

RETURNING TO CAMPUS: BIBLE STUDY #1 (45 minutes)

Psalm 42 NIV, Emotions and God, Leader Instructions

5 min - Community and Vision

Lead an activity that helps your group get to know one another. Then tell the group your vision for why you are meeting and what you want to see God do.

Our lives are forever marked by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of us experienced isolation, mental health struggles, and losses of various kinds. This past year of 2020-2021 brought many other challenges as well: unemployment, financial hardship, racial tension, the death of George Floyd and too many other people of color at the hands of law enforcement (Rayshard Brooks, Daunte Wright, and Ma'Khia Bryant, to name a few recently), the suffering of immigrants, political unrest and a contested election, mass shootings, racism and violence toward Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, widespread global trauma and uncertainty, and the list goes on.

We have endured distancing from those we love. We have had to change the way we do just about everything. And we have carried the heavy load of unpredictability along the way. How long will this last? What tragedy will strike next? Who can I trust?

This season has invited us toward deeper dependence on God and a renewed commitment to live out his justice in the world. Lamenting the limitations and losses of this season is an important step as we do the challenging work of integrating Jesus into the chaos we feel both within and surrounding us. Lament is a form of prayer that helps us remain present to God, to one another, and to ourselves in the midst of pain and suffering.

Before we begin our Bible study, take a quiet moment to allow your emotions to surface. What has this year been like for you? What feelings have been part of your pandemic experience?

1 min - Pray

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your study.

3 min - Read

Hand out a manuscript of the text to each participant. Read the text out loud together. Allow two minutes for everyone to re-read the text individually.

1 min - Context

Identify the context of this passage together.

The Psalms were first written and compiled as a communal prayer book set to music. They are ancient song lyrics that the people of God would sing or pray together as they tried to live faithfully in good times and bad. Jesus himself prayed these same prayers! The Psalms invite us to worship God, even when our hearts are slow to follow.

5 min - Observe

“On your own, look closely at the passage in front of you. Be a curious reader and mark what you see. Note characters, relationships, locations, time, actions, repeated words, comparisons, contrasts, cause and effect. If you have time, make sections and label them.”

7 min - Share

“Let’s share out loud. For now, we’ll stick with observations that the whole group can agree upon, and then later we’ll move into interpretation. What do you see?” *Start in pairs or go in a circle, if they need a warmup.*

12 min - Interpret (add time here if you have more than 45 minutes total)

“Let’s get curious and ask questions that will help us discuss what the author wanted the original readers to understand. Good questions come from our best observations. I will collect our questions and then we will use the text to answer them, along with three questions I will add (see below). While answering, let’s listen and make space for one another as we share. We will keep the text at the center. Feel free to reference the Old Testament if you’d like, since the original audience would have had access to it.

- The psalmist uses images from nature as he tries to describe his emotions – a deer who thirsts for streams of water, tears so abundant they are like three meals a day, and waterfalls and waves calling out and sweeping overhead. Why is the psalmist using nature language as he seeks God?
- Verses 5 and 11 are exactly the same. Why do you think the psalmist repeatedly speaks directly to his own soul? How is this related to his references to emotion (tears), spirit (pouring out his soul), physical body (bones in agony), and relationships (foes taunting)?
- How would you describe the psalmist’s relationship with God?

5 min - Summarize

“If you could communicate the main point of this passage in just one sentence, what would it be? What core message is the author communicating to the original audience?” *After some group discussion, retell the passage in your own words and share what you have prepared.*

- God is present with his people even in suffering and chaos, and the practice of bringing emotions to God is an act of faith.

5 min - Apply (add time here if you have more than 45 minutes total)

“Let’s apply the core message to our own lives.” *Select a question or two, depending on time. Allow a quiet moment and then share all together or just in pairs. Model vulnerability.*

- As an act of transparency to your small group community and vulnerability to God, name some emotions you hold back from God. Have someone in your group pray over you as you surrender these emotions to God. Ask God to meet you in your emotions.
- Psalm 42 is a reminder that God is present and welcomes our emotions even in the darkest times of our lives. It may feel uncomfortable or even unholy to be honest with God about all the things that have contributed to a “downcast” spirit this year, but this passage shows us that talking with God in this way is an act of faith! Write a few sentences or a short lament psalm to express to God any emotions that you are feeling: pain, rage, confusion, joy, gratitude or even praise. Share if you’d like.
- We may continue to experience the emotional effects of this past year for weeks, months, and years to come. God invites us to seek him throughout the process. This community is a place where we can seek God together, no matter what we are feeling. What can we do to help each other and those around us on campus turn to God with our emotions?

1 min - Pray

Close in prayer together or in pairs.