

Week 1: Depression & Loneliness → Joy in Community with God and others (Ray)

WHY ME? What Does God Have to Say about Mental Health.

What does God say about DEPRESSION?

SERIES INTRODUCTION: Mental Health is a hot topic that has caught much momentum over the years. Specifically, when it comes to the younger generation. Perhaps you have heard this term before in conversation at school or in a reel that came across your FYP. Whether you've heard the term before or this is your first time, let's start by clarifying what "Mental Health" is.

Mental Health in its simplest definition is the *process* in which people *think, feel, and behave*.

In the same way a fever or a cold can affect our physical health, so can fear, worry, and loneliness affect our mental health.

DISCLAIMER: We are not trained psychiatrists or doctors. If you are experiencing deep dark thoughts of harming yourself, others, or just sense something is off, please reach out to a trusted adult/leader and talk asap.

We believe Jesus is our chief healer and can bring deep healing to our hearts and situations that others can't. But we also believe God has gifted us with wise people like doctors and counselors who can further assist our journey of healing.

INTRO: In the whirlwind of emotions, stresses, and changes that often define the teenage years, one dark shadow that can loom over many is DEPRESSION. It's a heavy word, loaded with stigma and misunderstanding, yet it's a reality that many of us grapple with silently.

Today, let's shine a light on this often-misunderstood topic and explore **what** depression is, **why** we experience it and **how** we can overcome its grip on our lives.

TRANSITION: By a raise of hands, how many of you here have ever seen the movie *The Incredibles*? If you haven't, that's okay. This is a Disney movie based on a family who has superpowers. The Dad, Mr. Incredible, has a power that gives him super strength abilities. In an attempt to defeat the villain, he has also found himself in a situation where must escape a room before being captured. In the room are a bunch of canons filled with black gunk shooting out of canons trying to catch Mr. Incredible. Anytime a black bubble would attach to him he would quickly grab it, shake it off and keep moving. The only issue, the more gunk that attached to Mr. Incredible the harder it became for him to escape or move for that matter. Even his super abilities were ineffective against the enemies' trap.

[LEADER NOTE: Movie clip -

https://youtu.be/aiKbsyD8Cjc?si=je_MG2TPXYT2YRQV]

When I think about the word or feeling of *Depression*, this scene comes to mind. Like Mr. Incredible, no matter how hard we try to shake off this deep feeling of sadness, it doesn't seem to go away. No matter how much strength you try to muster up, it still isn't enough.

[WHAT] Depression is more than just feeling sad or going through a rough patch; it's a complex mental health condition that can **impact** how we *think*, *feel*, and *act*. It can make the world feel heavy, dull, and empty, leaving us feeling isolated and hopeless.

[WHY] But **why** do we experience it, especially during our teenage years, a time that's supposed to be filled with excitement and possibility? There's a couple reasons.

1. Part of that reason is because change and growth, both physically and mentally, are ever moving. Hormones are raging, social pressures are mounting, and the search for identity and belonging can feel overwhelming. In this storm of uncertainty, our mental health can sometimes take a hit, leading to feelings of sadness, anxiety, and hopelessness that can spiral into depression.

2. Part of that other reason is because of *Sin*.
Sin's mission in our lives is to destroy and corrupt God's original design.

BUT HERE'S THE **GOOD NEWS**: You and I are designed by God. According to the Psalmist in Psalm 139 you and I are "fearfully and wonderfully made". That means God is our designer and we are his masterpiece. Like clay, at first, we may just look like a clump of hot mess. But when we choose to entrust our lives in God's hands, He molds us into who we are truly meant to be. His perfect design - Full of hope and life.

Here's the other **good news** - Depression is not a life sentence, and there are ways to navigate through it and emerge stronger on the other side. From seeking support from trusted adults and leaders, to practicing self-care, mindfulness, and healthy coping mechanisms, there are tools and strategies that can help us manage our mental health and break free from the grip of depression.

TRANSITION: If you consider yourself a Christian or not, depression touches all our lives at one point or another. Just because you are a Christian does not make you immune to experiencing depression. In fact, though the term depression is not specifically used in the bible, its effects and characteristics are often highlighted throughout stories of influential people God used in the bible.

- Let's look at one man's life, in the bible, named *Elijah* and **how** God was able to help him through a dark season in his life.

PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 19: 1-18. (Feel free to paraphrase if you think your students can't sit through the whole story)

- Elijah is a prophet. A prophet is someone chosen by God to speak for God.
- Elijah was sent by God to approach a king named Ahab. The point of the meeting was to reveal who the one true God is.
- In an ultimate showdown, God reveals himself by fire after Elijah prayed and killed 450 prophets of Baal.
- I don't know about you, But if I was in Elijah's position after this miracle I would feel on top of the world.
- Momentarily, he was. Until Ahab's wife, queen Jezebel threatened to kill Elijah.
- Out of fear for his life, Elijah ran away as far as he could.
- Interesting how this man can go from feeling on top of the world to scared for his life in the matter of a day.

