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# UNSTUCK

## A Teen Guide for Living in Uncertain Times

When disasters happen, our lives are completely interrupted and suddenly we face uncertain times. You might be feeling alone right now, missing friends and opportunities, dealing with difficult circumstances, and finding it hard to stay motivated to do anything at all. You may have lost material belongings or even a loved one who has died in the midst of these hard days.

Maybe you're feeling stuck right now, and don't know how to get yourself going again, how to move forward when you don't know how long things will be like this or if life will ever feel normal again.

The activities in this book can be helpful in getting you through this crisis—or anytime your life gets turned upside down. There are four sessions for you to experience, but don't try to do them all at the same time! Space them out in a way that seems right for you. We hope you'll find comfort from God's presence and some strategies for getting UNSTUCK as you go through this self-guided booklet, either by yourself or with someone you trust.

In this four-part story, Jason and Maya are living through the days of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Your circumstances may be different from theirs, but you may see that their responses are similar to your own.

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# Session 1. Why Am I Feeling This Way?

## Things Just Got Real

The year 2020 began just like normal. After the Christmas break, Jason, who was 17, and his sister Maya, who was 15, went back to school—just like every other year. They remembered hearing news of a new “flu” that was affecting people in China but no one at school was talking about it.

Jason was loving his senior year. He was spending lots of time with his friends, had a part time job, and was saving some money. But the year had been hard for Maya. She had moved to a new school while her best friends—since they were babies!—got to stay together in the old school. She was lonely and felt embarrassed that everything was so hard. She was struggling with her grades, struggling to find new friends.

Their parents were both working and they seemed to fight with each other all the time, usually about money. Mostly it was just yelling, but even so Maya never felt like talking to them about her problems. They would probably just get mad. Their mom worked long hours at a nearby clinic. When she was home, she was always tired and slept a lot. Maya knew her dad had something to do with sales, but when he was home he always seemed too quiet or angry to ever ask him questions about work.

Then everything changed. Just before spring break, their teachers and classmates were talking more and more about the virus. Their family normally never watched the news, but now the TV was always on. Everybody talked about coronavirus and COVID-19. In some places lots of people were getting sick, even dying.

“Wow. Things are getting real,” Jason said.

“So how bad do you think this virus thing will be?” Maya asked. “Actually, I don’t care too much. I don’t have any plans for spring break and no one to hang out with anyway.”

The next day they learned that the school would not reopen after the break and they would both have to do schoolwork and classes online from home. Maya knew she would have to ask for a new computer. The family had only one, and it was old and slow.



When their dad got home that night, he slammed the door, threw down his stuff, and went straight to the refrigerator for a beer. Soon he and their mom were yelling at each other. It went on for hours. Maya put on her headphones and turned up the volume. *“I’ll have to ask them about a computer later,”* she thought. Before she fell asleep that night, her mom came in and told her that her dad had been laid off from work. *“Oh no,”* she thought. *“There go my chances for a new computer.”* Then she felt ashamed to be worrying about something sort of trivial. As she tried to go to sleep, Maya’s head was full of thoughts. *“What will happen to our family? How will we manage without dad working? How will I get my schoolwork done? What if Mom gets sick?”* Maya felt very tired all of a sudden, and so lonely that she cried herself to sleep.

The next day the news stayed on. It was weird for dad to be at home. Jason, feeling awkward, tried to talk sports with him, but his father told him that all the major sports had been postponed and the national basketball tournament was cancelled. *“Oh no,”* thought Jason. *“Now what am I going to talk with Dad about?”* He listened as his dad called Grandma to tell her about getting laid off—and how she needed to stay home so she wouldn’t get the virus.

Jason put in his headphones. Like Maya, his mind was racing. *“What will happen to Grandma? The news said old people are the most likely to die if they catch this! And what about all my plans? It’s my senior year! What will happen to school? Homecoming? Graduation? Everything has changed,”* he thought. *“I feel completely stuck. Like my whole life is just on hold. I can’t even think about what comes next.”* With nothing else to do, Jason went outside to walk around the neighborhood, alone with his thoughts.

#### THINK ABOUT IT

Put your thoughts into words or draw a picture to answer the following questions.

1. What are some of the things Maya has lost? What has Jason lost?
2. Why does Jason feel “stuck?”
3. How are the feelings you have about your situation like Maya’s or Jason’s?

### Activity—Name Your Feelings

It’s good to notice your feelings, especially during days like these when so many things have changed for you. There are no wrong feelings! Feelings are a natural response to things that happen in our lives. It is normal to have difficult feelings when difficult things happen to us.

Circle any words below that describe the feelings you’ve experienced recently.

Angry	Disappointed	Sad	Excited
Frustrated	Relaxed	Anxious	Worried
Hopeless	Ashamed	Guilty	Calm
Depressed	Jealous	Lonely	Hopeful
Bored	Happy	Numb	Confused
Overwhelmed	Helpless	Afraid	Rejected

**THINK ABOUT IT**

1. Why is it weird sometimes to talk about your feelings?
2. Which of these feelings are the strongest for you right now?
3. Do you have other feelings you can name?
4. What do you do when you feel this way?

**Activity—Name Your Losses**

Think about how this disaster has interrupted your life. Think about opportunities you may have lost, the disappointment of cancelled events, the interruption of your plans, not knowing when this “life-on-hold” feeling is going to end or what the “new normal” will be. Perhaps relationships with some important people in your life have changed and you’ve lost a feeling of connection with them.

See if you can name the losses you have experienced as a result of your current situation. Remember they may be physical things like friends, school, and sports, or deeper things like personal freedom or safety. Then, write how each loss makes you feel or draw a face showing that feeling.

**Activity—Grief Street**

You have experienced a lot of loss! And the feelings you named are connected to the grief you’re feeling because of those losses. Loss always leads to grief. Grief is the emotional response we feel when we have lost someone or something. Grief is normal and healthy, as it helps us deal with the loss we feel.

Grief is a process. Our losses are different, but we all take a similar journey in dealing with them. Everyone goes through stages of grief. Each stage is a normal and healthy part of the grieving process. Sometimes we go back to an earlier stage for a while. Sometimes we get stuck and need help. But there’s no way to bypass the journey.

WHAT I HAVE LOST	HOW IT MAKES ME FEEL

We can think of our grief journey as a street with bus stops along the way.

### Bus Stop 1: DENIAL & ANGER

Often our first response to losing something or someone important is denial, to not believe it is possible. Along with doubting that it's true, we sometimes feel numb, with no emotions at all. Often we feel angry about the loss and try to find someone or something to blame so we can aim our anger there. Sometimes anger feels better than feeling numb, and sometimes we can feel safer to express anger than to express our sorrow.

### Bus Stop 2: NO HOPE

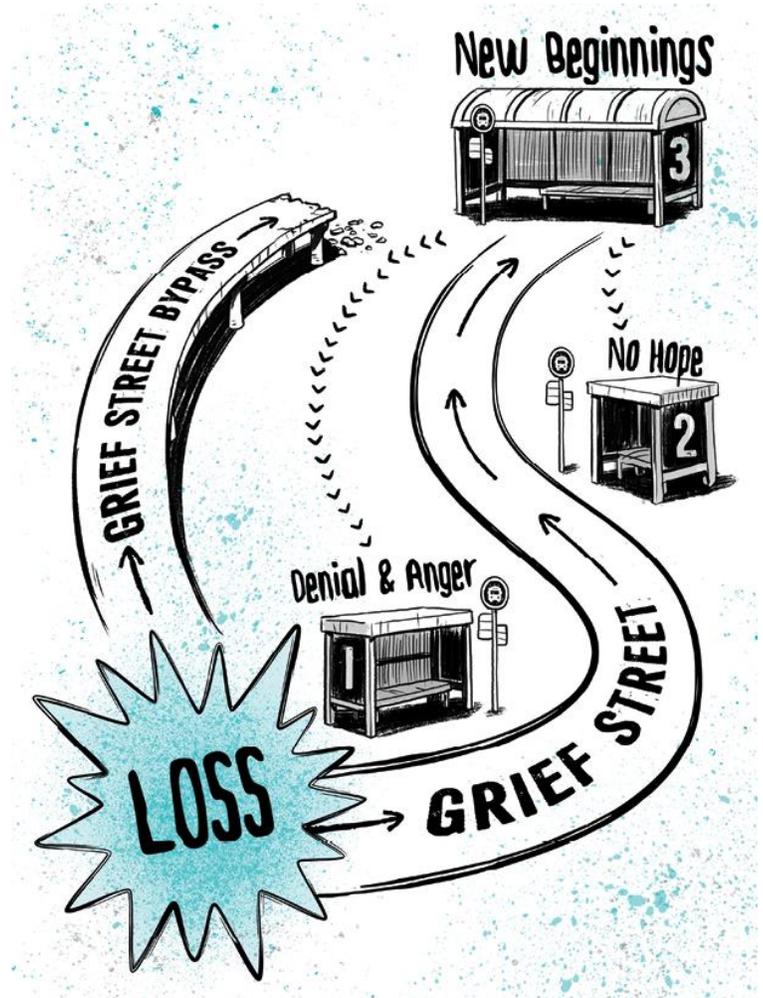
Eventually, our denial and anger fade, and we face the reality of the loss, causing us to feel hopeless, as if nothing will ever be good again. Some people show this stage by crying, withdrawing, or being depressed. You may not feel like taking care of yourself or doing schoolwork. You may feel like numbing the pain with activities that are harmful to you. Sometimes, people cover up their true feelings in this stage by pretending that everything is okay, that it "doesn't matter."

