



theme: Doubt #4 – The Forsaken Ones – Psalm 22
materials: Bibles

welcome

Have you ever felt completely alone, completely isolated and forsaken? Have you ever been despairing, and believing that life could never get any better? What did you do in that situation?

interact

Is anyone in the group presently feeling alone, forsaken or despairing? Spend time praying with them, not just for a quick fix or cure, but so that together as a group you might experience the comforting presence of God, and that the person or people feeling isolated will know that the people in their cell will listen to them and care for them. If no one in the group is feeling this way, pray for others you know who may be feeling forsaken. You could also pray for the Christians around the world who are being persecuted for their faith. Thank God particularly for the gift of his Spirit and for the gift of each other. Finish your time of prayer with someone reading out James 1:16-18.

read

Read out all of Psalm 22 together.

What do you do when you feel that God is absent, or just not listening to you or caring for you? Do you know of any other place in the Bible where some of these words come up? (Hint: Matthew 27:46 – read this passage as well.)

Why do you think Jesus would choose to quote this Psalm at this point in his life, as he is being killed? Is Jesus expressing doubt in his calling, in his Father?

Has Jesus been forsaken by God here? If so, why would God forsake his Son? If God would forsake his Son at his point of greatest need, what trust do we have that He won't forsake us?

Who could we say are the "forsaken" in our world today? Which groups of people are isolated, abandoned, in despair? Do they have reason to doubt the care of God?

How might Jesus' words on the cross speak to these people?

Jesus went as far as death on a cross to identify with the forsaken in our world. How is his Church following his example? How are we not following his example?

think

How can we tell a doubting, despairing world that God has not forsaken them? Read out verses 24-31 again. There is hope here. God has not despised the afflicted, and neither should we. We, as Christ's body on earth, need to identify with the forsaken as well, and need to proclaim the righteousness of God to the ends of the earth. This is not just done with words, but with our actions.

Who are the forsaken in your city, in your neighbourhood? Discuss how your cell can proclaim – in word and deed – the righteousness of God to the forsaken. And remember, Christ didn't just proclaim it at the forsaken, he identified with them and their plight utterly. What would that look like for your cell?



live & pray

Take a field trip as a cell group. Do you know where people in your city are feeling forsaken, are doubting the righteous presence of God? Go walking and looking for evidence of this doubt, and explore ways that you can follow Christ's example into these situations. Do not come with any arrogance, but with utmost humility, and keep your eyes open to where Christ is already at work bringing hope and comfort to the forsaken. Don't think that he hasn't gone ahead of you!

useful resources

Book: *Answering God*, by Eugene Peterson
Scripture: Philippians 2:1-11, 2 Corinthians 5:20-21

leader's guide

This Psalm (which comes immediately before the well-known and altogether more cheery Psalm 23), is a testament to hope in the face of great doubt and worry. The author is wondering where God is in his present troubles, why he doesn't seem to hear – let alone answer – his prayers. He outlines some of his troubles, and follows up with complaints that God is not helping and with heartfelt requests that God “be not far off.”

This Psalm takes on new poignancy, however, as we see Christ quoting it on the cross. He only cries out one of the phrases, but he is certainly referencing the entire thing. Where is God the Father now? Doctor, heal yourself! These were some of the taunts coming at Jesus from below the cross.

With his life on earth Jesus identified with the full scope of humanity, in particular with it's suffering. He knew cold, hunger, pain, humiliation, work, fatigue, betrayal, homelessness, rejection, and sadness. But on the cross Jesus even went so far as to take on a full identification with all of those who have felt abandoned by God himself. It says that Christ became sin for us so that we could become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:20-21). On the cross Jesus took on the separation from God the Father that we ourselves have earned with our sin, and so became forsaken in the way that we should have been. This is the only reason we can trust that God will not forsake us – Christ has already taken that on himself.

Christ's identification with the forsaken speaks a powerful word to those who feel forsaken today. People who feel abandoned by the world – and by the church – understandably may also feel abandoned by God. Jesus said that where you find these people, you will find him. Are we doing a god job of searching for Christ amongst the last, lost and least?