This is the reality of our humanity. When our comforts, space, or lives feel threatened, the natural tendency is to run, hide, and/or want to quit life all together.

BIG IDEA: Depression tells us we're alone. Faith reminds us that God is with us and in control, even when we can't see it or feel it.

Transition: God was with Elijah, even in his loneliness.

I. God's Special Comfort In Our Loneliness (V.3-4)

- Elijah felt isolated and alone, but God met him in his wilderness.
 - Elijah's pain was so deep he openly confessed to God that he had enough and preferred that God would end his life at that present moment. (Perhaps some of you have felt this kind of pain before)
- [Leader pause: sense the weight of the room. Express a simple gratitude for the lives represented in the room with you]
- After unloading this deep confession to God, Elijah falls asleep.
 - Then God responds in an interesting way.. **with food and drink hand delivered by an angel!!** Uber Eats aint got nothing on God.

ILLUSTRATION: [Leader consider using a funny story of a time you were HANGRY and/or tired and how after napping and eating you felt better again]

- Its quite possible that Elijah was speaking from a place of feeling depleted not just mentally and spiritually, but physically. He was hungry and tired.
- Just as God provided food and rest for Elijah under the tree, God gives us the strength we need in our seasons of weakness and hopelessness.

Transition: Just as food and rest gives strength to the body, so does a word of encouragement bring life to the soul.

II. Whispers of Encouragement (V.11-12)

- In the stillness of Mount Horeb, God spoke to Elijah in a gentle whisper.
- Why is this important? Because the only noise Elijah could hear in that moment was his enemy's threat and his fear.

ILLUSTRATION: [Leader consider using a time where you afraid of something and no matter how much bravery you tried to put together, the voices of fear in your head kept screaming and holding you back]

- When we're confused or lost in our thoughts or feelings, we need some encouragement. I'm not talking about a pep talk but receiving words that have power.

When you feel lost or hopeless, Remember these words from Jesus in **John 14:27** // "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

- We can live at peace knowing that God is in control.
- Gods voice brought clarity and direction to Elijah's situation. He can also bring clarity to what your facing now as well.
- Gods whisper of encouragement helped Elijah. God's words brought clarity and direction but also instilled a new sense of strength and purpose in his life.

Transition: God speaks to us in various ways. But sometimes he whispers as a reminder that he is not in competition with outside voices.

III. Renewed Purpose Through a Special Mission (V.14-17)

- Despite Elijah's feelings of worthlessness and fatigue, God reaffirmed his calling and gave him a new mission to fulfill. Just as God gave Elijah specific tasks to carry out, God can renew our sense of purpose and direction in life.
- Depression Disables us to live with purpose. God's grace enables us to live a life on mission.

- Gods commission EMPOWERED Elijah to move beyond his depression and continue serving God faithfully, demonstrating how God can use our struggles to shape us for greater purpose.
- One of those greater purposes is to help others. God brings us comfort so we can comfort others. **2 Corinthians 1:3-4** // *Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.*

I love that Jesus reminds us that he is always with us. This brings security and comfort knowing we are not on this journey alone. There are also others around us going through things in life. Were called to live in community. Not do life alone.

CLOSE + GOSPEL: Depression is not a sign of weakness or lack of faith. Depression reveals our humanity and our deeper need for Jesus and Community. Throughout this journey, remember that you are not alone. Many of us have walked this path before, and many will walk it after. By opening up the conversation, seeking help when needed, and building a community of support around one another, through Jesus, we can light the way through the darkness and reclaim our lives from the grip of depression as God intended.

So, lets embark on this journey together, armed with understanding, compassion, and resilience, as we explore what depression is, why we experience it, and most importantly, how we can overcome it and thrive as a resilient and courageous generation that you are.

Let's break the silence, shatter the stigma, and embrace the journey towards healing and hope.

PRAY PSALM 40:1-3: *Righteous God, I wait patiently for You, because I know that You turn to me and hear my cries. I know that you will lift me out of this dark perios, You will set my feet on a rock and give me a firm place to stand. Because of you, I will have a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to You. Father, I praise you because You are my joy and my hope. I praise you because I know that You are the reason that I will overcome my depression, Amen.*

QUESTIONS:

1. After hearing this sermon, do you feel like you have a deeper understanding of the term Depression. If so, what does it mean to you?
2. Have you ever experienced a time of feeling alone or empty inside? How did you cope with what you were going through?
3. Do you currently feel like you're in a state of Depression?
4. Fear for his life drove Elijah to run and hide. Have you ever ran away from a problem or "threat"? If so, what was it you were running from and where did you go? (not just physically, but even escaping in thoughts or feelings)