### Bus Stop 3: NEW BEGINNINGS

This is a place of resolution, where we recognize that things will never be the same but we can learn to live with the loss. We can talk about our loss without the sharp pain that we felt when the loss was new. We accept that we can't get those things or people back, and we are able to accept a "new normal" in the face of the loss.

### Grief Street Bypass

Sometimes people want to skip all the stops and try to take a bypass directly to New Beginnings. They don't allow themselves the time or space to be sad or angry about their loss. Maybe there are people in their lives that tell them to "just get over it." Or sometimes, they hear at church that they should "praise God for everything all the time." The Bypass is not healthy. Going through the stages of grief is important so we can deal with our loss honestly and get to New Beginnings in a normal, natural way.



## Riding the Bus

Often the grief journey is not direct. Many times when you think about something or someone you have lost, you find your feelings going back to a stage you thought you had already passed. You might go back to anger (Bus Stop 1), or feeling hopelessness (Bus Stop 2). Over time, and sometimes with help from a friend or safe adult, you are able to move forward again, eventually coming to stay in New Beginnings.

Try drawing your own version of Grief Street, including the three bus stops. Look back at your list of losses. Decide which stage of grief you're feeling for each one, and write those losses at the appropriate bus stop in your drawing. For example, if you're feeling angry about not having a graduation ceremony, write "graduation" or draw a graduation cap on Bus Stop 1.

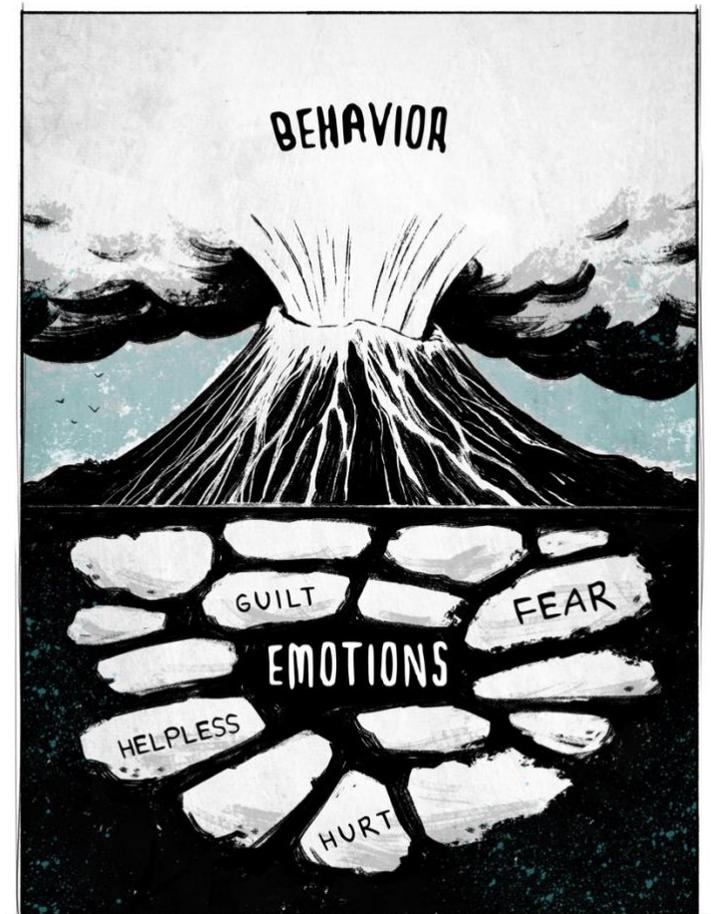
## Activity—Anger Volcano

You might be feeling more anger than usual these days. For many people, anger is the most difficult emotion to understand and to control. Did you know that anger doesn't exist on its own? Anger usually comes from another underlying emotion we are feeling, and most of the time we don't even realize it. We use anger to protect ourselves or to cover up other feelings that make us feel vulnerable.

This picture of a volcano can help us understand our anger. Look back to the beginning of this section and check out the feelings you circled. Some of those feelings may have erupted into anger, even though you didn't realize what you were feeling at the time. You just knew you were angry.

In the illustration of the volcano, write in the section underground the feelings that you have that sometimes erupt into anger. In the air above the volcano where the anger erupts, write some of the things you have done when you're angry.

Anger is not bad. It tells us that something is wrong, that we are feeling something we need to deal with in healthy ways.



## Bible Spotlight: Jesus Grieved

Is there another family that your family is close with? Maybe they have kids the same age as you, or your parents are friends, or there is some other reason they are like a second family to you. In the Bible we read that Jesus had a family like this. There were three siblings—Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Several stories in the Bible (like Luke 10:38–42) speak of times when Jesus visited these friends. They were the kind of friends you would do anything for.

One day Lazarus got very sick. Mary and Martha sent a message to Jesus to come quickly, saying, “the one you love is sick.” Jesus was known for being able to heal people from many kinds of diseases and they desperately wanted him to come and heal their brother. But Jesus did not hurry back—in fact, he delayed his return. And Lazarus died. He had been buried for four days by the time Jesus arrived. Mary and Martha must have been sad and deeply disappointed that Jesus had not come in time. They may have been experiencing “denial,” or “no hope” like in the grief journey. The Bible tells us that Martha went out to meet Jesus first, while he was on his way to their house, to ask him why it took so long for him to come. Then Mary arrived. She simply fell at his feet. “Lord,” she said, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died!” Jesus saw her crying, and he also saw how the people with her were crying. His heart was touched, and he was deeply moved. “Where have you buried him?” he asked. “Come and see,” they answered. And then Jesus himself cried.

You can read the whole story in the book of John in the Bible, chapter 11, verses 1–44.

In uncertain times we will experience lots of different emotions. Remember, emotions are neither good or bad. They’re neutral, informing us of our responses to life experiences. But some emotions are difficult. It is okay to have difficult emotions, and we can learn to express them in healthy ways. (We’ll talk about some healthy ways in the next chapter.)

In this story, we see that Mary and Martha must have had many feelings, like sadness, loneliness, anger, regret, hopelessness, fear, and maybe others. Jesus also felt the pain of grief and he cried with them.

### THINK ABOUT IT

1. Why do you think Jesus didn’t come right away?
2. If you had been there, what questions would you have had for him?
3. Later in the story, Jesus shocks everyone by bringing Lazarus back to life (John 11:43–44). What kinds of things feel dead in you right now that you could ask Jesus to bring back to life?

In your Bible, find the book of Psalms and look for Psalm 34. In verse 18, it says, “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.” **Just as Jesus was with Mary and Martha and grieved with them, know that God is with you now in your pain and grief.**

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*TAKE A BREAK!*

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Thinking and journaling about difficult emotions can be tiring. You may want to spend a few days going through this booklet, or at least take breaks between chapters.

## Session 2. What Can I Do with These Feelings?

### Life on Hold

Everything seemed like they were living in a movie. To Jason, it was a zombie movie where everyone was hiding out in their homes and preparing for the apocalypse. For Maya it was a horror movie, or maybe a silent movie—she wasn't sure which. Jason was walking around the house muttering, "I can't believe it. I just can't believe it."

To be fair, it was pretty unbelievable, and every day it was something else—and always bad news. First the basketball season got cancelled ... during his senior year. That meant no rallies, no celebrations, no championships, no parties, no senior night. Then college exams were cancelled, which sounded great until Jason remembered he had lost focus in school and was hoping to do well on the tests to get into a better college. Then homecoming was cancelled—and he had finally gotten the nerve to ask Anna out. He had even been looking forward to the Ignite after-prom event, also cancelled. Ignite was a Christian club or something that did stuff at his school. He had heard that the Ignite events were a lot of fun, and Anna was really involved.

