praise Chorus Book, expanded 2nd edition*, p. 119.
- ❖ The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want *Lutheran Book of Worship*, p. 451.

SESSION 5: I'M MOVING TO A NEW LIFE—LEADER GUIDE

OVERVIEW

After a disaster, life is not the same as it was before the disaster. This is true for individuals, families and communities. Often we were not looking for a new life before a disaster, so moving to it makes for a hard adjustment. Furthermore, the people attending this study may not be ready to move into a new life after just five sessions. But today's lesson is not about arriving there. It is about God molding us. This molding occurs over time and does not happen without discomfort or even pain. However, we can trust God that He will never make a mistake when molding us.

SUGGESTED SONGS

- ❖ Change My Heart Oh God Maranatha! Music *Praise Chorus Book, expanded 3rd edition*, p. 50.
- ❖ Abba, Abba Father 1977 by North American Liturgy Resources CCLI #1282027.
- ❖ In His Time Maranatha! Music *Praise Chorus Book, expanded 3rd edition*, p. 41.



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SESSION 1: THIS DISASTER OVERWHELMS ME

Leader: God tells us: “When you pass through deep waters, I will be with you; your troubles will not overwhelm you. When you pass through fire, you will not be burned; the hard trials that come will not hurt you.” (*Isaiah 43:2; Good News Bible*)

Response: Heavenly Father, we know that we will experience disasters of all types during our life here on earth. They are frightening to us and threaten to overwhelm us, but we thank You for Your promises to be there with us and carry us through.

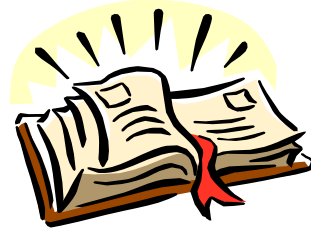
Leader: The Bible says: “Since the children are made of flesh and blood, it’s logical that the Savior took on flesh and blood in order to rescue them by His death. By embracing death, taking it into Himself, He destroyed the Devil’s hold on death and freed all who cower through life, scared to death of death. It’s obvious, of course, that He didn’t go to all this trouble for angels. It was for people like us, children of Abraham. That’s why He had to enter into every detail of human life. Then, when He came before God as high priest to get rid of the people’s sins, He would have already experienced it all Himself—all the pain, all the testing—and would be able to help where help was needed.” (*Hebrews 2:17-18; The Message*)

Response: Jesus, we give You all our thanks for the great sacrifice that You made for us. It is comforting to know that You understand and feel our deepest suffering and fears. Please deliver us from these terrible, painful experiences so that we do not need to cower through life but can live in your freedom.

Leader: God promises us: “As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.” (*Isaiah 66:13; New King James Version*)

Response: Holy Spirit, pour Your oil of comfort into our wounds. We ask You to heal us through Your love and grace. Instill in us Your hope for our future and Your power to live a life of victory over our hurts.

Bible Study



God Rescues Jehoshaphat

King Jehoshaphat and his people were threatened by a large army who was coming to attack them. He prayed for the Lord to guide him; then he ordered a fast and prayer throughout the country. When all the people gathered in Jerusalem with him, King Jehoshaphat pleaded with the Lord to protect him and his people. After the prayer, a priest had a message for them.

2 Chronicles 20: 15, 17

The Lord says that you must not be discouraged or be afraid to face this large army. The battle depends on God, not on you. . . . You will not have to fight this battle. Just take up your positions and wait; you will see the Lord give you victory.

The next morning Jehoshaphat and his people assembled and began to sing as the large army approached. The Lord threw the army into panic, and they killed each other. Not one person in the invading army escaped, and none of Jehoshaphat's people were hurt. (*2 Chronicles 20: 1-25*)

Questions for discussion:

1. What happened in this story?

2. How did Jehoshaphat feel when he learned about the impending disaster, i.e., the approaching army?

3. What did Jehoshaphat do to prepare for the upcoming battle?

4. Jehoshaphat's people were spared through a miracle. You may not have experienced a miracle that relieved you from your present suffering. (a) Thinking of the Scriptures above, how can they apply to you in your situation?

(b) What signs do you have that God has not forgotten you (e.g., people who have cared for you, special Scriptures, extraordinary circumstances that resulted in your life or the life of others being spared)?

