

Finding Hope in the Midst of Distress

Small Group Guide

Warm-up Question: (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part all together, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. Describe a time when you were really sick.
2. Are there any relatives outside of your immediate family with whom you connect really well? Explain.

Read the following passage: Psalm 102.

We all have moments when we overreact to the hardships we are facing. That was not the case for the speaker in Psalm 102. Things were actually bad. Jerusalem had been destroyed and the people had been exiled. He's feverish. He's all alone. He can't eat. He can't sleep. He's wasting away. He feels as if God has "taken [him] up and thrown [him] aside." If we're going to move forward, we have to start in reality. We need to move beyond our anger and get in touch with our pain.

But then what? Are we stuck in our sadness forever? The psalmist is overwhelmed by his circumstances until he focuses his attention on God. And as he does that, he begins to rediscover purpose. In fact, this psalm shows us four areas in which we can rediscover purpose in our lives: 1) Compassion; 2) The Nations; 3) The Glory of God; and 4) Future Generations. When we reconnect with purpose, we can persevere in spite of our pain.

Questions for Discussion (Choose several that are relevant for your group):

1. How regularly do you experience anger toward yourself, other people, your circumstances, or the world? Explain. How do we recognize when our experience with anger is unhealthy?
2. Are you engaging the pain that is often underneath our anger? Explain. Have you shared your areas of pain with anybody else?
3. Generally speaking do you run from God or to God when you are angry or in pain? Explain. Similarly, do you run from people or to people when you are angry or in pain? How can reconnecting with God and other people help us find hope in the middle of our pain?
4. Read the following passage. Why do you think hope makes such a great impact in so many different areas of life? How does a strong sense of purpose lead to greater hope?

In every published study of hope, every single one, hope is the single best predictor of well-being compared to any other measures of trauma recovery. ...

Adults and children with higher hope do better in navigating injuries, diseases, and physical pain. They score higher on satisfaction, self-esteem, optimism, meaning of life, and happiness. They perform better in sports even when abilities are equal. They excel at higher rates in academics from elementary to graduate school. In sports and academics, higher hope produces better results even when controlling for natural abilities.

Hope Rising, Casey Gwinn and Chan Hellman

5. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. When is the last time you comforted somebody around you? Although we may be tempted to say that the ability to comfort others is just a gift or personality trait that we have or don't have, Paul's life suggests otherwise. He was once a "persecutor and violent man" (1 Timothy 1:13), but learned to comfort others in their suffering. How would you rate your ability to comfort others? Why do you think this matters to God?
6. Read Exodus 35:30-35. Do you pray for God to reveal his glory through your work? What might it look like for God to be glorified through your work life?
7. What is one important lesson you have learned in a different season of your life? Have you ever shared that with anyone else? Explain.
8. Are you regularly praying for three people you know who are not currently following Jesus? If not, are you willing to start? What is one step you might be able to take with someone for whom you are regularly praying?

Pray