

WEEK 1

LESSON GUIDE

NOT OKAY

BIG IDEA

When you're not okay, Jesus offers hope.

BIBLE

Mark 5:25–34; Romans 15:13; Psalms 39:7

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

POLL | Okay & Not Okay

- Welcome to the first week in our new series, *Not Okay*, where we will see how God is with us in our moments of stress and anxiety and wants to help us when we feel overwhelmed.
- Just a heads up, we will be talking about stress and mental health today, so we want to encourage you to go at a pace you feel comfortable with. If you ever need to take a break, feel free to tell someone. If you feel like it's needed, seek outside professional support and resources.
 - Throughout the next few weeks, as a way to support you on this journey, we'll offer some prayer practices that can help you with your mental health, and we hope you incorporate them into your life.
 - The goal of our time this month is to help you know where to find some hope when you feel like you're not okay.
- Most of the time, when we feel stressed, it is out of our control, and most of our energy is used to try to stop whatever is stressing us out. But if we want to recognize stress when it happens and how God meets us in the middle, we must understand what stress is. So let's run a little experiment.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Poll your students' responses to the following questions. Choose some poll questions that work for your group. Here are a few suggestions to get you started.*
 - Which is scariest: a spider, clown, or snake, looking down from the top of a tall building?
 - What would be the grossest to touch: Uncooked chicken, jello, chewed gum, warm yogurt?
 - What is not okay: Touching wet food in the sink, peeling an orange and not being able to wash your hands afterward, cleaning seeds out of a pumpkin, drinking orange juice after brushing your teeth?
 - What is okay to eat: week-old pizza, week-old mac and cheese, or a week-old burger from a restaurant?
 - What is okay to eat the whole of: a watermelon (including the seeds and rind), bananas (including the peel), strawberries (including the leaves), or broccoli (including the stem)?
- Some of these questions made us have physical responses. They may have caused some of us to laugh, and at worst, we may have gagged.
- But at some level, something is unsettling about them. They made us uneasy or uncomfortable, and we may have found our heart rates increased as if a question got more intense. That feeling you have is a stress response, and it's designed to keep you safe.

- That poll was helpful because it helped us see we are not alone in our stress. It is something we all go through.

STORY | Not Okay (Part 1)

- God designed us with a stress response system hardwired into our bodies to keep us safe.
 - Stress is a temporary response to feeling under pressure or threatened. As we just saw, that also means stress is unique to each person.
 - What is threatening to one person may not be to another. What feels like positive or motivational stress to you might be debilitating to someone else.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Talk about a time you remember not being okay. What brought you to that feeling? How did you know you were not okay? What did it feel like in your body? What were your prayers like? Wait to resolve the story until later. You could also have a volunteer or student share.*
- My story isn't your story. Maybe your stress has to do with your grades, family, relationships, or the health of someone you know. Perhaps you wouldn't say you're feeling stressed about your life, but there might be other situations where you are looking for help. How does God fit in when we have stress or feel overwhelmed? Where is Jesus when I am Not Okay?

DISCUSSION

- Which causes you more stress: eating soup out of a bowl made from an empty watermelon rind, or dunking cookies in orange juice forever?
- How often do you talk about stress with your friends?
- *What do you already know about stress or feeling anxious?

SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

SCRIPTURE | Mark 5:25–29

- There is a story in the book of Mark about a woman who struggled with a physical ailment. In addition to physical pain, this ailment also caused her social and emotional pain. Listen to how she tried to manage it and how her life changed when Jesus entered her story.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Mark 5:25–29.*
- Jesus had a unique encounter with a woman with an internal bleeding condition for twelve years.
 - Could you imagine having chronic pain or an illness for twelve years straight? It would probably be frustrating and, in some sense, humiliating.
 - She tried doctor after doctor, but none of them could help her. Her condition only seemed to get worse. She had spent all she had to try to get well and was now chasing rumors about miracle workers.
- It's important to remember that within this culture, her condition kept her from being a fully functioning member of society. There were rules surrounding how she interacted with people, including her family. There were certain places she couldn't go. Under the penalty of death, she couldn't be touched or touched by others until she proved her healing.
- Can you imagine the loneliness and despair of needing to deal with that for over a decade?