5. What special needs do you have that you need for God to hear about?

Leader: (Lead in prayer for special needs. Pray either individually or as a group.)

Activity: Creating a Refuge for Safety



Materials: crayons or colored markers, white drawing paper, glue sticks, index cards

Directions:

- Lay the paper lengthwise in front of you and fold the paper lengthwise. Lay the paper in front of you with the folded edge at the bottom. Apply a line of glue inside each of the side edges, so that when the sides are glued together, you will have a pocket or envelope with the top edge open.
- Think of places or spaces in your life where you felt safe and secure. Try to remember details that made this place special to you – including color, sounds, textures, smells, light, weather, objects, etc. If you can't remember a place, try to imagine one that you think would feel safe to you at this time in your life.
- With the folded edge at the bottom of your drawing surface, draw your safe place on the outside of the 'envelope' using the crayons or colored markers. Try to include the elements that you consider essential in making this a safe and secure place for you. You can create a realistic drawing or something abstract using color, line and shape to represent this place.
- Once your drawing is complete, write at least four words, names of objects or people, and/or sources of strength on individual index cards. Place these cards inside your drawing envelope.

Discussion of art activity:

1. What do you notice about your drawing that depicts safety or security?

2. Is there anything that you would like to change? After listening to others, try to add one more thing to your picture of safety and security.

3. If you're not in the picture, put yourself in this place. Where would you place yourself?

4. Pull out the cards with the words and consider if they would fit in the place that you have created.

Closing:

Leader: In this devotion we have reviewed God's promises to be with us regardless of what we experience. Even so, we often feel vulnerable and exposed, especially after going through a disaster. Until we meet again, focus on what God tells us: "...you people of Judah and Jerusalem, the Lord says that you must not be discouraged or be afraid to face this large army. The battle depends on God, not on you... You will not have to fight this battle. Just take up your positions and wait; you will see the Lord give you victory..." (*2 Chronicles 20: 15, 17a; Good News Bible*)

Response: **Thank You, Lord.**

Leader: God invites you to seek Him for rest. He tells us: "Come to Me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest." (*Matthew 11: 28; Good News Bible*). As you leave, may the Lord go in front of you to lead the way, behind you to protect you, above you to watch over you, and in you to give you His peace. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Response: **Amen.**



SESSION 2: I CANNOT UNDERSTAND

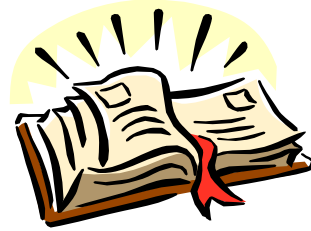
Leader: The Bible says: “Israel, why then do you complain that the Lord doesn’t know your troubles or care if you suffer injustice? Don’t you know? Haven’t you heard? The Lord is the everlasting God; He created all the world. He never grows tired or weary. No one understands His thoughts.” (*Isaiah, 40: 27-28, Good News Bible*)

Response: **God, we often cannot understand why things happen to us and wonder where You are in our suffering. Help us to learn to trust You even through our pain.**

Leader: In John 9 there is a story about a blind man whom Jesus healed. When the disciples asked Jesus whose sin caused this man to be born blind, Jesus responded, “His blindness has nothing to do with his sins or his parents’ sins. He is blind so that God’s power might be seen at work in him.” (*John 9: 3, Good News Bible*) God tells us: “My thoughts, says the Lord, are not like yours. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are My ways and thoughts above yours.” (*Isaiah 55:8-9, Good News Bible*)

Response: **Heavenly Father, we cannot begin to grasp Your plan for us. We only know what we are experiencing. Give us faith to be able to face our circumstances, knowing that You are in charge, and help us to know that Your desire for us is only for our good.**

Bible Study



Jesus Raises Lazarus

Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, became sick and died in Bethany while Jesus was in Jerusalem. Jesus returned to Bethany four days after Lazarus was buried. Both Mary and Martha had seen Jesus perform miracles previously, and each said to Jesus, “If you had been here, Lord, my brother would not have died.” Jesus went to the gravesite, became overwhelmed with grief and wept. Then He ordered the stone covering the grave to be rolled away, said in a loud voice “Lazarus, come out!” and Lazarus came walking out of the grave. (*John 11: 1-44*)

Questions for discussion:

1. What happened in this story?
2. What did Mary and Martha say to Jesus? Do you think they may have felt betrayed by Jesus?
3. What was Jesus’ reply to Mary?

