

SESSION 1 LEAD IT: COLLEGE AGE



GOALS

- For students to realize God knows everything about them.
- For students to embrace that God is present around them, even when it doesn't seem so.
- For students to desire an increased intimacy with God.

MATERIALS: Group

- Variety of colored pencils
- Whiteboard and markers

MATERIALS: Each Student

- Student journal pages
- Scripture sheet, Psalm 139
- A Bible
- A pen

SESSION INTRO

Prayer

After your group has gathered, open your time in prayer. Thank God for knowing us and actively pursuing an intimate relationship with us. You may want to breathe the following Scripture into your prayer.

The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.

—Psalm 119:130

Open

Start your time with an icebreaker question and a brainstorm discussion about relationships. Ask:

What's one thing in no one in this room knows about you?

What creates closeness with a friend?

Discuss

Transition into Psalm 139 by sharing in your own words some or all of the bullet-point background below:

The book of Psalms is different from any other book. Most of the other books in the Bible primarily consist of God's dealings with mankind. But not the psalms, the psalms are unique in that they place far greater emphasis on human thoughts, feelings and emotions. They are the heartfelt responses of real people to the God who made them and understands them. They consist of real people, having real struggles and honestly searching for God in the midst of them. In today's world this is something we could all benefit from. To be able to live openly and honestly before God, in relationship with the one who created us. To not fight to withhold who we really are from the one who already knows us.

David is often described as a man after God's own heart. He knew God, really knew Him. In the same way we know our closest friends. We were created to know God. Not just to know about Him, but to know Him and to know Him intimately. To know what His voice sounds like. To know what He feels like.

God has invited us into relationship. He desires for us to speak with Him as openly and honestly as we will see David do. The pages of the book of psalms are going to help us intimately connect with Him. We will use Scripture as a guide in hearing His voice and understanding His wisdom.

DIGGING IN

Let's jump into Psalm 139. To give your group a heads up on the session, share that you'll be giving them an opportunity to experience the entire psalm in solitude, and then processing it as a group in bite-sized bits.

Invite the group to come up with a symbol to denote the author of the psalm that they can use to highlight references to him. This may be a circle, a box, or even a stick figure (this is where you colored pencils might come in handy). Have students read the psalm slowly and thoughtfully to discover everything they can about the person who wrote it, especially as it relates to God. The group should use the symbol to mark any mention of the author of the psalm whenever it occurs. This includes pronouns, like "I," "me," and "my."

After they've read and marked the passage, ask students to make a list on their journal page of everything they learned about the author. (Hint: every time they marked something on their Scripture sheet, they should have learned a new detail about the author. Each detail should be added to their list.)

Reconvene the group when most students have finished and when all of them have had a chance to at least read the entire psalm. It's okay if not everyone finished the entire exercise.

Use the following questions to guide your group through discussing the psalm.

Who wrote Psalm 139?

David

Just by reading this psalm, what do you think this guy (David) is like? What was his relationship with God like?

Why (based on Psalm 139) would you use these words to describe David's relationship with God?

David said a lot of things about himself in this psalm. Do you think that the things David said about himself could be said of us? Why or why not?

TAKING IT INWARD

Part 1

Divide your whiteboard into 4 quadrants and label the quadrants 1,2,3,4 respectively. After the students have discussed the questions it's time for the group to break apart the psalm and study its four sections (like you did in your personal prep).

Share with your group that anything David wrote about himself in this psalm is also true of us. Ask students to review verses 1-6 and to tell you two facts that stood out the most to them. As they feed you the details, record the information on the board in Quadrant 1.

Possible responses include:

I'm searched and known by God (v. 1)

God knows when I sit down and get up (v. 2)

God knows what I'm thinking (v. 2)

God knows when I go out (v. 3)

God knows my sleep habits (v. 3)

He's familiar with all my ways (v. 3)

He knows what I'm going to say before I say it (v. 4)

He's all around me – right in front of my face/right behind my back (v. 5)

His hand is right above me (I'm surrounded) (v. 5)

Couple questions:

What point about God is the author making here?

Can you tell if David feels smothered or grateful for God's omniscience?

Verse 6 may give a clue.

What would be a good bumper-sticker title for this section of Psalm 139?