SCRIPTURE | Mark 5:30–34

- She had heard about Jesus and the ways he was healing people. Imagine how desperate you would need to be that because of this possibility, you would be willing to risk your own life for the possibility of getting

healed. Because of the things she heard Jesus could do, she took a considerable risk. This is the power of what hope can do.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Mark 5:30–34.
- Despite all of the rules regarding where she could be and what she could do, she took a risk to come to Jesus because she believed if she touched the edge of his cloak, Jesus would heal her.
- When she realized Jesus had done the thing she had been praying and hoping for, she threw herself at Jesus' feet. She was scared because she knew what she had done broke so many cultural and religious laws.
 - Her stress levels were through the roof, and Jesus had an opportunity to tell this woman what a lawbreaker and sinner she was . . . but he doesn't do that.
 - Instead, Jesus looks at her, sees her pain and fear, and says, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."
- I am not sure how it happened, but somehow the power of his healing touch began to undo her condition, the source of her loneliness. Even though she was not okay, Jesus saw her, heard her, and gave her hope for a new future.
- With these few words, by choosing to heal her and acknowledge her, Jesus affirms her experience is not what he wants for her. When he undoes her ailment, he reminds her she is intended to have connection and closeness with others.

DISCUSSION

- What stood out to you in the story of the woman seeking healing?
- Why do you think this story is in the Bible? What does it tell us about who God is?

OBJECT LESSON | Crutch

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this object lesson, you will need a crutch. Before your program, be sure the crutch is available to show while you teach. As you teach, say . . .
- We all experience stressful situations sometimes, but like this woman and some of us here, "stress" doesn't begin to cover it. We're not sure how to handle feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression, and we're not even sure what's normal or not. All we know is we don't feel "okay."
- When we experience emotional and psychological pain, it activates a similar part of the brain to where the physical pain is experienced.
 - Think about what that means. If you had a broken leg and couldn't walk without a crutch for a while, there would be zero shame in that.
 - But with mental health, it can feel like something is wrong, but there's a chance that other than you, no one notices it unless you are honest about what you are feeling.
- The truth is it's normal to struggle, and just like a broken leg needs care, attention, and professional support, stress and other mental health struggles also require support.
- Your path for support may be simple. Prayer, exercise, and eating well may be enough to get you through, but other times, like this woman, you may need more support. Some may need to do all of those things, courageously tell someone what they are going through and see a mental health professional. All of that is okay, and no matter where on that spectrum you are, we want to help support you.
- There is not a one size fits all approach to finding hope during our stress and anxiety. We see Jesus is with us as the source of hope, no matter the way that comes about.

SCRIPTURE | Romans 15:13

- The woman who was bleeding had hoped Jesus could do something different. She hoped Jesus would take care of her when she reached out to touch his clothes.

- Paul, one of the Early Church leaders and the author of many books in the New Testament, talks about a similar experience to the Early Church of first-century Rome.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Romans 15:13.
- I am sure you noticed Paul said our hope would increase, but did you notice what Paul *didn't* say? He didn't say that the God of hope would fix everything immediately. He didn't say God changes our circumstances when we increase our trust. Paul didn't say God does our bidding once we hit a certain threshold.
- He simply says the God of hope will overflow our joy as we lean to trust him. God won't always change our circumstances the way we want, but Jesus always offers hope. Jesus provides us with the hope to help sustain us in times of stress and anxiety. We can trust God will care for us and lead us toward healing because **when you're not okay, Jesus offers hope.**

NOW WHAT? What does God want us to do about it?

