

LOOK UP: LARGE GROUP TEACHING GUIDE

BIG IDEA

In this session, students will recognize that at times our feelings of pressure and anxiety become more than we can handle on our own. God designed us to be part of groups and families who care, and at times to expand our circle to professional helpers. Reaching out to God and sharing honestly with others can keep us from facing anxiety alone.

FOR THIS SESSION, YOU'LL NEED:

- Session 3 slides and means to project them
- Consider inviting an adult your students trust who can share about a time when they reached out to a counselor or therapist who helped their own struggle with anxiety or depression. Later in this session you'll find a suggested point at which to invite your guest to speak
- **Session 3 Video: *Life in a hurting world*** and a means to play it, if you are using the videos included with this curriculum during your **Look up** teaching time
- If you're doing small groups during this gathering, be sure to check the "You'll need" list at the top of the **Look inside small group discussion guide**

*If you are using the videos included with this curriculum in your **Look up** teaching time, show **Session 3 Video: Life in a hurting world** here to open your teaching session.*

LEADER TIP

When asking a guest to speak, make sure to review their talk or story beforehand to make sure their point is clear and their examples are appropriate for your group.

A TALE OF TWO HOPELESS SITUATIONS

Begin by reminding your students that this month you're talking about life in our anxious world. Last week we learned that God designed us to be part of groups and families, and to build a circle of care we can ask to be with us when we experience both good times and bad. But even with people at our side, sometimes life can hand us circumstances that are totally overwhelming—even hopeless.

Explain that today we're going to read a tale of two hopeless situations. Read Luke 8:40–56 out loud, or invite a student to do so.



SLIDE: LUKE 8:40–56 (3 SLIDES)

When Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they had been waiting for him. A man named Jairus, who was a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus' feet. He pleaded with Jesus to come to his house because his only daughter, a twelve-year-old, was dying.

As Jesus moved forward, he faced smothering crowds. A woman was there who had been bleeding for twelve years. She had spent her entire livelihood on doctors, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the hem of his clothes, and at once her bleeding stopped.

“Who touched me?” Jesus asked.

When everyone denied it, Peter said, “Master, the crowds are surrounding you and pressing in on you!”

But Jesus said, “Someone touched me. I know that power has gone out from me.”

When the woman saw that she couldn't escape notice, she came trembling and fell before Jesus. In front of everyone, she explained why she had touched him and how she had been immediately healed.

“Daughter, your faith has healed you,” Jesus said. “Go in peace.”

While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the synagogue leader's house, saying to Jairus, “Your daughter has died. Don't bother the teacher any longer.”

When Jesus heard this, he responded, “Don’t be afraid; just keep trusting, and she will be healed.”

When he came to the house, he didn’t allow anyone to enter with him except Peter, John, and James, and the child’s father and mother. They were all crying and mourning for her, but Jesus said, “Don’t cry. She isn’t dead. She’s only sleeping.”

They laughed at him because they knew she was dead.

Taking her hand, Jesus called out, “Child, get up.” Her life returned and she got up at once. He directed them to give her something to eat. Her parents were beside themselves with joy, but he ordered them to tell no one what had happened.

Luke 8:40–56

Say: In Luke 8 we find two people in hopeless situations. The woman’s been sick for 12 years. The girl has just died. Feels pretty extreme, right?

Point out some of the differences in each situation. The woman is completely alone, surrounded by a crowd of strangers. We never even learn her name. The girl has family all around her and is clearly loved. But both are disconnected from other people by something they can’t control—their health.

Say: Jesus is on his way somewhere else. The crowd wants to get where it’s going. But Jesus “stops in his tracks” for both the woman and the girl.



SLIDE: JESUS STOPS IN HIS TRACKS.

Wherever he’s going, it’s not as important as the people in front of him. He’s not too busy to stop and notice the woman no one else seemed to have time for. He doesn’t even overlook the girl everyone else had given up for dead. Of the many things that we can observe in this passage of Scripture, here’s an important one to recognize:

No matter how old a person is,
no matter how hopeless things seem,
no matter what everyone else thinks,
when we’re hurting, we’re Jesus’ top priority.



