

COVID Experience Circles

Serving our communities, leading them to Jesus

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought loss, disruption, and isolation in some form to all of us. This upheaval may open up unbelievers to deeper conversations and a desire to debrief this crisis. We have a timely opportunity to gather our friends, neighbors, and those in our ministry circles into small COVID conversation groups. These groups provide a place for listening and sharing with each other, even when answers are not simple. As we listen and participate, we might learn how our unbelieving friends and acquaintances are looking to God in crisis and we may experience deepening relationships of trust. The stress and trauma of these types of experiences may delay complete emotional and spiritual recovery for some time. Stress can linger unnoticed, and surges or waves of instability can trigger renewed trauma. Let us remain sensitive to each other's concerns and process.

Here are some ideas for how to use the questions and passages listed below to cultivate community through COVID experience circles:

- Meet over a number of weeks to debrief your COVID experiences. Choose a few questions to discuss each week based on timelines that work in your context.
- Depending on your group makeup, discuss your COVID experience in creative ways (what one word describes your experience; draw or sketch images that come to mind when you reflect on this crisis; share what memories bubble up). Focus on actively listening, empathizing, and giving space to share and grieve losses or to take hope in growth and change.
- After discussing some COVID debrief questions, consider choosing a passage of scripture to read and share. If you are meeting with those who are familiar with the Bible, this may feel natural. If you are gathering with those who are unfamiliar with the Bible, you can say that you would like to share a story or passage from the Bible that has been helpful to you, and might help everyone in navigating this experience.
- If your first meeting goes too long, it may be difficult to gather again, so keep it simple. Read just a few verses or a single passage. Encourage everyone to participate in some aspect of reading, restating the passage, asking questions, and giving insights so that it is collective and community directed. There are some passages and verses listed on this document as suggestions for deeper conversation during crisis or upheaval. You can text the passage/verses to the group so everyone can review on their phone, or print out the passage/verses if you are meeting together in person.
- Possible methods: (a) Print out a list of some debrief questions or send them in a text or in a Zoom chat; (b) Rotate a different person to read each question or to lead the discussion each week; (c) Share verses during the gathering or before, depending on the group dynamics.
- This may be one of the first opportunities this circle of friends, neighbors, students, co-workers, or patients has had to talk vulnerably about these things, so it may be difficult. Culture may influence how pain and difficulty are processed. Personality can lead us to share everything or almost nothing.

- Depending on your group (assuming these are not followers of Jesus), ask if you can pray a blessing over them and pray for God to be present in some of the areas they have shared with the group. If someone else wants to pray, welcome their desire to draw near to God through this practice.
- If your circle enjoys these gatherings, consider ongoing meetings to keep processing your experiences together or to begin to delve into other aspects of life and faith by learning from God's word in community.

Crisis processing questions

1. What has been particularly difficult or what losses have you experienced during COVID-19?
2. What has provided hope or a step forward for you during this season?
3. What name or phrase would you give to your experience during this pandemic?
4. How has this crisis impacted your emotional life? Physical life? Spiritual life? Social life?
5. How do you picture God in all of this? How have you related to God through the COVID-19 crisis? Has anything changed about your picture of God?
6. How will you move forward from here? Do you need to forgive someone, make changes, manage your stress? Whom do you need to help you move forward?

Scripture Reading and Reflection

- Read the selected passage aloud (one person reads, others listen).
- Have someone in group retell the story or passage to the best of their ability.
- What do I learn about God from this?
- What do I learn about humanity/people from this?
- What can I/we do specifically this week in response to what we have read?
- With whom can I share this passage this week?

Potential passages for Reading and Reflection

Luke 10:30-36 Jesus replied with a story: "A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, 'Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here.' Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked.

Galatians 6:2 Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Isaiah 41:8-13 But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, descendant of Abraham, My friend—I brought you from the ends of the earth and called you from its farthest corners. I said to you: You are My servant; I have chosen you and not rejected you. Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with My righteous right hand. Be sure that all who are enraged against you will be ashamed and disgraced; those who contend with you will become as nothing and will perish. You will look for those who contend with you, but you will not find them. Those who war against you will become absolutely nothing. For I, Yahweh your God, hold your right hand and say to you: Do not fear, I will help you.

Psalm 13: 1-6 How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Look on me and answer, LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death, and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall. But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me.

Luke 8:22-25 One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So, they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement, they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him."

Psalm 62:5-10 Rest in God alone, my soul, for my hope comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I will not be shaken. My salvation and glory depend on God, my strong rock. My refuge is in God. Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts before Him. God is our refuge. Men are only a vapor; exalted men, an illusion. Weighed in the scales, they go up; together they are less than a vapor. Place no trust in oppression, or false hope in robbery. If wealth increases, pay no attention to it.

1 John 4:16-20 And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. In this, love is perfected with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, for we are as He is in this world. There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So, the one who fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother he has seen cannot love the God he has not seen. And we have this command from Him: The one who loves God must also love his brother.