STORY | Not Okay (Part 2)

- However you feel about what's happening in your life, know Jesus is with you in what you are going through. He's with you in your anxiety and pain. Jesus sees your suffering, and he wants to do something about it.
- This is what ultimately happened in my life. Remember the story I told you earlier?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Complete the story you told at the top of this section. Discuss how hope or other people reminded you to hope for change. How did this change your perspective? How did having hope make you feel? Be sure to acknowledge Jesus doesn't necessarily make everything better instantly, but he does offer hope amid our experience. Be sure your story includes the four takeaway points below.
- This is what it looked like for Jesus to offer me hope at one point in my life. It may be different for you, but here are four ways you can pursue the hope Jesus offers this week:
 - **BE HONEST:** Part of our path toward healing comes when we're open and transparent about what we feel. We must be realistic about what's happening and what needs to change. Just like the woman in Mark 5, we have to be ready to admit what we've been trying hasn't worked and look for a new path with God.
 - **NAME YOUR FEELINGS:** One of the best ways to invite others into your healing process is to learn to name what you're going through and what you're feeling. There are so many different types of emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Many of us have difficulty getting specific about our feelings, and that's okay. If you notice you are stressed this week, name the feelings coming up. Maybe write them down in a journal or note on your phone.
 - **BRING EVERYTHING TO JESUS:** No matter how hard things can be, Jesus offers hope. Like the story of the woman we read today, there is an unexplainable hope Jesus brings when we draw close to him. This week bring your honest experience and feelings to Jesus and talk to him about it.
 - **ASK FOR HELP:** There are times no matter how much we pray or ask God to fix how we are feeling, no matter how much we have faith, things can change. The truth is sometimes they don't. I don't have a good answer as to why that is, but I know it isn't easy. This is not a burden you have to carry alone. If you feel like you have prayed or tried to do it on your own and things haven't changed, it is a good indicator you may need support. Talk to someone here today, and we will do what we can to help get you the support you need.

DISCUSSION

- ***What questions do you have about how God is at work when you have stress and anxiety?**

- *What keeps you from being honest about your stress? What is one way you think Jesus can help you with that?
- On a scale of one to five (five being most difficult), how difficult is it to name what you feel in stressful moments? Why is that?

REFLECTION | Hope In The Healing

- Let's take steps to allow Jesus to offer us hope for what we are experiencing.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this reflection, you will need a bandage, a few permanent markers, pens, and a blank piece of paper. Ask students to spend a few minutes reflecting on their life and the places they feel anxiety or stress, and where Jesus offers hope. Provide them with pens and a place for them to journal their thoughts. After a few minutes, have them write the word "hope" on a bandage and ask them to put it somewhere to remind them this week that Jesus offers hope in every circumstance.*
- Even though our circumstances may not change or we might not find ourselves relieved of our struggles immediately, we can trust Jesus sustains us in the process.
- Because all the ways God may bring healing into our lives will look different for each person, healing might look more like managing symptoms. Recovery might look like investing in people who care and can support you. Healing might look like acknowledging that you're not okay and saying that out loud to a friend or trusted professional for the first time.

DISCUSSION

- *Who can you ask for help if you feel stressed and anxious?
- Read Psalms 39:7. When are you not okay, what is one way you can ask Jesus for hope?

PRAYER | The Place Where God Is . . .

- When we feel stressed, overwhelmed, hopeless, or generally not okay, it can seem like God has abandoned us, but we know that is not true. And while it's important to talk with friends and trusted adults about what you are going through (please keep doing that), it's also important to bring your experience to Jesus.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Guide students in a time of quiet reflection by inviting them to close their eyes and picture the things you are asking them. Consider playing soft worship music without any words. This is the beginning of a contemplative prayer practice called "Meeting Place Prayer," which creates an imaginative and serene space for people to connect with God.*
 - *Imagine a calm, peaceful place where you can go and relax.*
 - *What do you see, hear, smell, feel, and taste in your calm place?*
 - *Is it a beach, the mountains, or a tree house in the forest?*
 - *Allow your body to sink into the peace of this place and spend a few moments in prayer with God. Talk about the things you need hope for in life right now and some of your recent struggles. Ask God to sustain hope amid these struggles.*
- This is a prayer practice you can do at any time stress or anxiety starts to get your heart rate up. This prayer is a great first step as you begin to engage with what is causing your anxiety and stress. Remember, **when you're not okay, Jesus offers hope.**