



### Session 1: Uncomfortable psalms

1-10 JULY

#### ICEBREAKER

Describe a time when you have felt uncomfortable - eg driving test, first date, scoring an own goal, entering a crowded room of unfamiliar faces etc.

#### KEY THOUGHT

The Holy Spirit is God Himself. He longs for us to form an intimate relationship with Him so we can benefit from His wisdom, encouragement, strength and comfort.

Some of the psalms contain negative emotions. Often we feel uncomfortable about expressing downbeat feelings to God, and are shocked at some of the psalmists' more violent displays of emotion. However, correctly understood these psalms teach us not to deny our emotions but to wrestle with them until they give way to hope. Ultimately, our emotions, both positive and negative, say something about our relationship with God Himself. This is because at the root of all negative emotions is the question: 'Is God good?'

#### KEY VERSE

'When I was in distress, I sought the Lord ...'  
Psalm 77:2

#### DISCUSSION STARTERS

- 1. Why is it wrong to deny uncomfortable emotions?

- 2. How would you explain to Kathleen Norris that she was wrong?
- 3. Why do Christians often deny reality?
- 4. Why and how should we wrestle with negative feelings?
- 5. What do you do when you are afraid?
- 6. How do the psalms reveal that which we try to conceal?
- 7. What is the benefit of expressing real emotions to a real God?
- 8. Is mistrust of God sinful?
- 9. What profound statement do negative emotions make about us?
- 10. Why may Christians be hostile to God?
- 11. How may emotions affect us physically?

#### THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

'During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.' Hebrews 5:7

#### PRAYER POINTERS

- Pray for the Holy Spirit's help to understand and assimilate the truths in this study.
- Pray that you will be able to handle emotions wisely, with honesty and spiritual maturity.
- Pray for those who are currently experiencing times of emotional turmoil.

### Session 2: Anger

11-17 JULY

#### ICEBREAKER

Why do you think there appear to be more and more incidents of 'road rage', 'supermarket rage' etc?

#### KEY THOUGHT

Anger arises when we can't get our own way. Ultimately it suggests that we feel as if God is blocking our path to happiness.

#### KEY VERSE

"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.' Ephesians 4:26-27

#### DISCUSSION STARTERS

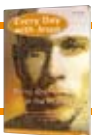
- 1. Why is it OK to be angry with God?
- 2. How can you apply the dynamic of the uncomfortable psalms to your own life?
- 3. How do our emotions reveal our concept of God?
- 4. How can heart convictions help us struggle well?
- 5. Why does our anger reveal something about us?
- 6. Why may anger be a form of idolatry?
- 7. When can anger be a positive emotion?

#### THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

'When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.' 1 Peter 2:23

#### PRAYER POINTERS

- Pray that we might discover the root causes of our anger and deal with them.
- Pray that God will help us handle our negative emotions in a positive way.



### Session 3: Righteous anger

18–24 JULY

#### ICEBREAKERS

- Have you ever been involved in a protest, petition or march for justice? Should local villagers be allowed to protest against a third runway at London Heathrow Airport?
- You could research and briefly share the story of William Wilberforce and his battle to abolish slavery.

#### KEY THOUGHT

Righteous anger is other-centred rather than self-centred, focuses on the offence rather than the offender and is prepared to commit any sense of vengeance to God Himself.

#### KEY VERSE

'So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.' John 2:15

#### DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. Define righteous anger.
2. How can anger be defused rather than suppressed?
3. How can we transform destructive anger into righteous anger?
4. Should Christians never feel negative emotions?
5. Do you tend to fight problems or flee them?

6. How can talking both create and dissipate fear?
7. Change the following equation to cancel out fear:  
uncontrollable situation + anxiety = fear.

#### THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

Why was the cleansing of the temple in John 2:13–17 an example of righteous anger?

#### PRAYER POINTERS

- Pray that we might understand the difference between righteous and unrighteous anger.
- Pray that you might be zealous for the things of God and that zeal will be channelled by the Holy Spirit in constructive ways.
- Pray that God may give us the boldness to face and confront our fears.

### Session 4: Fear

25–31 JULY

#### ICEBREAKER

Is insurance a form of fear? Should a Christian footballer insure his legs?

#### KEY THOUGHT

Fear is an emotion that arises when we face uncertainty in a difficult situation and no longer feel in control. A feeling of fear suggests that we are asking the question, 'Is God capable of taking care of me?', and are therefore in a position of doubting God's goodness and providential care.

#### KEY VERSE

'Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.' 1 Peter 5:7

#### DISCUSSION STARTERS

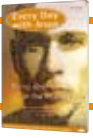
1. Why can we be confident even when things are out of our control?
2. How can fear be a good thing?
3. Why are many fears baseless?
4. How do we prevent uncomfortable facts becoming uncomfortable fears?
5. Contrast the results of fearing God to the results of fearing situations.
6. When afraid, where does your fear drive you and why is this important?
7. Why may Christians be afraid of lament?

#### THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

'Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.'" Luke 12:22

#### PRAYER POINTERS

- Confess any specific fears to God.
- Pray for confidence in God's ability to overcome the objects of all your fears.
- Prayerfully mediate on appropriate scriptures – eg Isaiah 43:1–5; Luke 12:22–32; Hebrews 13:6.



**Session 5: Envy**

1-6 AUGUST

**ICEBREAKER**

Discuss this situation: parents of twins bought two ice creams for them. One twin was asked which ice cream he wanted. He replied, 'His!'