4. The outcome for Mary was that her brother Lazarus was raised from the dead in a miracle. You may not have experienced a miracle that relieved you from your present suffering. Thinking of the Scriptures above, how can they apply to you in your situation?

5. At this point what do you need from God to see you through this?

Leader: (Lead in prayer for special needs. Pray either individually or as a group.)

Activity: Making a Feelings Quilt



Materials: two pieces of white drawing paper, crayons or colored markers, scissors, glue sticks

Directions:

- Fold one sheet of paper in half lengthwise, in half again, then fold across twice so that you have 8 equal sections. Cut along the folded lines to create eight pieces of paper of equal size.
- Try to remember or recall old feelings and new feelings, feelings you had before and after the disaster.
- On four sheets of paper, illustrate four old feelings and on the other four sheets, illustrate four new feelings. You can use color, line, and shape to illustrate each feeling in an abstract way or use symbols as metaphor to suggest how each feeling might appear in visual form. Choose colors, texture, or patterns that feel right for each feeling you portray.
- On the other sheet of paper, arrange your eight smaller drawings in a way that has meaning for you, keeping in mind the overall design. Glue the pieces of paper in place.

Discussion of art activities:

1. Look at your picture and describe how it looks to you (organized, chaotic, warm, angry, etc.) – how does each square contribute to the overall picture or “quilt”?

2. Do the pieces that represent the old feelings contrast with the pieces that represent new feelings? How are they different?

3. Are there any pieces in your quilt that don't fit or would you like to change anything to make a more cohesive design? Why?

4. If possible, discuss some of the feelings in your quilt with the group.

Closing:

Leader: In this session we have focused on how we often cannot understand where God is in uncontrollable situations in our lives, and how we experience feelings such as fear and anger as a result of our circumstances. God does not forget us in these experiences, and the Bible says: “Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; He's the one who will keep you on track.” (*Proverbs 3: 5-6, The Message*)

Response: Lord, guide us and keep us on Your path.

Leader: The Lord says: “I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for.” (*Jeremiah 29:11, Good New Bible*)

Response: Help us, Lord, to trust you when we cannot understand.



SESSION 3: MY SALVATION IS SECURE

Leader: The Lord says: “I am the Lord your God. I stir up the sea and make its waves roar. My name is the Lord Almighty! I stretch out the heavens and laid the earth’s foundations; I say to Jerusalem, ‘You are My people! I have given you My teaching, and I protect you with My hand.’” (*Isaiah 51:15-16, Good News Bible*)

Response: Heavenly Father, we are awed by Your power and comforted by Your promise to never let us out of Your sight. Please continue to protect us, even when we may feel we are losing our grasp of You.

Leader: The Bible promises us: “...the moment we get tired in the waiting, God’s Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don’t know how or what to pray, it does not matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our [waiting] condition, and keeps us present before God. That’s why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.” (*Romans 8:26-28, The Message*)

Response: Holy Spirit, we thank You that our spiritual condition is constantly nourished and protected by You, especially when we are tired and worn. Please continue to care for us.

3. How can we be sure that God keeps these assurances?

4. Thinking of the Scriptures above, how can they apply to you in your situation?

5. At this point what do you need from God to see you through the situation?

Leader: (Lead in prayer for special needs. Pray either individually or as a group.)

Activity: Confronting Obstacles in the Round



Materials: white drawing paper, variety of paper, crayons or colored markers, pencils, scissors, magazines and magazine pictures, glue sticks, markers

Directions:

1. On a sheet of white drawing paper, draw a large circle with a marker or crayon in a color that represents God.
2. In the center, draw a symbol to represent yourself or select a magazine picture of something that can be used to symbolize you.
3. Once you have your center, think about the obstacles in your life that are keeping you from moving beyond the disaster or connecting with God (emotional, physical, spiritual).
4. Around the center, place drawings, magazine pictures, color, repeated designs, or whatever feels right to represent the obstacles in your life. The obstacles that are most difficult should be placed closest to the center with less significant obstacles further from the central point. Draw, collage, use abstract designs, or mix the media to complete your picture. You can place obstacles inside the circle or beyond the outer edges. Remember, there is no right way.
5. Using a drawing tool (pencil, crayon or marker), start with a line from the center and find a path to the outside edges of your circle. You can use one continuous line or several lines traveling in different directions.