Come to a group consensus and invite students to write this in the space provided on their Scripture sheet.

Part 2

Now have students review verses 7-12 and ask them again to share one fact that grabbed their attention about the relationship between themselves and God.

Possible responses include:

I can't get away from God's Spirit (v. 7)

I can't flee from His presence (v. 7)

Wherever I go, He is there (v. 8-9)

Wherever I go, His hand guides and holds me (v. 10)

I can't hide in the dark from God; He sees everything (v. 11-12)

What would be a good bumper-sticker title for this section of Psalm 139?

Come to a group consensus and invite students to write this in the space provided on their Scripture sheet.

Part 3

Time for Part 3 (verses 13-18). Again, give your students a minute to review verses 13-18. Have students share two things that stood out. As they share write their answers in Quadrant 3. Your list may look something like this:

Possible responses include:

God created my inmost being (v. 13)

He knit/wove me together in my mother's womb (v. 13-15)

I am fearfully and wonderfully made (v. 14)

God's works are wonderful (and I am one of them!) (v. 14)

God saw me when I was made in the secret place (v. 15)

His eyes saw my unformed body (He saw my cells) (v. 16)

God knew all the days of my life before they even began (v. 16)

In case your students ask, in the Hebrew language the phrase "in the depths of the earth" (used in verse 15) was a figurative or poetic way of saying, "in the womb."

A couple questions:

Does this section of Psalm 139 seem to be more about David or about God?

What big points are being made by David?

What would be a good bumper-sticker title for this section of Psalm 139?

Come to a group consensus and invite students to write this in the space provided on their Scripture sheet.

Part 4

Last one! This part of the psalm seems to take a little bit of a twist. All through Psalm 139, David has seemed like a pretty sweet guy in a generally good mood. Now, all of the sudden, he seems ticked off—he's not even being very "Christian" about it either! (Yeh, we know David was Jewish and not Christian. But he knew God's law and he knew how to behave—so what's the deal?)

Have students read the verses, marking the references to David and then have them share the thing that most grabbed their attention. Write their answers in Quadrant 4.

Possible responses include:

- He wants God to slay the wicked (v. 19)*
- He wants God to get the blood thirsty men away from him (v. 19)*
- He hates those who hate God (v. 20-21)*
- He counts these people as his enemies (v. 22)*
- He wants God to search him and his heart (v. 23)*
- He has anxious thoughts (v. 23)*
- He wants God to point out any offensive ways he has (v. 24)*
- He wants God to lead him in the everlasting way (v. 24)*

Now have your students make a title for Part 4 of Psalm 139

The questions below are printed on your students' journal pages. Pick two or three questions you'd like the group to answer and invite students to look over the questions and choose one or two that they'd like to answer.

How would you sum up what you have learned about God? Is this scary? Comforting? Why?

Which of these four quadrants speaks to you the most? Why?

Share about a time when God seemed more near to you than other times.

Share about a time when God felt distant.

Based on this psalm, where was God when He felt distant?

If God is truly all around you, why do you think you don't experience Him as near to you as often as you'd like?

Faith vs. Feelings: Students may answer this question in a variety of different ways. But you will want to be prepared to talk about the difference between faith and feeling. Faith is believing in God's presence because of what the Bible says (even when you don't feel it). Feeling is going on emotion, as in, "God doesn't seem to be with me, so He probably isn't."

Do you think we live in a culture of students seeking faith or feeling?

Why is it so much easier to seek feeling?

David was upset and he let it go in front of God. Do you think that's okay?

Have you ever let it go in front of God?

Have you ever held back from being real with God because you felt the need to keep it together?

PUTTING INTO PRACTICE

Spiritual growth comes when we not only hear from God, but when we take actions regarding the things He places on our hearts.

What is one thing you can do this next week to increase your intimacy with God?

How will you do this? Who will do it with you? Where will you do it?

Answering these questions will help you put together a plan and sharing that plan with someone else will help with accountability.

One more thing:

Your students may have noticed that because they used the Scripture sheets that they haven't used their Bibles in this session. In most sessions they will be using their Bibles to look up other passages. To encourage personal use of their Bibles, have students open their Bibles to Psalm 139. Invite them to make notes from the session in the margins of this psalm.