**KEY THOUGHT**

Envy is based on comparison and is an emotion that arises in our hearts when we feel we should have something that belongs to others. It basically accuses God of being unfair and blessing others more than ourselves. It is therefore very self-centred and strikes at the heart of the Christian message of selflessness, trusting God and sacrificial love.

**KEY VERSE**

'For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.' Psalm 73:3

**DISCUSSION STARTERS**

1. Is our society based too much on the economics of envy?
2. Consider the life of a famous rich person who is in the public eye.
3. Why are celebrity magazines so popular?
4. Why may people feel that God is not good?
5. Why will shopaholics never achieve their goals?
6. Read Matthew 27:1-5 and 2 Corinthians 2:14-15. How does sin come home to roost?

**THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS**

'When Peter saw him [John], he asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus answered, "... what is that to you? You must follow me.'" John 21:21-22

'Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant ... he humbled himself ...' Philippians 2:5-8

**PRAYER POINTERS**

- Pray that you will be free of comparing yourself with others to avoid either pride or envy.
- Be content and thankful to God for what you have.

**Session 6: Seeing from God's viewpoint**

7-14 AUGUST

**ICEBREAKER**

Try to find or draw some pictures where the subject is obscure, and ask the group what they see - eg draw a bird's eye view of a person wearing a sombrero hat riding a bicycle.

**KEY THOUGHT**

We can come to false conclusions when we look at people and circumstances merely from our own point of view. In order to correctly assess situations, we need to gain God's perspective.

**KEY VERSE**

'So from now on we regard no-one from a worldly point of view.' 2 Corinthians 5:16

**DISCUSSION STARTERS**

1. Contrast natural thinking and spiritual thinking about wealth and possessions.
2. How has Scripture helped you to understand life?
3. Why and how do we renew our minds? (See Romans 12:2.)
4. In what sense is God both unfair and just?
5. How can praise be based on pain rather than optimism and blessing?
6. How may we become a victim of despair?
7. How may our early experiences affect us in later life?

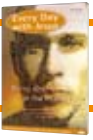
8. How has God used the natural world to speak to you?

**THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS**

'You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no-one. But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me.' John 8:15-16

**PRAYER POINTERS**

- Ask God to help you see life whole.
- Thank God for His unfair act of salvation which you did not deserve.
- Pray that God will lay the axe of His Holy Spirit to cut off the long roots of any childhood fears.



### Session 7: Despair and hope

15-22 AUGUST

#### ICEBREAKER

Contrast two characters from Dad's Army: Private Fraser says, 'We're doomed, doomed.' Corporal Jones says, 'Don't panic, don't panic!'

#### KEY THOUGHT

Despair is a sense of hopelessness that things will never improve, and therefore casts doubt on the character and abilities of a God of hope. Despair is characterised by withdrawal, defeatism and the death of desire. We must recognise that in a fallen world not all our expectations will be met. Despair should drive us not to self-pity but into the arms of a loving heavenly Comforter and Encourager.

#### KEY VERSES

'Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God ...' Psalm 42:11

'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope ...' Romans 15:13

#### DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. Which symbols give you a picture of hope?
2. How can we live with deferred desire?
3. Define the word 'hope'.
4. What natural and spiritual antidotes can we use to overcome loneliness?

5. Why can communion or the Lord's Supper provide a new sense of hope?
6. Why will we always feel a sense of frustration?
7. How can we determine the direction in which despair drives us?

#### THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

'Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."' Matthew 26:38-39

Note that Jesus' agony did not turn to self-pity or accusation but drew Him deeper into the bosom of His Father where He found grace and strength to face what confronted Him.

#### PRAYER POINTERS

- Pray for those who are experiencing despair and those who seek to help them.
- Pray that people will see both the reality of their situation and of a God who will never leave them or forsake them.
- Pray that a sense of despair will drive people to God rather than away from Him.

### Session 8: Shame

23-31 AUGUST

#### ICEBREAKER

Describe an embarrassing incident that you can now laugh about. How does shame differ from embarrassment?

#### KEY THOUGHT

Shame saps us of energy and causes us to want to hide from human contact and intimacy with God. Although some see it as a result of poor self-esteem, Christians regard the root of shame as misplaced dependence. That is, placing our trust in false gods or idols which let us down and expose our foolishness. Shame doubts that God will love me if He sees me as I really am. We need to ask God for forgiveness and put Him first.

#### KEY VERSE

'In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame.' Psalm 71:1

#### DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. What is the difference between shame and guilt?
2. How can shame affect us?
3. Why may we hide from others and feel a sense of isolation?
4. Why may self accusation be evidence of deep shame?
5. Why may teenagers feel shame if they do not have the latest fashion?

6. How could aspiring to excellence be wrong?
7. How do we create and serve false gods and thereby become idol worshippers?
8. Why may we be unwilling to look where our real dependence lies?
9. Which psalms should we read alongside the uncomfortable psalms?
10. What has most impacted you from these studies and how will you change as a result?

#### THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

'... I always do what pleases him.' John 8:29

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' Mark 12:30

#### PRAYER POINTERS

- Repent of any false idols which have taken the place of God as first in your life.
- Acknowledge negative emotions to God without wallowing in them, and ask for deliverance.
- Rejoice that you are a child of God and praise Him for His goodness.
- Prayerfully meditate on the cross so you will not grow weary and lose heart (see Hebrews 12:2-3).