Questions for discussion:

1. Describe your picture – does it look full or empty, colorful or dark, fragmented or cohesive?

2. What did you choose to represent yourself? Why?

3. Describe the obstacles that you placed in or around your circle. How do they affect your life and your connection with God?

4. If you removed one or more obstacles from your picture, what would happen? How would you feel? Can you think of something to put in place of an obstacle – perhaps it's opposite.

Closing:

Leader: In this devotion we have focused on struggles with our faith even though there are powerful Scriptures that describe how precious we are to God and His faithfulness to us. God promises: I am with you always, no matter where you are, and I will guide and keep you in My ways.

Response: God promises: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Leader: God says: My word lights your path to keep you from falling, and I will help your faith to grow.

Response: God promises: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Leader: God promises: Nothing will ever separate Me from you. I will use all things, yes, all things, for your good. Help us, Lord, to trust You.

Response: God promises: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”



SESSION 4: IT'S OKAY TO BE HUMAN

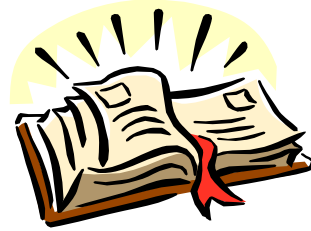
Leader: The Bible is full of stories about people who have suffered and acted human, not godlike, during their suffering. God did not cast them away. The Psalmist said: “I am worn out, O Lord; have pity on me. Give me strength; I am completely exhausted and my whole being is deeply troubled. How long, O Lord, will you wait to help me?...I am worn out with grief; every night my bed is damp from my weeping; my pillow is soaked with tears.” (*Psalms 6:2,3,6, Good News Bible*)

Response: **God, we are like the Psalmist. We are worn out, often unable to cope with our losses and all we have to do. Sometimes we are disappointed by people and things that are supposed to be helping us. Please have patience with us and love us through this time.**

Leader: When we think of suffering, we often think of Job. But Job clearly expressed his frustration with these words: “Do you think I have nerves of steel? Do you think that I am made of iron? Do you think I can pull myself up by my bootstraps? Why, I don’t even have any boots...I can’t stand my life—I hate it!” (*Job 6:12-13, 10:1a, The Message*)

Response: **Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the example of Job so that we know that You don’t throw people away for being human. You created us and understand how weak we are. Please carry us and give us Your strength to make up for the lack of ours.**

Bible Study



Reactions of David and His Men

While David and his army were out fighting battles, another army attacked their home village, burning it down and carrying away their wives and children and their animals. David and his men cried about their loss and did not stop crying until they were exhausted. David's men also became very bitter and threatened David's life. A priest told David to go after this army because God would give them victory and enable them to bring their families back. David started with 600 men, but 200 became too tired to continue, so he left them to guard supplies and took the remaining 400 to fight the army. David's army fought and won a fierce battle, resulting in the rescue of their families and their stock. When the 400 who fought the battle did not want to share any loot with the 200 who remained behind to guard the supplies, David replied: "My brothers, you can't do this with what the Lord has given us! He kept us safe and gave us victory over the raiders. . . . All must share alike: whoever stays behind with the supplies gets the same share as the one who goes into battle." (*1 Samuel 30:1-25*)

Questions for discussion:

1. What happened in this story?

2. How did David and his men react?

Activity: Dealing with Life's Hardships Collage



Materials: one sheet of white drawing paper, scissors, glue stick, variety of magazine pictures, old magazines, variety of paper such as tissue, construction, origami paper

Directions:

1. Select several pictures (at least 6) that represent ways you have dealt with life after the disaster and at least one picture to represent something that didn't help you deal with your situation.
2. As an option you could add additional color by choosing from other paper such as tissue paper or construction paper. You can cut or tear shapes from paper to place behind or around the selected magazine pictures to create your collage.
3. Once you have arranged the pictures and added paper in a meaningful way on a sheet of white drawing paper, glue them into place using a glue stick.

Questions for discussion:

1. Describe each picture and what it means to you, especially as a means of dealing with life after the disaster.
2. Try to make some comments about the picture of the unsuccessful dealing with your present life and where you placed it in your collage.
3. Do you see a pattern in how you deal with a crisis or difficult period in your life? Do your usual ways always work for you? Are you able to use these usual ways of dealing with life's hardships now?