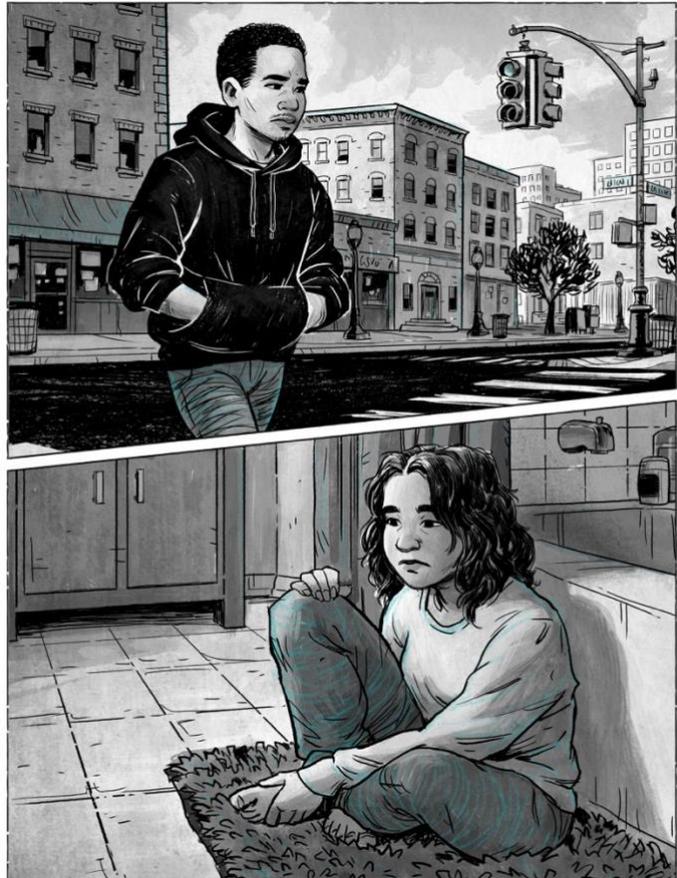
Jason had never thought it was possible to have so many things taken away at once. Now he was worried about his mom getting sick at the clinic and about his grandma

getting sick since all the old people were dying. All he felt was angry—and then guilty about being angry. He was trying to work out at home to stay in shape but it was hard to stay motivated. All he wanted to do (and did most of the time) was play video games and sleep. He really missed his friends. He snuck out a couple of times but honestly the news was pretty scary and most of his friends stayed home too.

"Man," he thought, "what I really need is something to help me calm down." He knew lots of guys who could hook him up with weed or something. Or he could raid his dad's beer.

He called his buddy Griff and they met in an alley around the corner. Griff was pretty angry too, and they complained together some, but mostly they just stood there and smoked. Normally they would go shoot hoops but the parks were closed, so after a while Jason just went home.

His dad yelled at him when he walked in the door. "Are you trying to kill your grandmother?"



“No!” Jason shouted back. “That doesn’t even make any sense.”

“Well, stop going outside because you might be spreading germs and not even know it.” His dad went back to looking at the laptop.

It was getting hard to be home all the time. His dad was always moping on the couch and hogging the computer to apply for unemployment. His mom was gone most of the time, or sleeping. Jason spent a lot of time texting his friends but it wasn’t the same. He was so angry that he threw his game console remote at the wall and broke it. *“Something else to feel bad about,”* he thought. He couldn’t remember any time in his life when he had felt this angry and helpless. The closest was when his grandfather died a few years ago. Now he was stuck in the house with his life on hold. He wandered over to the kitchen where Maya was staring blankly at her homework. “Hey Maya,” Jason said. “What are you doing?” “What does it look like?” she shouted, throwing her book down. “Nothing.” She stormed off to the bathroom.

Maya felt bad for doing so poorly at her new school. She knew how important school was to her mother, but she was lonely. Plus, she preferred painting and writing poetry to math and science, and now she was so far behind it was hardly worth trying. When her mom asked her how school was going she just kept saying fine. It wasn’t fine. She knew her teacher was trying to talk to her parents but she kept deleting the emails. It was easy, since they all shared the same computer, but it made her feel even worse. When she felt bad sometimes Maya would sneak into the bathroom and cry for what felt like hours. She felt so trapped: stuck at home, behind in school, no friends. She sat on the floor staring at the bathroom wall as tears ran down her face.

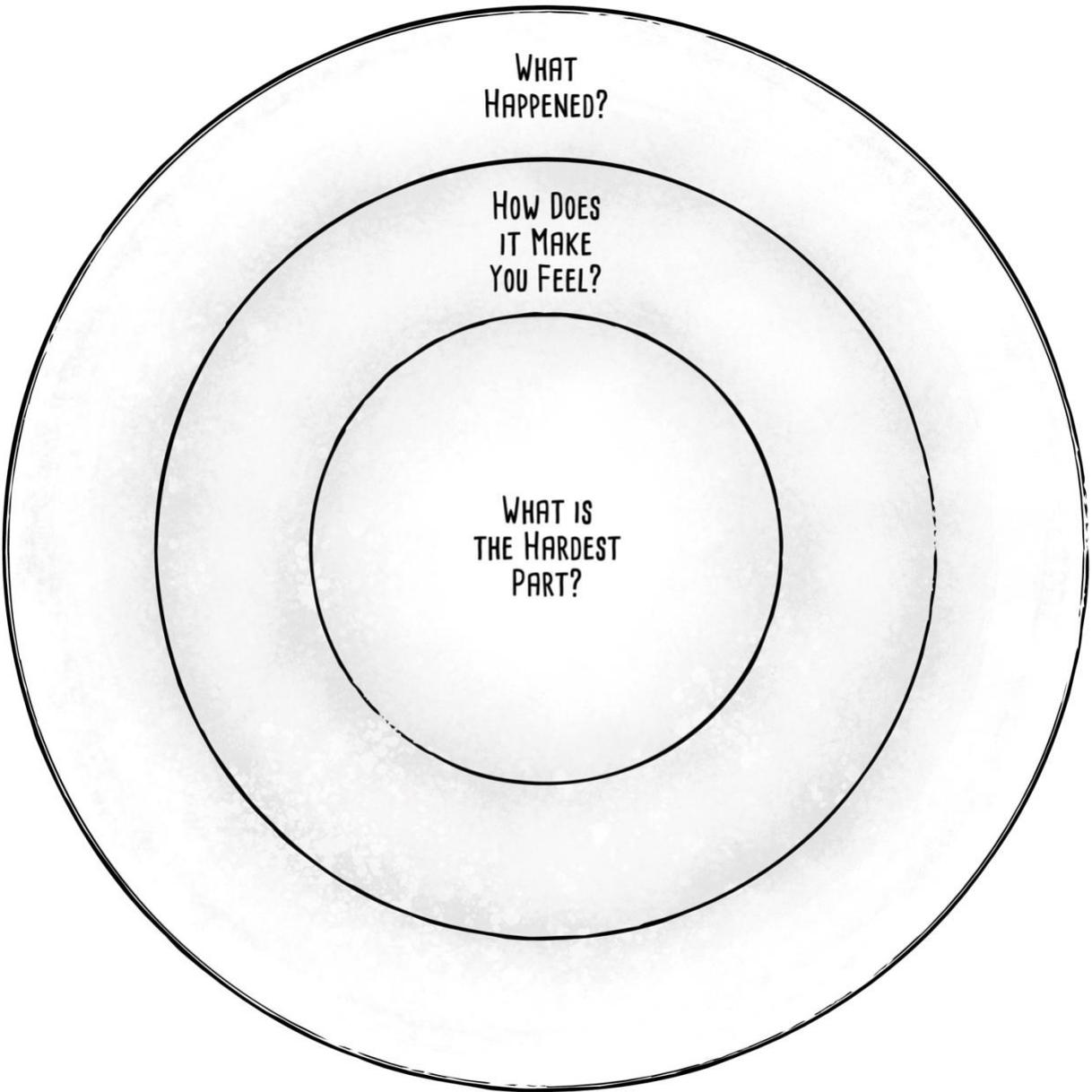
#### THINK ABOUT IT

1. Why did life seem like a movie to Maya and Jason?
2. What was each member of the family feeling during this coronavirus situation, and how were they each responding to those feelings?
3. What are some ways, both positive and negative, that you have been responding to your situation?

## Activity—Telling Your Story

One of the best ways you can deal with your difficult feelings is to talk about them. Telling the story about difficult times in your life can help you feel better. It’s always best to talk to someone you can trust, like a parent, friend, counselor, coach, or church leader—ideally, someone you already have a relationship with. Maybe you’re already having regular in-person or online meetings with someone. If not, think about who you can call on to begin a conversation. You can get to your story by saying something like, “Hey, I want to talk about something that has been bothering me.” Then talk about the circumstances in your life that have made you struggle with difficult feelings. That’s your story.

