

Beyond Blue

Despair Leader Guide

Welcome to 2022! The January sermon series is a great time to pause and think about important challenges we all face during these complicated and challenging times. Discussions about the upcoming topics will be a good opportunity to get a feel for where your LifeGroup members are at, and whether they need additional support from you and/or the group.

Before starting the discussion this week, we strongly encourage you and your group to take time to set up some guidelines around group interactions. This will help encourage everyone to feel safe during discussions about these challenging and heavy topics. Some guidelines before beginning may include:

- We want to encourage people to **share freely** about their thoughts and feelings. However, if someone in the group decides to **listen without sharing**, please respect his/her preference.
- During the next few weeks, we also encourage you to ask your group to **refrain from crosstalk**. Crosstalk occurs when we interject a comment during someone else's share time. It also means not criticizing what someone said, telling him/her what to do about the problem, how we solved something similar, or how to feel differently.
- Remind your group that after you ask a question, you are comfortable with **letting the group sit quietly to think for a time**. Teachers often silently count to 15 in their mind to remind themselves that "wait time" is important to give people space to process their thoughts before sharing.
- As a facilitator, liberally use **affirming responses** such as, paraphrasing what the person's basic message or experience is. You can start with, "Let me see if I understand what you are saying." Acknowledge their willingness to share by saying "Thanks for sharing" and other positive comments that you are comfortable working with.
- Remind the group that we are committed to reaching out when group members let us know they are struggling. Keep this in mind as you pray for our group this week and see if God nudges you to do so.

Feel free to read this entire list to your group! Having group norms and guidelines in place can help protect your group conversations, no matter the topic. The Community Life team has many resources available to support you and your group members if issues come up during your discussions that feel out of your comfort zone. Please reach out to us for more information or if you need someone to discuss a challenging situation with to find clarity.

Warm-Up: What's the first thought that comes into your mind when you hear the word **despair**? (Definition: Lack of hope.)

Discussion Questions:

1. What does despair look like in your life?
2. Have you ever had poor experiences with other Christians when sharing about despair?
3. When you're having a hard time, what can others do to support you?
4. What are some ways to demonstrate love to someone who is full of despair?
5. How does the world teach us to cope with despair? How does the Bible tell us to cope with despair? Look at Psalms 42-43 and 13 to see how different people handled despair.
6. What are practices in your life that lead to spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being?

Closing: Prayer experience with group as a whole or in pairs. Share about practices you would like to incorporate for increased well-being that your partner/group can pray for tonight and during the week.

In closing, summarize several ideas and common feelings at the end of the group session. "As a group this area seems to be one that many of us have struggled with during covid/fires/job losses, though it looks and feels different for each of us..."