SLIDE: WHEN WE’RE HURTING, WE’RE JESUS’ TOP PRIORITY.

ONE TOP PRIORITY

Explain that although we know the woman had been suffering for a long time—as long as the girl has been alive, actually—there’s no mention of her family or friends. In this story, we are not even given a name or place she’s from. She’s completely anonymous.

Maybe her bleeding condition caused her to be avoided by Jewish society because of purity rules about not touching people who were bleeding. Or maybe she was self-conscious and pushed people away. Either way, the woman had to make the tough choice to step out of her silent struggle, no matter how hopeless she felt, and go for help.

She’s *physically* healed the instant she touches Jesus’ robe. But he clearly isn’t content for the woman just to walk away alone. Physical healing isn’t going to solve all of her problems; it’s when the woman connects and talks with Jesus that she experiences peace.

Ask the group to discuss the woman’s response to her physical healing (found in verses 47–48).



SLIDE: LUKE 8:47–48

When the woman saw that she couldn’t escape notice, she came trembling and fell before Jesus. In front of everyone, she explained why she had touched him and how she had been immediately healed.

“Daughter, your faith has healed you,” Jesus said. “Go in peace.”

Luke 8:47–48



SLIDE: WHY DID SHE STAY QUIET WHEN SHE WAS HEALED? HOW WOULD YOU HAVE RESPONDED?

Ask: **What are some of the reasons you can think of that the woman might not have jumped and shouted for joy, like others did when Jesus healed them?**

How would you have responded if you had been healed without even having to speak to Jesus?

Ask students to call out their answers or break up to discuss in pairs, depending on the responsiveness and size of your group.

The *girl* in this story, however, has a family, a home, and servants. We even know her father’s name, and know he’s an important person in the town. This girl is valued in society. Yet there are some similarities between the way people react each time Jesus stops.



SLIDE: VERSE 45 & VERSE 49

Verse 45: “Who touched me?” Jesus asked.

When everyone denied it, Peter said, “Master, the crowds are surrounding you and pressing in on you!”

Verse 49: While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the synagogue leader’s house, saying to Jairus, “Your daughter has died. Don’t bother the teacher any longer.”



SLIDE: HOW DID PEOPLE REACT TO THE SICK WOMAN AND TO THE GIRL’S FATHER?

Give your students a minute to observe the similarities or differences between the ways the crowd reacted to the sick woman in verse 45, and to the girl’s father in verse 49.

Say: **Often the world around us—and even our family and friends—can miss their cue to stop and pay attention to us. We can all get distracted by our own busyness, or by what the world or our culture says is important, and not see how someone near us is feeling. In both the woman’s story and the girl’s story, Jesus has to remind even his closest followers that people are the most important priority.**

STOPPING IN OUR OWN TRACKS

Say: **Both the sick woman and the dead girl’s father needed to leave their homes and go for help. The same is true for us: sometimes we have to stop in our own tracks and reach out for help.**



SLIDE: STOP IN YOUR TRACKS. REACH OUT.

Explain that when we experience the same anxiety over and over again—or if we try to ignore it instead of listening to it—we eventually begin to lose hope. Ultimately, unhealthy anxiety that goes unaddressed leads to depression. And when we’re depressed, most of us want to be alone and isolate ourselves. It can become a cycle that we can’t break on our own.

But think about it—what would happen if, instead of keeping things to ourselves in those moments when we feel hopeless, we reached out instead?

Explain to students that even though our feelings may make us feel vulnerable and want to be alone, it’s really important that we push ourselves out the door and reach out for help, just like the

sick woman and the girl's father in the story. Make sure that your students understand these three important action steps:

1. Breathe. Use the Daily Replay to help ground you and look beyond the moment.



SLIDE: BREATHE.