Here’s a good way to structure your story. Look at the bullseye target below. Fill in the answers from your own experience to the question on each level:



You can also help your friends or family members by being a good listener. Ask them these three questions. You may be surprised by their answers!

### Activity—Body Scan

Have you ever had a headache before a test or felt your stomach tossing around because of a conflict with someone? That’s because our physical bodies hold our stress and emotions.

Our bodies communicate how we are feeling, often even before we are aware of it. Consider all the different and difficult things going on in your life right now. Thinking about all of that at once can be really hard!

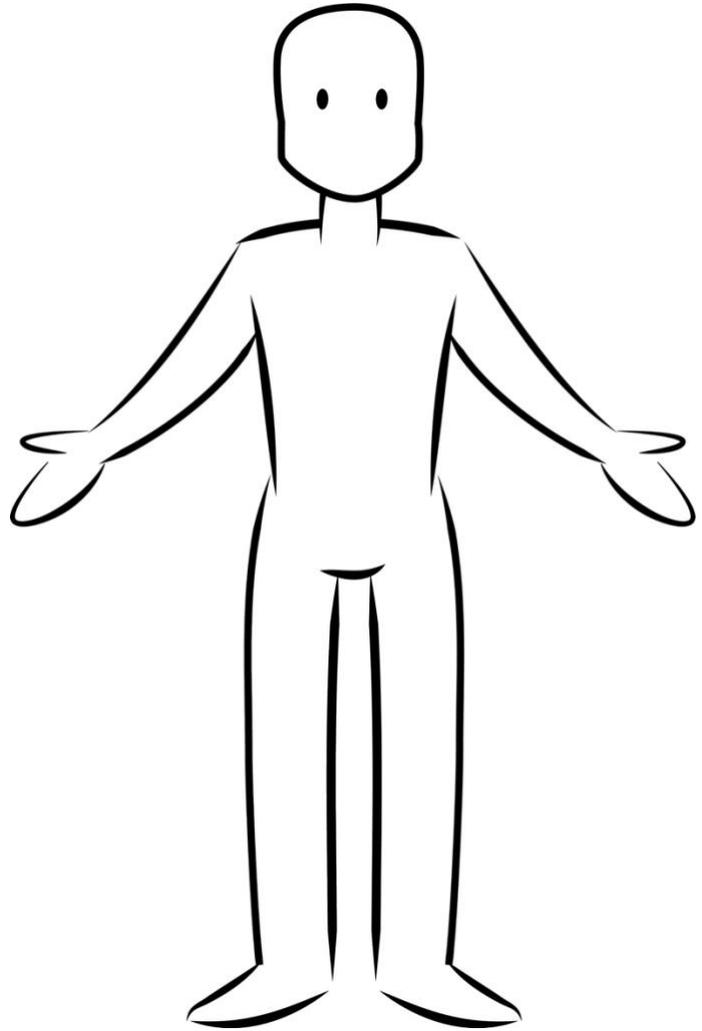
Take a minute to scan your body. Do this by focusing on each different part of your body and noticing what you feel physically. It could be pain, tightness, discomfort, tingling, or any other kind of sensation. Start at your head and slowly go down your neck, shoulders, arms, chest, stomach, back, waist, legs, and feet. Pause at each area and focus on what you feel.

On the body outline shown here, mark the location where you noticed a feeling in your own body. After you think about each area, do your best to relax the muscles there and let go of the stress you're feeling. Then move on.

Complete this exercise by taking a few minutes to write down what you felt in the space provided.

You can do a body scan anytime, day or night, to help relax your body—it also helps relax your mind—and lower your stress levels.

Paying attention to how your body is feeling helps you know when you are stressed and need to do something to take care of yourself.



## Activity—Taking Care of Yourself

### *Three ways to take care of your body*

1. **Move:** It is super important to move your body. Moving around increases oxygen to your cells for extra energy and helps you feel better by releasing the hormones called endorphins.
  - If you are able to be outdoors, make time to do that every day. Sunlight positively affects mood, and physical activity can improve concentration and a sense of well-being.
  - If you are indoors, there are endless free resources online or apps for exercising in your home. Bodyweight exercises are movements you can do using your body's weight for resistance (like pushups, squats, and lunges). Doing dances that follow along with your favorite videos also count!

**TRY IT!** Take five minutes now to stop and go outside for a walk, dance, stretch, or something active!

2. **Eat healthy:** It is easy to buy or eat snack food or junk food. But it isn't the best thing for you, especially if you are spending most of your day sitting down. Try to drink only water for a day. Eat foods that nourish and are more filling whenever you can. Cooking for yourself and your family can also be a good way to help out, eat better, and feel better.
3. **Limit screen time:** It seems like everyone is saying it but take some time away from screens (phone, computer, TV) especially before bedtime. Try setting a timer for thirty minutes or an hour to remind yourself to take a ten-minute break to do other things from this activity that take care of your body, mind, or spirit.

#### *Three ways to take care of your mind*

1. **Avoid panic:** Keeping your thoughts under control has a positive effect on other dimensions of life. When you feel anxious, take the time to write out what your anxious thoughts are. It is a way to take our thoughts "captive," as 2 Corinthians 10:5 notes. Remind yourself: Right now, I'm safe. Stay in the present.
2. **Practice mindfulness:** Think about what you are thinking about. That may sound crazy, but if you spend all day thinking about stressful things, guess what? You're going to feel stressed. Instead, choose good things to focus your attention on. Use healthy distractions like reading, drawing, or talking to a friend. Play a game or exercise to give your brain a break.
3. **Stay connected:** Talk, chat, video conference, post on social media, or do anything else you can think of to connect with your friends and family. Virtual connections count when you're not able to connect in person.

TRY IT! Reach out to one different person each day this week.

#### *Three ways to take care of your spirit*

1. **Interact with beauty:** This could be doing something creative yourself (writing, drawing, cooking, singing, rapping, journaling) or stopping to appreciate something beautiful. Go outside and watch the clouds roll past, look up some art, or listen to music that really moves you. God's gifts to us are abundant and accessible even in a time of distress.

TRY IT! Take a picture of something beautiful every day for a week and send it to a friend.

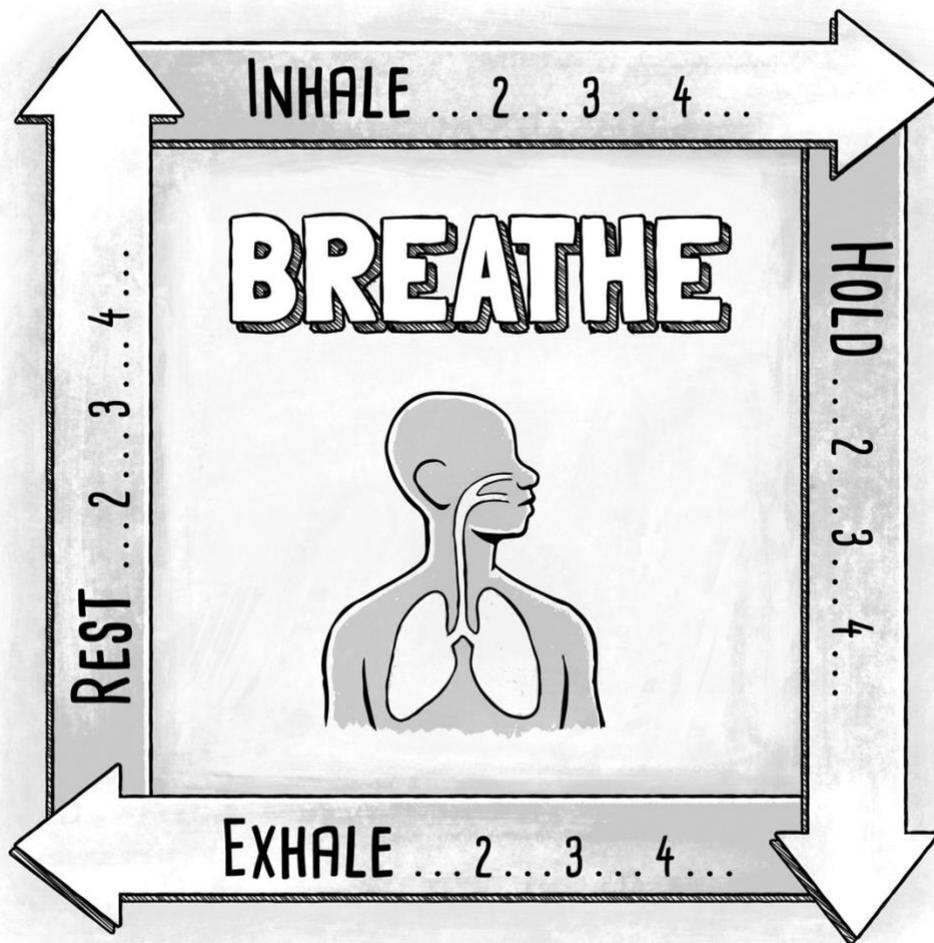
2. **Journal:** At the end of the day, jot down what you're grateful for and why. Record humor or points of joy that you had with family or friends. Write down what you're hoping and praying for. Doodle and draw just for fun. If you found beauty in people, art, or nature today, write about how it made you feel.
3. **Pray:** You can talk with God anytime and anywhere. 1 John 5:14 (GNT) says, "We have courage in God's presence, because we are sure that he hears us." Prayer doesn't have to be formal or complicated. You can talk to God like you would talk to any other person.