Romans 8:18, 22-25 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. And not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the first fruits—we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. Now in this hope we were saved, yet hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.

Psalms 84:1-5 How lovely is Your dwelling place, LORD of Hosts. I long and yearn for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh cry out for the living God. Even a sparrow finds a home, and a swallow, a nest for herself where she places her young— near Your altars, LORD of Hosts, my King and my God. How happy are those who reside in Your house, who praise You continually. Happy are the people whose strength is in You, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.

1 Samuel 1:10-18 In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, “LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.” As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, “How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine.” “Not so, my lord,” Hannah replied, “I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.” Eli answered, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.” She said, “May your servant find favor in your eyes.” Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

Psalms 139:7-12 Where can I go to escape Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your Presence? If I go up to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, You are there. If I live at the eastern horizon or settle at the western limits, even there Your hand will lead me; Your right hand will hold on to me. If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me, and the light around me will be night”— even the darkness is not dark to You. The night shines like the day; darkness and light are alike to You.

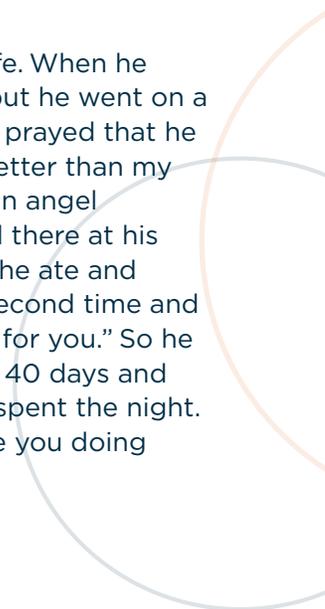
Habakkuk 3:17-19 Though the fig tree does not bud and there is no fruit on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will triumph in Yahweh; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation! Yahweh my Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like those of a deer and enables me to walk on mountain heights!



Acts 16: 19-31 When her owners saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. Bringing them before the chief magistrates, they said, “These men are seriously disturbing our city. They are Jews and are promoting customs that are not legal for us as Romans to adopt or practice.” Then the mob joined in the attack against them, and the chief magistrates stripped off their clothes and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had inflicted many blows on them, they threw them in jail, ordering the jailer to keep them securely guarded. Receiving such an order, he put them into the inner prison and secured their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the jail were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s chains came loose. When the jailer woke up and saw the doors of the prison open, he drew his sword and was going to kill himself, since he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul called out in a loud voice, “Don’t harm yourself, because all of us are here!” Then the jailer called for lights, rushed in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he escorted them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” Then they spoke the message of the Lord to him along with everyone in his house. He took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. Right away he and all his family were baptized. He brought them into his house, set a meal before them, and rejoiced because he had believed God with his entire household.

Psalms 91:1-9 The one who lives under the protection of the Most High dwells in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” He Himself will deliver you from the hunter’s net, from the destructive plague. He will cover you with His feathers; you will take refuge under His wings. His faithfulness will be a protective shield. You will not fear the terror of the night, the arrow that flies by day, the plague that stalks in darkness, or the pestilence that ravages at noon. Though a thousand fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand, the pestilence will not reach you. You will only see it with your eyes and witness the punishment of the wicked. Because you have made the LORD—my refuge, the Most High—your dwelling place.

I Kings 19: 3-9 Then Elijah became afraid and immediately ran for his life. When he came to Beer-sheba that belonged to Judah, he left his servant there, but he went on a day’s journey into the wilderness. He sat down under a broom tree and prayed that he might die. He said, “I have had enough! LORD, take my life, for I’m no better than my fathers.” Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree. Suddenly, an angel touched him. The angel told him, “Get up and eat.” Then he looked, and there at his head was a loaf of bread baked over hot stones, and a jug of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again. Then the angel of the LORD returned for a second time and touched him. He said, “Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you.” So he got up, ate, and drank. Then on the strength from that food, he walked 40 days and 40 nights to Horeb, the mountain of God. He entered a cave there and spent the night. Then the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”



Jeremiah 29:4-7 This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says to all the exiles I deported from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and live in them. Plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters. Take wives for your sons and give your daughters to men in marriage so that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there; do not decrease. Seek the welfare of the city I have deported you to. Pray to the LORD on its behalf, for when it has prosperity, you will prosper.”

Psalm 118: 5-14 I called to the LORD in distress; the LORD answered me and put me in a spacious place. The LORD is for me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The LORD is my helper, Therefore, I will look in triumph on those who hate me. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in nobles. All the nations surrounded me; in the name of Yahweh I destroyed them. They surrounded me, yes, they surrounded me; in the name of Yahweh I destroyed them. They surrounded me like bees; they were extinguished like a fire among thorns; in the name of Yahweh I destroyed them. You pushed me hard to make me fall, but the LORD helped me. The LORD is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation.

Psalms 1, 46, and 121 (complete psalm or a portion)