

**WHAT YOUR GROUP WILL NEED**

- A quiet spot
- Something to watch a video clip on from YouTube on
- A Bible
- A pen and some paper

LEADER NOTES

This session has been designed for you to use with your group online, feel free to pick and choose parts of it if you are short on time. Make sure you send round the video links to your group beforehand or have it ready in the chat to watch before you start the session. They will need their Bible, pen and paper.

Tip: There are a few prayers, passages and quotes included in these notes. As you'll most likely be using this session on a video chat service, text or message certain people in the group with the prayers or quotes at the start or throughout the session and ask them to read them out at the right time - it'll help break up your meeting and involve others too!

(It's worth noting that you may want to be sensitive in leading this reflection if anyone in your group has recently experienced a loss – God doesn't always completely heal people. "Week 7 – Loss" looks at this theme and you might want to explore this first!)

i INTRO

Explain: During the COVID-19 crisis you may well have heard of people who are sick and who need healing. We believe that God can heal us physically, spiritually and mentally today, and, of course, we also believe he uses our amazing medical professionals to bring healing too. As you'll see, there is no set formula for healing, but in this session, you'll discover a couple of stories from our persecuted family to show that Jesus is still healing people today, just as He did when He was here on earth.

🚶 ACTIVITY: WOULD YOU RATHER

Ask the group, would you rather...

(You may want to have some pictures to share to show the different choices)

- Lose Netflix or Amazon Prime / Take your exams or don't take your exams / Never eat a donut again or only eat donuts for a week / Drink Coke or drink Pepsi / Walk or cycle / Learn to bake or learn to skate / Home school or go to school / Pray for someone to be healed or not risk it

Explain: Healing can easily become an awkward subject if we are not careful; What if God doesn't do it? Or what if God says 'not yet'. The thing is, God isn't a vending machine. Praying isn't simply about closing your eyes, saying what you want and then you get what you asked for. That's not a relationship, God want's an authentic, genuine relationship with us, a relationship where we can be honest with him. He wants us to put our hope in Him, to come to Him in prayer, whatever it is. As you'll see, Jesus can surprise us his answers to our prayers, sometimes doing even more than we were hoping for.

- Have you ever prayed for anyone to be healed before?

🙏 PRAY

Encourage the group to be still and pause. Ask them to slow down their breathing and focus on God. Ask Him to speak to you all whilst you go through this session!

You might want to ask one of your group to read out this prayer:

Father God. You are good. You are everything we need. Please speak to us as we read these stories. Help us put aside distractions and focus on You. Teach us something new. Let us know You are with us. Amen.

🎬 VIDEO: CENTRAL ASIA – AKMAL

Check out this week's video (click here).

This week Naomi shares about Akmal from Central Asia and the healing he experienced "...this joy couldn't be provided by anyone except God." Akmal experienced physical healing.

- Do you know anyone who has ever been physically healed?

Explain: Akmal wasn't completely physically healed; his friend asked him, "How can you be so happy and open with people in this state?" He replied, "this joy couldn't be provided by anyone except God." Akmal realised that the joy he knew was as powerful as the healing he had experienced. Sometimes God heals people in ways we don't see.

- Are there any things beyond physical pain where you (or people you know) might need healing?

Continued...

STORY: IRAN - SALMA

In Iran, leaving Islam for Christianity is extremely dangerous – those who convert can be punished with the death penalty. Many try and keep their faith a complete secret, but despite the risks, believers from Muslim backgrounds make up the largest group of believers in Iran!

- How do you think your faith would look different if you lived in Iran?

Many believers in Iran meet together secretly in people's homes. Hospitality is an important part of Middle Eastern culture, and a big part of running a house church. Salma* is married to a pastor in Iran, and sees hospitality as an important part of their ministry. Salma says, "We often receive guests from other cities and it's my joy to take good care of them."

- Do we have someone in our church like Salma? Someone who makes us feel welcome?

But at one point, she thought this ministry might have to come to an end.

"I started feeling a pain in my hand. It got stronger and stronger until I couldn't even lift a glass of water anymore. Can you imagine how I felt? How could I serve people with only one hand?"