## Activity—Deep Breathing

When our feelings are getting the best of us, one of the most important things we can do is to ground ourselves with our breathing. This can help us relieve stress and improve our focus. Once our bodies and our brains are calm, we can choose how we want to move forward in a healthy way.

Slowing and regulating our breathing helps to slow our heart rate and lower blood pressure. Doing this will quiet feelings of panic or high stress and slow the amount of stress hormones that are making you feel on edge and keeping you amped up.

One way to do this is through simple box breathing. Place your finger at the top left corner of the box. Slowly move your finger to the right as you inhale and count to four. Then hold your breath for four seconds as you move your finger to the bottom right square. As you move your finger to the left, exhale for four seconds. Then rest as you move your finger up to complete the square. Do this multiple times to allow your brain and body to get in sync with your breath.



Once you have slowed your breathing, be still for a few minutes. Close your eyes and continue breathing slowly as you think about these words of Jesus: “My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you. Don’t let your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27 NKJV).

## Bible Spotlight: David's Feelings

Have you heard about David from the Bible? He was a musician, warrior, shepherd, king, and poet. He was far from perfect, but he had all of the qualities you would look for in a great leader. The Bible calls him "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14).

When David was a young teen he went to the battlefield where his brothers were fighting a war. There was an enormous giant of a man on the other side teasing and taunting the Israelites (David's people) and daring anyone to fight. So David volunteered, then fought and killed the giant and helped conquer the rest of the enemy. He was not the kind of guy you would expect to struggle with anything, especially difficult emotions.

But David *did* struggle with strong feelings. He spent years on the run, hiding in the mountains and living in caves because someone was trying to kill him. Many times he was just trying to survive, with no idea what the future held, feeling stuck and helpless.

In Psalm 69, David wrote down how he was feeling. He said, "Save me, O God! The water is up to my neck! I am sinking in deep mud, and there is no solid ground; I am out in deep water, and the waves are about to drown me. I am worn out from calling for help, and my throat is aching. I have strained my eyes, looking for your help" (GNT).

Wow, that sounds tough. David was so desperate he could do nothing but cry out to God. Have you ever felt hopeless like him? When David was overwhelmed or afraid, he would often write or sing what he was feeling. The book of Psalms has over forty such poems or laments (you will learn more about laments in session 4).

David recognized the power of being able to express his feelings. Here are some of the ways David responded to times of strong difficult feelings. Look up each Bible reference and draw a line to match it to the correct response of David. You can use a printed Bible or search the references online.

Took care of his body and worshiped God while he was still grieving	1 Samuel 20:41–42
Wrote poems or songs to express his feelings	2 Samuel 12:20
Reaffirmed his friendship and wept with his best friend	1 Samuel 30:4, 6
Grieved with his men about their losses and found his strength in God	Psalm 13

### THINK ABOUT IT

1. Which of David's responses have you also done?

2. Think about how you're feeling now. Are you most likely to respond to your feelings by talking and praying with your best friend or writing poetry or music to express yourself? Why?
3. How can you find your strength in God?

When Jesus was on earth, he knew his friends and family were worried about a lot of things, and they were tired of carrying such heaviness in their hearts. One day he said to them, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest ... Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11:28–29 NLT)

**You can find rest for your soul by letting go of what is worrying you, and finding your strength in God like David did.**

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*TAKE A BREAK!*

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## Session 3. How Can I Get Unstuck?

### Connecting

Jason was lying on his bed staring at the ceiling fan going around and around. He couldn't believe it. There were rumors it was possible, but he never thought it could happen to him: he was officially bored with playing video games and just couldn't look at a screen anymore.

He was also done being angry. All he felt now was sad. Tears came into his eyes as he thought about not getting to celebrate his graduation. After being in school since *kindergarten* to end with—nothing? Sure, not all of his friends had even made it to graduation, but he had worked hard enough, especially his first three years of high school, and now ... just thinking about it brought new tears, which made him feel embarrassed. *“At least no one is here to see this,”* he thought. He had connected with his friends online a ton, but it didn't stop him feeling sad, and now fearful about the future. What was next? Everyone was saying something different. Some people thought the governments were overreacting, others couldn't believe they weren't doing more. Some stuff was opening up again but he was torn about what he was supposed to do.

There was a knock at the door. He quickly wiped his eyes and said, “Yeah?”

“Can I come in?” asked Maya.

“Yeah, I guess,” Jason answered. She sat on the chair by his bed.

Maya and Jason hadn't been close. They were almost three years apart and had always been into different things. Jason knew she wasn't having a good year, but it had been hard to relate because Jason loved the school so much. But in the last few weeks of isolation they had been talking a lot more. It was actually really nice.

“I'm really scared,” said Maya.

“Wow,” said Jason. “That got real, fast.”



“I’m serious,” said Maya. “Everything is so crazy right now. My best friend Hannah, who I haven’t even seen since January, just found out her aunt passed away from the coronavirus. She was only fifty-five.”

Jason sat up quickly. “Oh man, I am so sorry, Maya. Are you okay? How is Hannah?” Maya started telling Jason about Hannah and how much she missed her since they stopped going to the same school. When Hannah’s aunt died, no one could go to the funeral except for immediate family.

As Jason listened to Maya, he was surprised to feel a bit better. Listening to his sister was something he could do, and it seemed to help her. Maya ended with a question: “What will we do if mom or grandma get sick?”

“I don’t know,” Jason said. “But we’ll deal with it somehow, and we’ll deal with it together.” Jason had a thought. “You know what I’m stuck on, Maya? I’m really sad I missed so many things from my senior year! Sometimes it makes me so mad, but there isn’t even anyone to be mad at!”

Maya nodded. “Jason, I’m sorry you missed so many things, even a full-on graduation.” She paused and then a smile came over her face. “Do you think we should have a graduation celebration here with Mom and Dad?”

Jason laughed. “Yeah,” he said, “Dad can wear a suit and Mom can give a speech.” Then Maya started to laugh too. She fell out of the chair as they laughed together. Finally Jason gasped out, “You know, I actually *would* like that.”

It turned out the school had an online graduation after all, but since they could not celebrate with their school friends, Maya made a bunch of decorations that said “Congratulations, Jason!” and “Class of 2020!”, and put them all over the house.

The Ignite youth group had been meeting online every week and had held their own online graduation party. Maya had joined Jason on the calls for the past couple weeks, and both of them began to realize how good it felt to talk with each other and find a way to connect with new friends.

#### THINK ABOUT IT

1. From what you know about Grief Street, what loss is Jason grieving, and which “bus stop” do you think he is in? How can you tell?
2. Why do you think Jason felt better when he was listening to Maya’s feelings?
3. Who do you have in your life that you can talk to? Who can you listen to?

## Activity—Circle of Control

In uncertain times, things can feel chaotic, like everything is out of control. The anxiety of not knowing how things will turn out and how long the chaos will last can feel overwhelming.

When you are feeling overwhelmed, it can be helpful to pause and look at what you can and cannot control right now, in this specific moment. This can help you let go of those things that are not in your control and help you feel empowered to focus on the things you can control. This exercise can ground you in the present moment and give you something practical to do.

For example, you might not be able to control the actions of others and how they are responding to this crisis, but you can control how *you* are responding. You cannot control how long things will feel in a crisis mode, but you can control your attitude and find positive things to do today.

Look at the circle below. Inside the circle, write down the things that you can control. On the outside of the circle, write down the things you cannot control.



Notice the things you wrote outside the circle, things that you can't control. It's likely that these are things that cause you to worry or be stressed out in other ways. What if you were able to give those things to God? Take a moment to ask God to calm your heart and help you let go of the things you can't control.