Remind students about slow and deep breathing skills. You can teach one of your own, or use the following technique:

Sometimes settling our body and mind is really difficult, especially when we have a lot going on. One technique is to focus on our breathing. When we breathe slowly and deeply, we let our body and souls know that it is okay to relax and rest in God's presence.

Sounds simple, right? We all know how to breathe!

But have you ever noticed that when you have a strong feeling like anxiety your heart starts to beat faster? Your heart is just trying to do its job. Well, when you start to breathe more deeply, your heart gets more oxygen and doesn't have to work as hard. Then this amazing thing happens where your heart slows down and lets your brain know that you aren't in danger anymore. It's a really simple but powerful way to trick your body and brain to shift gears into relaxation mode!

It can be a bit strange at first, but learning how to breathe with your belly instead of with your chest can also be very helpful. All you have to do is slowly take three seconds to breathe in through your nose, making sure to fill your belly with air ... [take a breath in to model this] and then take three seconds to slowly breathe out through your mouth. [Exhale.]

As you continue to breathe deep and slow, you can begin to take a moment to simply notice God's presence with each breath that you take.

While breathing might seem kind of obvious, there's actually science behind the power of stopping to take a few breaths like this. It can make the difference between feeling completely overwhelmed or being able to cope with the moment.

2. Remember that you don't ever have to handle feelings of anxiety, sadness, or depression on your own.



SLIDE: YOU DON'T EVER HAVE TO HANDLE FEELINGS OF ANXIETY, SADNESS, OR DEPRESSION ON YOUR OWN.

Remind students that they have a circle of support—family members, parents, medical professionals, pastors, and a church body—who are ready to listen and help. If possible, give them the name of a pastor or church member responsible for pastoral care they can contact.

LEADER TIP

You care a great deal about your students. But most leaders have many responsibilities and people to care for. Your own friends and family have needs too. As you connect your students with people they can call upon in a crisis, you may want to put your name on their list. But it's important that you're not the only name on their list. Talk with your pastor and review your church or denomination's policies to identify a few appropriate people who are responsible for pastoral care or crisis response and would be willing to be a point of contact for students in a crisis.

Make sure students understand appropriate boundaries (gender, time of day, etc.), and be clear with them if you and the adults on your list have obligations under your state's mandatory reporting laws. You may wish to communicate these things during this session, or send a communication to students and parents as a follow-up.

3. If you ever feel like harming or killing yourself, pick up the phone and reach out for help.



SLIDE: IF YOU FEEL LIKE HARMING YOURSELF, CALL FOR HELP.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: [1-800-273-8255](tel:1-800-273-8255) or suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Please replace this number if you have a preferred one.

Let students know that if they are ever in physical danger, it is the desire and responsibility of you and others in their circle to help keep them safe. Remind them that, as we learned in Session 1, anxiety and depression aren't permanent; there are health services, spiritual practices, and a community of people that can work together to help them feel better.

Tell them: **Suicide is currently the second leading cause of death among young people ages 10 to 24. And it's estimated that two out of every three young people who experience suicidal thoughts don't ever get help.**¹

A suicide hotline number is available in their **Look around** student take-home sheet (and consider posting it on a noticeboard where students and parents can see it). Tell students that if they feel like harming or killing themselves, call the hotline number or call 911 right away. Then call someone in their circle.

Say: **Sometimes we're concerned not for ourselves, but for a friend. If you're ever worried that a friend might hurt themselves, it's time to reach out for help. Don't try to carry that burden on your own. Call the same hotline number or 911.**

LEADER TIP

We've provided a suicide hotline number we trust, which is included in your student and parent handouts for this week. However, you may already be familiar with one that you trust. Whichever service you choose, make sure its name and number are displayed in places where students and parents will see them. You can also use this moment in your teaching session to ask students to save the hotline number in their phones—in case they ever need it themselves or for a friend.

