

**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

YOU WILL NEED

- Some blocks to build a tower with (ideally Jenga or something similar)

LEADER NOTES

This session has been adapted from the *Isolated Church: Loss* reflection so you can use it 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 link to the videos (click here) to your group before you meet or have it ready in your video chat to watch at the right time.

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!

i **INTRO**

Explain: Loss is something that has and will affect us all at some point. You might be familiar with loss already; you may have lost a loved one; it could be that you are angry about losing the opportunity to go away or celebrate a birthday with friends or you could be sad at the loss of your school prom. We want to share some stories from our persecuted church family - stories of people who, despite huge loss, are able to cling onto Jesus. When our lives are turned upside down by loss, the amazing promises in the Bible, and our loving heavenly Father, stay the same – and that's something really worth knowing and depending on.

🏗️ **ACTIVITY: CORNERSTONE**

Pre-build yourself a tower using blocks (Jenga), toilet roll or similar and show it to your group. Ask them to write down how many blocks they think you can take out before it collapses. Then take out the dice to roll and explain if you roll a one you need to take one of the lowest blocks out. If you roll a 6 and you can take a top block. For any other number work out where between the top and bottom you should remove a block (three being the middle). Do this until the tower collapses and see if anyone guessed right.

Explain: When we experience loss, it can seem like our world is coming tumbling down like our tower.

- **Ask a young person to read Psalm 118: 22-23**

Jesus quotes this whilst speaking to religious leaders before his crucifixion. He is saying that the church will be built upon him as a cornerstone - as a foundation. If we keep Jesus and His word as our foundation, our tower may tumble a bit, but we will always have Jesus as our foundation to build on.

🙏 **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: NORTH AFRICA - KABIL'S STORY**

If you haven't already - send round the link to the video for people to watch (click here). This week Naomi shares about Kabil from North Africa, explaining what he had to lose to when he chose to follow Jesus.

Ask

- Kabil had to give up a lot to become a Christian – have you ever had to give anything up to follow Jesus?

Kabil was given a really difficult dilemma: *"You must make a choice: it is us or Jesus. Do you want your family, or do you want your new faith?"*

- He experienced the loss of his family, his home and his business. This wasn't an easy choice. Put yourself in Kabil's shoes – how do you think he would have felt making this decision?

Explain: Experiencing loss will affect us all differently. Kabil was able to deal with the loss he went through by trusting that God would look after him. He says, *"Nothing can equal the life that Jesus gave to me."* As you

Continued...

keep reading this reflection, know that God cares about all your emotions - He is the Comforter - ask Him to be close and speak to you now.

STORY: EGYPT - MARIAN

Explain: Marian knows this first hand. She's from Egypt, where Christians are facing increasing persecution from violent Muslim extremist groups.

When she was just 14, the unthinkable happened. She was at church, and as one service was ending and another beginning, her dad sent her home to make some tea for him. As the water was heating up, she heard a big explosion. She rushed back to the church and found a scene of carnage. There were bodies and blood. Marian found her father; he was barely breathing:

"I put his head on my lap... and he asked me to take care of my younger brother and sister. Then he closed his eyes and smiled peacefully, his face shining. Then he went to heaven."

A suicide bomber had walked into the church, and Marian's father had run after him, trying to stop him from detonating his bomb-vest. The attack happened just days before Marian's 15th birthday.

Ask

- Loss of any kind can happen very suddenly. What loss have you experienced? It could be a death, or it could be you are really feeling the loss of school, family, friendships, sports, holidays etc. If nobody shares, don't worry just carry on with Marian's story.

A year and a half later, Marian still misses her dad. But courageously she's still following Jesus, clinging onto Him through pain, trauma and loss. Incredibly she says:

"God takes, but He gives back more. God is love, God is kind, God is merciful. I have experienced this in my most difficult hour".

Ask

- Do you know any bits of the Bible which talk of God's promises or His presence with us through tough times? Ask someone in your group to read Psalm 23 then ask: 'Why do you think Christians find encouragement in this verse?'
- Ask someone to read Rev 21: 3-5.

Explain: This scripture encourages us to 'write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true'. Lets do this now and write out these verses. Stick them somewhere you will see them every day.

BIBLE: JESUS WEPT

Explain: Loss can be really hard. We will all be coping with different kinds of loss in different ways. Often it can be hard to communicate what we are feeling - in Romans 8:26, the author, Paul says, "...the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."

There can be points when coming to God can feel too hard and we don't know what to say. But this verse reminds us that we can pray even when we don't know where to start - even if our prayer is just a groan. Thankfully God knows our hearts, he understands our emotions and pain; the Holy Spirit helps us to know that God hears us even when getting words out is hard.

- Does anyone know the shortest verse in the Bible?

Have someone read John 11:38-44

This passage is amazing as it shows we pray to a God that cried the same tears as we do (John 11:35) even though He went on to raise Lazarus from the dead. This whole section of Scripture is an intimate insight into the person of Jesus. It shows Jesus being 'deeply moved' because of His love for His friend Lazarus. There's also a remarkable statement about how secure he was in his relationship with God the Father: 'I knew that you always hear me'.

In the same way Marian was moved by her love for her father. She was obviously devastated to lose him, but she also came to know God in a new way in that loss saying: "God is love, God is king, God is merciful."

This story of Jesus weeping teaches us two things. One, Jesus knows our hurt and our grief. Point two is that Jesus also teaches us that God hears our prayers, even our wordless groans. Always.

If you're struggling with words to pray the Psalms can be a great place to start. Ask your group if any of them know any Psalms that are good to read if you are angry, sad or feeling low. Suggest the following:

- **Angry:** Psalm 13 - "Will you forget me for ever?"
- **Sad:** Psalm 31:9-10 - "My eyes grow weak with sorrow."
- **Feeling low:** Psalm 130:1-2 - "Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice."

Explain: Sometimes knowing other people have felt similar emotions and have been able to take them to God can help us to take our feelings to him too. Prayer is a great place to start when we've experienced loss - taking our emotions, questions and pain to a God who knows how it feels.

RESPOND

Explain: When we lose something, whatever it is, we can be left with a gap or a hole in our lives. Prayer and coming to God will always help, but what practical things can you do to fill that gap?

Give the following the examples and encourage your group to write out something similar.

- **Loss of a school prom:** Host a 'watch party' with some friends to connect with them
- **Loss of a relationship/friendship:** Commit to getting involved in your youth group and see if there are ways you can serve
- **Loss of a loved one:** Ask someone to spend some time with you talking about special memories of that person.
- **Loss of a holiday:** Keep busy during the time you would be away by volunteering your time where you can.

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 example of Christians like Marian, Kabil and our other brothers and sisters around the world who are persecuted for their faith in You. We know that You always hear us and know our hearts even if all we can manage is a groan. Help us to pray, whatever we are feeling and place people in our lives to talk and pray with us. Amen.