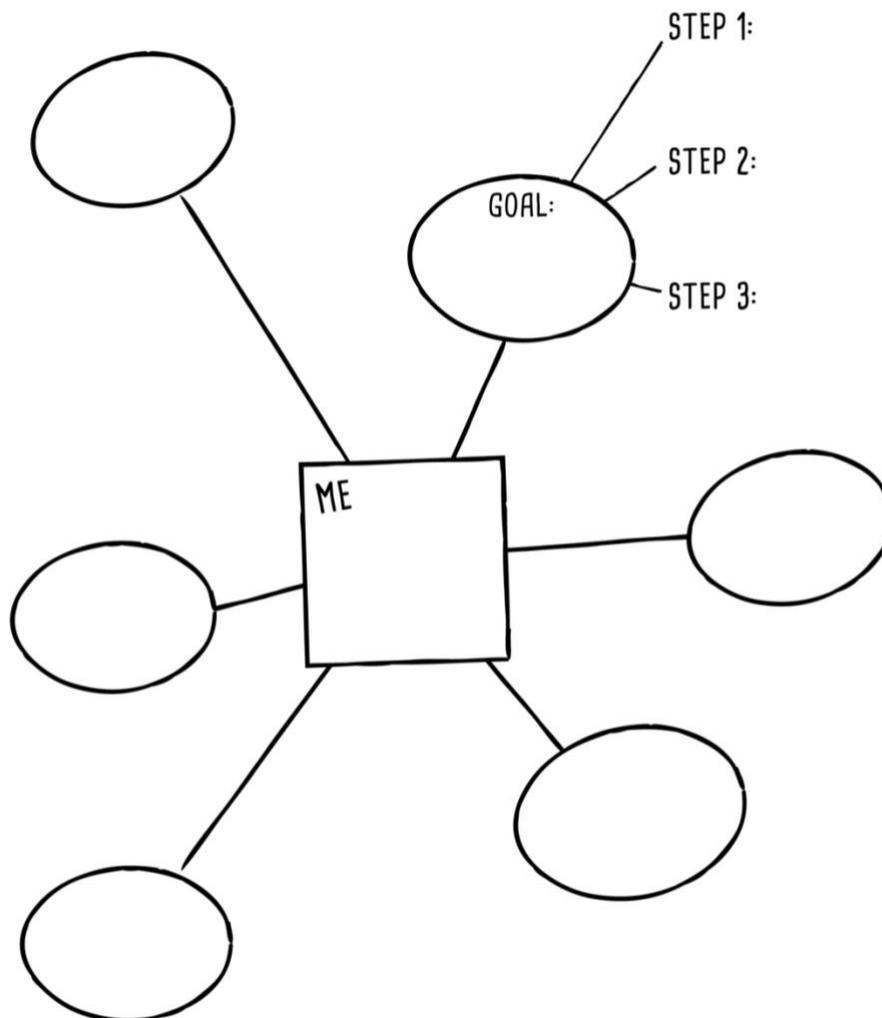
## Activity—Map Your Goals

Before your life was interrupted by this crisis, what were some of your goals for the future? What were you working toward, dreaming of, planning for, or counting on happening? You may feel all these things are impossible now, or doubt that you'll ever reach your goals.

But if you take steps toward those goals, no matter how small, you will begin to feel unstuck. One way to organize your thinking about your goals for the future is to make a kind of map. Follow these steps:

1. Start in the middle box and write your name or draw a picture of yourself.
2. Choose your goal categories and write them into the ovals. They might include things like Create, Health, Fun, Travel, People, Hobbies, Job, Mind, Save \$.
3. Draw lines coming out of each oval and write things you can do to reach your goal. Include the easiest, smallest things you can do, and a few of the more difficult steps you'll need to take.

You might want to create this map on a separate piece of paper and hang it on your wall to encourage and remind yourself to keep moving toward your goals. It will make you feel less stuck to feel movement and accomplishment, no matter how small.





It may be helpful for you to write another letter, this time from your present self to your future self, asking questions, giving advice, offering comfort or challenge. Keep the letters in a safe place so you can refer to them a year from now to see how close you were to the future you imagine for yourself now.

## Activity—Things to Do When You’re Bored

When the immediate needs of a crisis are met and you are struggling to bring your life back to some kind of normal, you may have times when you feel totally bored. Feeling bored can feel terrible. But if you think about it, boredom can also be an incredible opportunity. It can trigger your imagination to create or try something new! It can give you the motivation to do some things you’ve always wanted to do, but never had the time or energy. See how many of these suggestions you can check off over the next several weeks!

- Write a note to a friend or family member—even better, send it in regular mail
- Draw or paint a picture—use an online video or course as a tutorial
- Clean up your room—no, really: turn on some music and jump in
- Ask someone to play a game—online or in your living room, what’ll it be?
- Go for a walk—mask up if you need to
- Be curious about something you notice outside and learn as much as you can about that thing—caterpillars are cool, stars are beautiful
- Do something physically tiring—move furniture, run the stairs, do jumping jacks, whatever gets you moving
- Read a book—get lost in someone else’s story
- Learn a new skill—hair braiding, guitar playing, building a garden, what else?
- Bake some cookies—what’s your favorite?
- Make dinner for your family—tons of recipes online
- Plan the road trip of a lifetime—you can go anywhere in your imagination
- Take responsibility for improving one room in the house in some way—big or small
- Write a story—get in your head and find a story there
- Make a music video—post it online and you might make someone else’s day too!
- Find a way to volunteer—the world needs your gifts
- Do a puzzle—perfect with music and hot chocolate
- Organize the pictures in your phone—you know you need to do this
- Plan a family hike—if you can, where you can, when you can
- Make a list of one hundred things you are thankful for—yes, shoelaces and tacos count

## Bible Spotlight: Brave Esther

King Xerxes of Persia needed a queen. He ordered a search throughout his kingdom for the most beautiful girl, and soon the king’s scouts found Esther. Esther was beautiful, gracious, and kind—just what the king was looking for. She had no choice about becoming queen. She was taken to Xerxes.

But there was a problem. Esther was a Jew. The Jews were a minority population and disliked by the Persians. Esther's cousin and guardian Mordecai, who was the leader of the Jews, encouraged Esther to hide her faith from the king for her own safety, which she did.

An arrogant man named Haman had become powerful in the kingdom and decided that it would be appropriate for everyone to bow down to him. But Mordecai refused to bow. Enraged, Haman asked the King to authorize a royal decree to annihilate all the Jews. So the king sent out a decree to the whole kingdom proclaiming that all Jews were to be killed. When Mordecai discovered Haman's evil plan, he sent Esther a message. He told her what Haman was plotting and asked her to go to the king on behalf of the Jews.

Esther was terrified for her people, and for herself. By law, anyone who went to see the king without an invitation would be put to death. As she was thinking and praying about what to do, Mordecai said to her, "Who knows? Maybe you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this!" Esther finally gathered her courage and said, "I will go to the king and if I perish, I perish."

When Esther appeared before King Xerxes, he was taken by her beauty and spared her life. He said he would grant anything she wished, up to half his kingdom. All she asked was that the King and Haman join her for dinner for the next two nights.

Haman was pleased that he'd been asked to dine with the king and queen two nights in a row. The invitation fed his pride. But then he saw Mordecai at the king's gate and still Mordecai refused to bow to him. That night he decided to build a gallows on which to hang Mordecai; he planned to speak to the king about it the very next morning.

That same night the king could not sleep, so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. The book was turned to the day Mordecai had exposed a plot to assassinate the king. The king remembered the event and asked what reward Mordecai had received for saving his life. The attendants told him that nothing had been done for Mordecai.

The next morning, just as Haman was arriving to ask that Mordecai be hanged, the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" Haman, still filled with pride, mistakenly thought the king was referring to him. So he suggested that the king honor him with a showy public procession. Imagine Haman's shock when the king commanded that those things be done for Mordecai!

In a move of great courage, Esther finally told the king that she was a Jew and unveiled Haman's evil plots. She begged the king to spare her people. The king was furious with Haman and ordered that he be hanged on his own gallows. Haman's pride and cruelty had led to his own destruction and Esther had saved her people.

(Read the book of Esther in the Bible for the whole story.)

#### THINK ABOUT IT

1. Esther's choices about her life were taken from her when she was chosen to become queen of Persia. What freedoms did she lose?

2. Mordecai suggested that God placed Esther in her position “for such a time as this.” What do you think God’s purpose may be for you in your current circumstances?
3. What was the bigger picture Esther focused on when she decided to risk her own life to go to the king?
4. What are some of the bigger things you can focus on right now that are beyond your current circumstances?
5. In 2 Corinthians 4:18 (NLT) we are reminded, “So we don’t look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.” What does this mean to you?