A TALE THAT'S CLOSER TO HOME

At this point, invite an adult your group trusts who can share about reaching out to a counselor or therapist for help with their own struggle with anxiety or depression. Ask them to share:

- What made you decide to reach out and ask for help?
- How did talking to someone beyond your friends and family (like a counselor or therapist) help you look at your anxiety or depression differently?
- How did your faith grow during that time, or where did you see God at work in your life during that time?
- What would you say to someone who is hesitant to reach out for help because they fear that others might find out and think differently of them?
- What word of encouragement or advice would you give to a person who's feeling overwhelmed by anxiety or depression today?

LEADER TIP

You will want to meet with this person ahead of time to hear their story and how they tell it to be sure it's appropriate for your group. And you may consider doing this "interview style" where you ask questions if you think it might go more smoothly for this guest. Let them know how you are going to talk about faith in relation to struggle (read on for how we suggest framing this) so they don't contradict this perspective with what they share, since we tend to remember stories more than teaching points.

Thank your guest for sharing, then say: **Remember that having inner struggles doesn't mean we lack faith. It means we're human. We can grow in faith *even in the midst of our struggles* when we:**



SLIDE: LOOK UP. LOOK INSIDE. LOOK AROUND.

LOOK UP. We pause in the midst of our anxious thoughts to look up and seek God's encouragement through the Bible and by talking with others who are walking in faith.

LOOK INSIDE. We reflect on where God is at work inside us.

LOOK AROUND. We take a good look at our own anxious world to determine when and how to ask for help so that we can make positive changes.

Sometimes our anxiety can be too much for one person to handle on their own. God designed us to be part of groups and families who care, and at times to expand our circle to professional helpers. Reaching out to God and sharing honestly with others can keep us from facing anxiety alone.

WHO'S IN YOUR CIRCLE?



SLIDE: WHO'S IN YOUR CIRCLE?

This week I challenge you to have a conversation with your parent or a trusted adult at home. Here's why this is really important: You might be feeling fine now, but you're going to have days when you feel more anxious, sad, or unsure of yourself. That's normal. If it ever moves *beyond* normal and starts to feel more serious or out of control, it helps to know ahead of time who you can go to and what you can do to get help.

Studies have shown that among young people who have died by suicide, only half of their families were aware that they were having suicidal thoughts.²

We need to get comfortable talking with our families about how we feel. Sit down with a parent when you go home and talk about who's in your circle. Discuss who *needs to be* in your circle so that you don't have to face your inner struggles alone. And most important, talk about how you both will work together if you ever feel like you're dealing with more than you can handle.

Tell students that, just as in previous weeks, they will be given a handout with some conversation starters to help. Let them know that you'll also be encouraging their parents to make time and space for this conversation throughout the week as well.

LEADER TIP

The sad truth is that not all students have a home environment where they feel safe sharing their feelings. Make sure you get to know your students throughout this curriculum journey. Link young people who are truly unable to talk with their parents about getting help (if they ever need it) with a pastor or person in the church who is responsible for pastoral care, and who can help them grow a circle of support that's right for their own unique circumstances.

Remind students that, like many things in life, relationships take practice. Life at home may not always be perfect, but parents are human and are dealing with their own shortcomings and struggles too. Wherever students and their parents are in their relationships at the moment, it can be possible to put their differences aside and come together for this really important conversation.

Close in prayer, referring to the image of Jesus stopping in his tracks to give the sick woman, and the dead girl and her family, his care and attention.

Divide into small groups at this point, or use the Session 3 Look inward material whenever your ministry meets in small groups this week.

ENDNOTES

¹ Mathilde M. Husky, Mark Olfson, et al., "Twelve-Month Suicidal Symptoms and Use of Services Among Adolescents: Results From the National Comorbidity Survey," *Psychiatric Services* 63:10, 2012, 989-996, <https://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/abs/10.1176/appi.ps.201200058>.

² Jason D. Jones, Rhonda C. Boyd, et al., "Parent-Adolescent Agreement About Adolescents' Suicidal Thoughts," *Pediatrics* 143:2, February 2019, <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/143/2/e20181771>.