"A big lump started growing on my hand. I went to the doctor with it and he said it was a tumour that needed immediate attention. I went home and cried for hours. I asked God how He could allow this to happen, when he had also called me to serve. The next day we would be receiving guests – but how was I supposed to serve them now?"

- Salma was upset and angry. She would be probably be the first to say she didn't feel close to God. She asked 'how could God allow this to happen?' Have you ever felt like this?

"Eventually, I fell asleep that night. And the next morning, looking at my hand, I couldn't believe my eyes. Was I still dreaming? The lump was gone, and I didn't feel any pain. I started screaming for joy. My husband rushed into the room, and I told him: 'Look at my hand! It's healed!'"

"My husband urged me to take it easy and still ask for some help with the guests. But I said, 'No, I wouldn't even accept help from you. God has healed me!' The lump never came back. And, while doing ministry in Iran comes with many difficulties, I know for sure that God has called me to serve him here."

BIBLE: JESUS WEPT

Ask a young person to read Acts 3: 1-11.

Explain: In this passage, people come running up to Peter as he's just prayed for a lame beggar who was healed. However, like Akmal's friend, the crowd have missed the point. It's pretty likely that most people in this crowd will have walked past and ignored the beggar on their way into the temple. Sadly, because of his disability, he would have been excluded from society, not able to enter the temple – or anywhere else – without help.

- Who are the people in our society who are normally ignored and walked past?

In this passage, God doesn't only physically heal the beggar, he also enables the beggar to become part of the community. He's described as 'walking and jumping, and praising God.' Peter doesn't pray a set prayer for healing for the beggar, he doesn't have any magic words. Just like Salma, the healing was

unexpected. The beggar was looking for a few pennies, expecting to live out his days not being able to walk. To his surprise he got so much more.

- Have there been situations where God has surprised you?

Ask a young person to read Revelation 21:1-4

Explain: This passage is important because it reminds us that ultimately, no matter what is happening in the here and now, God will heal and completely restore us. But, the passage also highlights something that we might have missed before. These verses show that God will dwell intimately with his people. And it's from that place, a place of intimate relationship, that God wipes away all tears and takes away pain. It's about us being close to Him. As Akmal and Salma's story highlight, when we draw near in relationship with God, He can and will change us – sometimes even physically.

- Have you experienced any changes in your life because of your relationship with Jesus?

Explain: We're called to be people who live in the knowledge of this perfect relationship. We might not have the full picture, but God asks us to work with Him (just like Peter did) to bring healing to our world. On some occasions that might mean praying specifically for someone to be healed, on some occasions it might mean being a good friend, at other times, it might mean simply being there for someone – but at all times it means caring for people, drawing close to them and sharing their pains, burdens and troubles.

- In what ways can you bring healing and restoration this week?

RESPOND

Explain: In the Bible Jesus was good news for the whole person, he didn't 'just' perform physical healing. Jesus healed by: accepting those who were social outcasts, spending time with people who were hated, giving value to those who were often ignored. We've suggested two ways to respond based on believing in physical healing and also that God can use us to bring healing.

- Ask your group if they know anyone who is sick. Lead a time of prayer for these people to be healed.

Remind your group that there are no magic words, they can just bring that person before God. The best way to learn how to pray for healing, is to give it a go! It could be helpful to get your group to set a reminder so that they can keep praying. Set an alarm on your phone at least once a day to remind you to pray for that person. Encourage them by reading James 5:13-16.

We can bring healing through our actions and how we treat people too. Is there a strained relationship or friendship in your life right now? Give some time for your group to think/make a note. Encourage them to pray about this and ask God to show them how they could bring healing this week.

PRAY

As you close the session ask the group for any prayer requests. Then pray the following prayer:

Father God, we thank You for the stories of Christians like Akmal, Salma and our other brothers and sisters around the world who are persecuted for their faith in You. Thank You that You are still healing people today, help us to know Your joy, and love, and to persevere in prayer for all types of healing. Amen.