God never promised that we will live a trouble-free life. But listen to what Jesus says in John 16:33 (NLT): “I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”

**God can help you overcome your worry and fear. He can give you peace.**

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*TAKE A BREAK!*

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# Session 4. How Can I Relate to God in Uncertain Times?

## God Hears Me

Maya and Jason began to look forward to the weekly Ignite meetings. Not only was it fun to see their new friends, but they were learning ways to help them cope with their situation. They would usually join from their phones, each in a separate room, which was kind of weird since they were just a few feet apart. A couple named Keith and Alyssa led the group. They would hang out on the conference platform, playing games and asking how everyone was doing. Usually they wound up sharing something from the Bible. This week they had a question and answer activity. People got to send in questions before the meeting that Keith and Alyssa would answer when they were all together. Maya had asked, “Where is God while all of this coronavirus chaos is happening?”

Keith finally got to her question. “That’s a great question, Maya. Here’s the deal. When God created the world he made it perfect without any suffering which meant no war, no diseases, and definitely no coronavirus.”

“So, what happened?” someone asked. “Did God go on vacation?”

“No,” said Keith with a smile. “He gave us humans a choice between him and his way, or to choose our own way.”

Alyssa chimed in. “In the Bible, in Genesis, chapter 3, when Adam and Eve chose their own way, they disobeyed God. Because of that, suffering entered the world. And all of earth suffers,” she continued, “and not just from this coronavirus. The Bible even says in Romans 8:22, ‘For we know that up to the present time all of creation groans with pain ...’” [GNT]

“But,” Keith said, “even in the middle of all this mess, and even though we all disobey God, he has promised never to leave us or forsake us.” [Hebrews 13:5]

“Hmm,” thought Jason, and then he said out loud, “But what does that mean for us now?”

“Well,” Keith said, “for me it means that even though I feel so alone sometimes and don’t know what the future holds, I remember that God is still with me, and that makes me feel better.”



“For me,” said Alyssa, “because I have a relationship with Jesus, I have a sense of peace. He is like a fortress for me because I’m not so afraid of what’s happening and I know he’s with me and loves me, no matter what. In fact, that reminds me of something we can do. God encourages us to talk to him about the difficult things we experience. One way to do that is with a lament.”

Keith told the group that a lament is a complaint to God. “It might sound odd,” he said, “but this kind of complaint is a healthy way to talk to God about the difficult things we experience. God already knows what we are going through, and it helps us to be completely honest with him and say exactly how we are feeling instead of pretending everything is fine.

“I’ll text you all more information about how to create a lament. How about each of you give it a try?” Keith suggested. “We can talk more about this next week and, no pressure, maybe some of you will want to share your laments with the rest of us.”

After the call, Jason and Maya talked about what Keith and Alyssa had said. They agreed to each try writing a lament to share with each other. “Promise not to laugh at me?” asked Maya.

“I won’t if you won’t,” said Jason. “Anyway, we’ve got the time. Why not give it a try?” They went to their rooms to check out Keith’s texts and work on their laments.

The next day, they shared what they had written with each other. Jason read his first: *“I don’t know what’s going on, God, but I don’t like it. I used to think things were bad sometimes, but now it seems like life has gone completely crazy. I don’t know when it will end or if things will ever feel normal again. How could you let this happen? Please help me figure out how to live through this time and how to know you better and trust you more.”*

Maya had written her complaint to God in a poem. She read it out loud.

*How long, God, will we suffer in silence  
Lost in a world of sickness and violence  
People are dying and we are afraid  
Teens in this world are down and dismayed  
A virus is taking the world by storm  
Everything we know is far from the norm  
So many things we have lost on the way  
Being at home and forced to stay  
  
Sometimes our comfort is  
what the world has given  
Those things that are damaging,  
causing us friction*

*I know they’re not good and I feel ashamed  
But I’m lonely and bored,  
and what’s right feels unnamed  
  
But when I feel like despairing  
And the world around me is failing  
I’ll hope in what you’ve promised me  
I’ll remember that you’re with me  
Never alone, you said to me  
A fortress you have offered me  
Unending love I get from you  
My trust I’ll try to give to you*

Maya and Jason sat in silence for a few minutes thinking about their laments. It had helped to remind themselves that God loved them and was with them. They still didn’t know how long this was going to last, but somehow things seemed a bit different. More hopeful. By trying out the things they had learned and by helping each other, they were finally starting to feel unstuck.

## THINK ABOUT IT

1. What do you think Alyssa meant when she said that having a relationship with Jesus makes her feel less afraid?
2. Why is it helpful to tell God exactly what we're feeling?
3. Why do things feel different to Maya and Jason now than they did in the beginning of this story?
4. Are you feeling different now about your situation than you did when you started these lessons? Why or why not?

## Activity—Creating a Lament

One positive way to deal with the hard things that happen in our lives is to create a lament, a way of expressing our pain to God. Lament can be done in words, music, dance, drawing, or any other form of creative expression.

A lament helps us expose all the stuff that we have tried to hide and share it with God instead. This is a good way to start telling your story, naming your feelings, and releasing painful memories. As it becomes more comfortable for you to share your pain privately with God, creating a lament can lead to sharing your story with another person when you are ready.

There are many examples of laments in the Bible. Trauma after trauma happened to the nation of Israel as a community (wars, captivity, displacement, famines) as well as to individuals (abuse, rape, abandonment, murder). Many of them found comfort in bringing their pain to God. They had an honest way of speaking to God where they poured out their complaints to him, sometimes even as they declared their trust in him.

A lament can have some or all of these different parts, but they all must have a complaint.

- Address to God (“O God”)
- Review of God’s faithfulness in the past
- **Complaint**
- Request for help
- Promise to praise God (or statement of trust in God)

Take some time to create a lament. Read Psalm 13 if you need help, or think of what questions you would like to ask God about the difficult things in your life. You can put your lament in writing, song, rap, poem, prayer, or any creative way you wish to express your inner feelings to God. It does not have to include all five parts of a lament listed above. When you have finished, consider sharing your lament with someone else who is going through circumstances similar to your own.

## Activity—My Manifesto

Sometimes living through hard times forces us to evaluate what we believe about God and decide what is really important in our lives. Have you ever had those thoughts?

A declaration of your beliefs and values is called a manifesto. When you take time to think about what's really important to you and what you believe in, it can help you align your life goals with those things, and you will feel more confident and empowered to move forward.

Finish the sentences below to get you started, then add your own if you'd like. Don't forget to sign it!

# MY MANIFESTO

IT IS IMPORTANT TO ME that people \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*I AM  
PASSIONATE  
ABOUT*

*MY HEART BREAKS* when \_\_\_\_\_

I'm surprised by \_\_\_\_\_

I want others to see me as \_\_\_\_\_

*FEARS & FAILURES* that have shaped me

[]

**I BELIEVE GOD CAN** \_\_\_\_\_

What gives my life  
*MEANING & PURPOSE*

Things that  
*GIVE ME PEACE*

**I VALUE** \_\_\_\_\_

**I BELIEVE** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE

This is personal to you. But a manifesto is often a public declaration, so consider sharing what you have written with someone else. It may encourage others to think about these things, as well. You may want to take a picture of it and make it your phone background to remind yourself of your manifesto.

## Bible Spotlight: Peace, Be Still

You have been living in some difficult circumstances. Let's find out what Jesus did in a crazy situation when everyone around him was worried and afraid.

Before this incident happened, Jesus had been sitting in a boat all day long, teaching a huge crowd of people on the shore, and he was exhausted. We pick up the story from there, found in the Gospel of Mark in the Bible (Mark 4:36–41).

And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling with water. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. All of the people in the boats were afraid that their boats would be broken into pieces and they would all drown. They woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

These crazy days are like a terrible storm in our lives. Many people feel stuck because everything about the future is unknown. One of the ways to feel less stuck is to ask Jesus to calm our fears and worries that are like the wind and the waves.

### THINK ABOUT IT

1. Why did his friends think Jesus didn't care about them?
2. When he said, "Peace! Be still!" why did the wind and the sea obey him? (Check out Colossians 1:16–17 in the Bible.)
3. Why were his friends afraid when the wind stopped blowing and the waves became calm? (Do you think it was because Jesus was even more powerful than the storm?)
4. What is the biggest storm in your life right now?