4. Have you learned new ways of dealing with life from your experience in the disaster?
Try to share them with the class.

Closing:

Leader: In this session we have seen that grieving is part of our humanity, and people grieve differently. We need to know that God loves us as the humans we are. The Psalmist tells us: “The Lord is loving and merciful, slow to become angry and full of constant love. He is good to everyone and has compassion on all He made.” (*Psalm 145:8-9, Good News Bible*)

Response: **God, we need Your mercy and compassion. Do not leave us in our suffering, but renew us by pouring out Your love and healing on us.**

Leader: God also promises us that He will not allow us to be tested beyond our power to remain firm, and He will give us the strength to endure what comes into our lives (*1 Corinthians 10:13*) Therefore, we need not be worried about our humanity but instead trust God to carry us when we cannot carry ourselves. Now go in peace, knowing that God will meet your every need.



SESSION 5: I'M MOVING TO A NEW LIFE

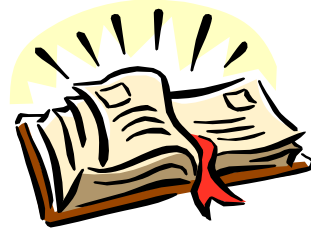
Leader: We should not be surprised that our experiences in life cause us to move to a new life. The Bible says: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new.” (*2 Corinthians 5:17; Good New Bible*)

Response: Heavenly Father, we often find it hard to change our lives. We become content where we are and may even resist You leading us into change. Please help our spirits to be willing to follow You.

Leader: We often are unable to even imagine how we could move to a life different from what we had. We are not alone in this experience. Ezekiel described it very well: “I felt the powerful presence of the Lord, and His spirit took me and set me down in a valley where the ground was covered with bones. He led me all around the valley, and I could see that there were very many bones and that they were very dry...He said, ‘Prophesy to the bones. Tell these dry bones to listen to the word of the Lord. Tell them that I, the Sovereign Lord, am saying to them: I am going to put breath into you and bring you back to life.’” (*Ezekiel 36:1-2, 4-5*)

Response: God, we are often like those dry bones—lifeless and feeling powerless to move in any direction. Breathe Your life into us and move us according to Your desire for our lives.

Bible Study



The Potter and the Clay

The Lord said to me, ‘Go down to the potter’s house, where I will give you My message.’ So I went there and saw the potter working at his wheel. Whenever a piece of pottery turned out imperfect, he would take the clay and make it into something else. Then the Lord said to me, ‘Don’t I have the right to do with you people of Israel what the potter did with the clay? You are in My hands just like clay in the potter’s hands.’ (*Jeremiah 18:1-6, Good News*)

Questions for discussion:

1. What happened in this story?
2. God uses all our experiences (both negative and positive) to mold us in new ways. When the potter (God) molds you (the clay), the molding requires constant rubbing and shaping. These actions may be painful to you. Can you describe examples of God’s molding you?
3. Do you have any ideas about how the shape of your life will differ in the future from what it was in the past? Can you see any good that has come from this experience?

4. At this point what do you need from God?

Leader: (Lead in prayer for special needs. Pray either individually or as a group.)

Activity: Moving to a New Life



Materials: clay, clay tools, cutting wire, covers for tables, smocks, clean-up supplies, found objects (optional: shells, sticks, stones for added detail)

Directions:

1. On a table covered with paper or plastic, work together as a group using a large piece of clay to create a bridge. Any type of bridge construction is fine. As a group or team, work together to determine structure, form, and shape for the bridge. Strength is important as *parts* joined together can help to make the *whole* bridge strong. Once the bridge is completed, additional details such as entrance and exit ramps or evidence of the “old side” and the “new side” can be added. Found objects can be used for detail and add interest to the overall design.
2. Once the bridge is completed, work with a small piece of clay about the size of an orange to create a representation for yourself. This can be a simple symbol such as a cross, heart or an object to represent a favorite hobby.
3. Once you have completed your self-representation, place it on the bridge to represent where you feel you have progressed in the journey of recovery from the disaster to a new life.

Questions for discussion:

1. Describe the process used to create the clay bridge. Did you function as a team? How did you work together; what was your role on the team?



Discover Passion in Serving

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