If Jesus were sitting next to you right now, he might be saying, "Peace, be still," or maybe these things:

- "Be still and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10
- "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Hebrews 13:5b
- "Don't be afraid ... Take courage! I am here!" Mark 6:50b

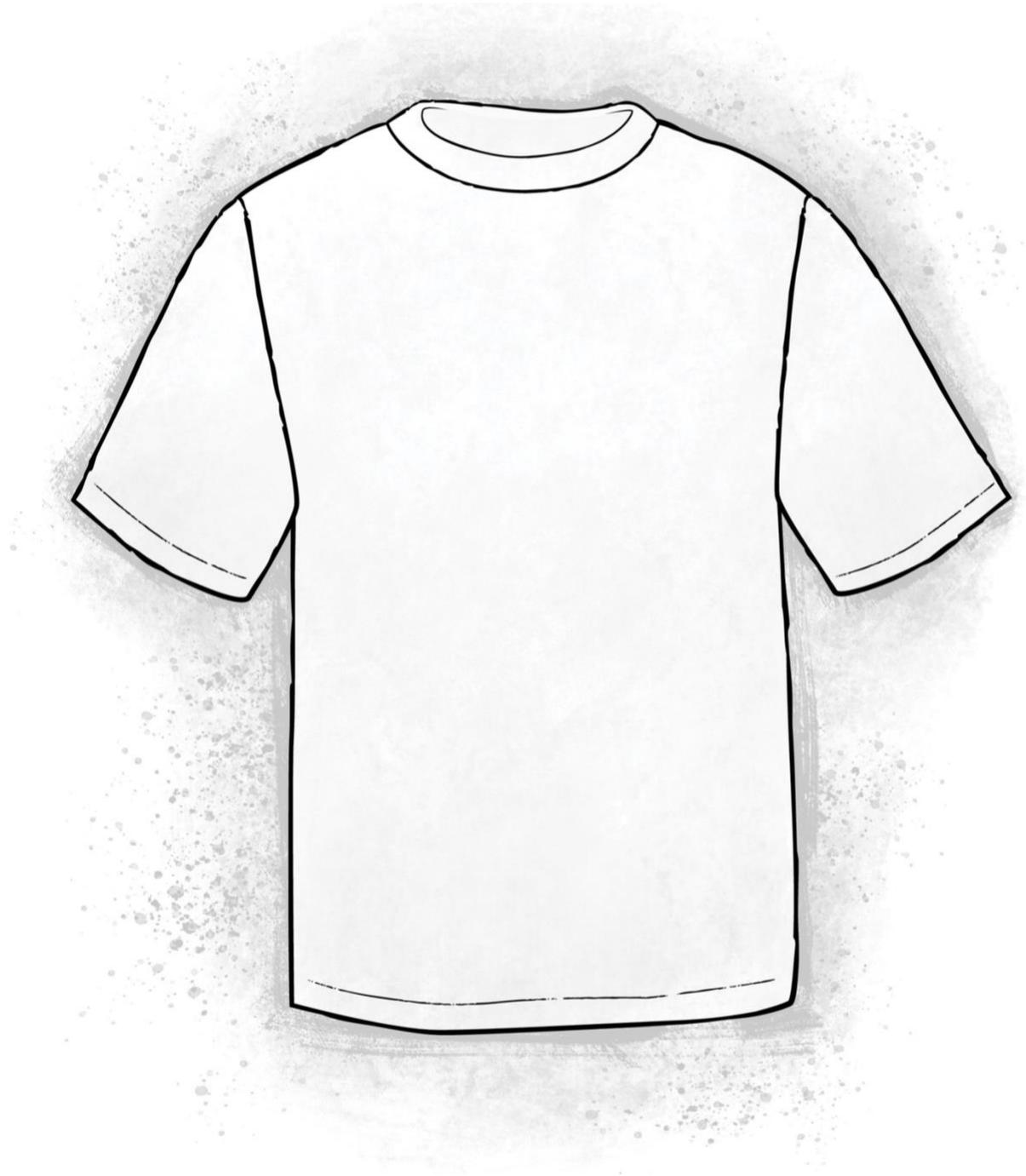
**Jesus can give you a sense of peace that you will not find anywhere else. All you need to do is ask him.**

If you would like to find out more about knowing God, your pastor, priest, or other church leader would be happy to talk with you.

## Activity—I Survived!

Stop to think about how you have survived these past months, the emotional storms you’ve weathered, the changes you have had to deal with, and the opportunities you have discovered for learning and creating new things.

If you were asked to design a t-shirt that let people know you survived these days, what would it look like?



# Getting Help

This booklet has many things that you can do yourself to get unstuck. Hopefully, some of the stories or activities will be able to help you. However, they may not be enough. One thing we saw in the story is how helpful it was for Jason and Maya to find someone to talk to. They realized that they could talk to each other and that there were good, safe adults in their life.

You may need help getting unstuck, and that's okay. Think about a friend or a safe adult you can talk to. It might be a coach, teacher, relative, school counselor, priest, pastor, or even a kind neighbor to talk about what has been the hardest thing for you. Telling your story releases the power it can have over you.

You also might not be safe in the place where you are living. Sometimes stress and pressure can make people do mean and terrible things. If this is happening to you or someone you care about, reach out to one of the safe adults you identified.

Sometimes difficult feelings can be so overwhelming that people might hurt themselves. If you ever feel like hurting yourself in any way, reach out to one of these safe adults, or go to a hospital or a police station for help.

**In the Bible, Deuteronomy 31:6 says, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”**

Don't forget—you're not alone. God is with you. He sees you and he hears you.

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# Tips for Adult Leaders

UNSTUCK helps teens cope during times of uncertainty, especially after a disaster. The materials are written for teens to go through on their own and at their own pace. Teens will also benefit by working through the resource with an adult leader, either one-on-one or in small groups over four weeks. Leaders can gather groups either online or in person, as appropriate.

## Using UNSTUCK with small groups

1. Contact parents/guardians of teens to tell them about the UNSTUCK material and ask permission to conduct a teen group using this material. Specify the location or online platform and the timing.
2. Each teen should have their own booklet or digital download. Emphasize that their responses in the books are personal and private, and will only be shared if they choose to.
3. If this will be an online group, make sure all teens have the group meeting application installed on their computers and phones.
4. Make sure all teens have access to a Bible, either printed or online.
5. Consider creating a private group or message board (for example, on WhatsApp or Google Hangouts). Have a plan to monitor any forum you create.
6. Make plans with the teens to meet on a regular basis to discuss each chapter. Teens could either go through the materials as a group with the leader facilitating, or get together after they have completed each chapter on their own.
7. Teens might want to share their responses to several activities in the booklet. Suggest that they take a picture of their finished drawings, videos, or written content and post it during meetings or on your message board or WhatsApp group.
8. If your group is large, break into smaller groups for discussion. If online, use the breakout room feature on your group meeting app. Have an experienced adult facilitator participate in each online breakout room. You may want to debrief in the large group after each small group.
9. Go through your own book and do the activities yourself before you meet with the teens, and be ready to share what you've done.
10. Encourage teens during these weeks of going through the UNSTUCK material with reminder texts ("Are you feeling stuck in UNSTUCK?) and teasers ("Have you done the volcano thing yet?").

This booklet is part of the **Beyond Disaster** suite of disaster response materials found on [beyonddisaster.bible](https://beyonddisaster.bible), where you can also find related content for adults and children.

# Informed Consent For Parents & Guardians

**UNSTUCK: A Teen Guide for Living in Uncertain Times** is a Bible-based interactive booklet for teens to help them cope with grief and anxiety caused by difficult circumstances following a disaster. Teens will learn to recognize their losses, tell their stories, connect with feelings, and find strategies for moving forward in the midst of a crisis.

A small group using UNSTUCK will provide teens an opportunity to connect meaningfully with others their age under the guidance of an experienced youth ministry worker. The small group experience will be a safe place for teens to find healing from some of the hurts they have had as a result of this crisis.

The group will include four sessions addressing questions that teens may be struggling with.

1. Why am I feeling this way?
2. What can I do with my feelings?
3. How do I get unstuck?
4. How can I relate to God in uncertain times?

Due to the sensitive nature of this work, we practice confidentiality to create a safe place for teens to openly and honestly share. However, the law mandates that we report concerns for the safety and wellbeing of the minors we serve. Therefore, we will notify appropriate parties if teens share an intent to hurt self or others, or if there are concerns of child abuse or neglect.

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**Parents/Legal Guardians: Please sign the permission statement below if you support your teen’s decision to participate in this group, and return it to the group leaders.**

I give my permission for \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in this group.  
I understand that I can seek further information by contacting the group leaders.

---

*Parent/Legal Guardian (please print)* *Signature* *Today’s Date*

**Group information**

**Location:**  Online  In Person \_\_\_\_\_

**Dates:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Group Leaders:**

Name	Organization	Email