



high school group study

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general editor

**dealing
with stress
& crisis**



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how to use the *uncommon* group bible studies

Each *Uncommon* group Bible study contains 12 sessions, which are divided into 3 stand-alone units of 4 sessions each. You may choose to teach all 12 sessions consecutively, to use just one unit, or to present individual sessions. You know your group, so do what works best for you and your students.

This is your leader's guidebook for teaching your group. Electronic files (in PDF format) of each session's student handouts are available for download at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/. The handouts include the "message," "dig," "apply," "reflect" and "meditation" sections of each study and have been formatted for easy printing. You may print as many copies as you need for your group.

Each session opens with a devotional meditation written for you, the youth leader. As hectic and trying as youth work is much of the time, it's important never to neglect your interior life. Use the devotions to refocus your heart and prepare yourself to share with kids the message that has already taken root in you. Each of the 12 sessions are divided into the following sections:

starter

Young people will stay in your youth group if they feel comfortable and make friends in the group. This section is designed for you and the students to get to know each other better.

message

The message section will introduce the Scripture reading for the session and get students thinking about how the passage applies to their lives.

dig

Many young people are biblically illiterate. In this section, students will dig into the Word of God and will begin to interact on a personal level with the concepts.

apply


Young people need the opportunity to think through the issues at hand. This section will get students talking about the passage of Scripture and interacting on important issues.

reflect

The conclusion to the study will allow students to reflect on some of the issues presented in the study on a more personal level.

meditation

A closing Scripture for the students to read and reflect on.



unit I

dealing with stress

I don't know about you, but there is many a day when I feel as if I'm alone. I have to really watch it when I'm under pressure or I become a little moody. And when I'm moody and feel stress coming on, you should see me put down those chocolate chip cookies. Then I look at my stomach and . . . oh, do I feel lonely, worried and moody. At times, that's the real me.

There is a great story from an old children's book called *The Velveteen Rabbit* that captures this idea of "being real." The story begins with a character called the Skin Horse. He had lived longer in the nursery than any of the other toys, and he was so old that his brown coat had become bald in patches (which is how he got his name). The stitching on his seams was showing and most of the hairs on his tail had been pulled out.

One day, a stuffed Rabbit approached the Skin Horse and asked, "What is REAL? Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

“Real isn’t how you are made,” replied the Skin Horse. “It’s something that happens *to* you. When a child loves you for a long time—not just to play with, but REALLY loves you—then you become Real.”

“Does it hurt?” asked the rabbit.

“Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse. “But when you are Real, you don’t mind being hurt.”

“Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,” the Rabbit asked, “or bit by bit?”

“It doesn’t happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse. “You *become*. It takes a long time. That’s why it doesn’t often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, your eyes have dropped out and you are loose in the joints and shabby. But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are Real, you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand.”¹

I believe there is a refreshing new wind within many of our churches. Finally, Christians are talking less about being perfect and more about *being real* as they strive to be God’s people. Let’s be honest. God wants to meet us where we are, not where we should be. Even when we struggle, God is present.

This unit is about taking our Christian faith into the inner struggles of our everyday lives. As an influencer of kids, you can receive the same message that you are presenting in this material—that God loves you just the way you are. So put away any pretenses, relax, and get prepared to offer real answers to real inner struggles.

Note

1. Adapted from Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit* (New York: Avon Books, 1975), pp. 16-17.



session 1

the stress of loneliness

The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

DEUTERONOMY 31:8

Loneliness affects just about everyone at times—even leaders. This is why it is so important that you deal with your own feelings of loneliness before you try to help our kids, because not dealing with these feelings will have negative effects on your ministry and the lives of your teens. If you develop relationships with teenagers as a way to deal with your loneliness and only have students for friends, you will create unhealthy relationships and dangerous or dysfunctional youth ministries.

If you are experiencing loneliness, know that God will walk with you through that dark valley. You must not allow working with kids to mask these feelings in your heart. Always remember

that God is with you and your students through the pain and anxiousness that loneliness brings.

So, what can you do if you are lonely? The most effective way of dealing with these feelings is to develop a game plan to counter its ugly effects. In this lesson, you will be inspired to handle personal loneliness in a positive manner and also help your students work through it in a constructive and Christ-centered way. Jesus Himself promised that He would never “leave you as orphans” (John 14:18). He will never abandon you or forsake you. He will walk with you even when you don’t feel His presence. His life will overshadow your loneliness with His love and grace.

The best way to forget your own problems is to help others solve theirs.

ANONYMOUS

group study guide

the stress of loneliness

starter

THE LONELY METER: Divide the group members into team of three to four. Give each person a pen or pencil. Have the group members rate each statement below using a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not lonely at all” and 10 being “extremely lonely.”

- ___ “When I asked out a person whom I really cared about, he/she told me he/she already had plans.”
- ___ “My boyfriend/girlfriend broke up with me on Friday and went out with another girl/guy on Saturday.”
- ___ “I spilled my tray of food in front of everyone in the cafeteria. I feel like a total loser!”

Note: You can download this group study guide in 8½" x 11" format at www.gspelllight.com/uncommon/dealing_with_stress_and_crisis.zip.

- ___ “We all went to the amusement park and had a pretty good time.”
- ___ “We had the best talk.”
- ___ “I couldn’t find anyone who wanted to go to the movies on Friday.”
- ___ “I have a good friend at school, and we do lots of things together.”
- ___ “My Christmas was horrible—the first since my parents divorced. My dad went out drinking and my mom went on a date. I sat home all by myself.”

Now have the group members indicate whether they believe the statements below are mostly true or mostly false:

True	False	The majority of people in my school are lonely most of the time.
True	False	Adults tend to be lonelier than teenagers.
True	False	Loneliness causes people to lower their moral standards.
True	False	Some teenagers have sex, become pregnant and get married because they are lonely.
True	False	God can always cure a person’s loneliness.

When everyone is finished, gather back together and ask the teams to share their responses. Ask the group members to share any other “lonely statements” they would like to add to this list.

message

The Bible is full of truths that God wants us to understand, and one of these truths is that we are never alone. God is always with

us. As we see in Psalm 23, God watches over everything we do, and He knows exactly what we are going through:

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

- 1. According to this psalm, God is our “shepherd.” What are some of the things He does for us as our shepherd?

He makes me _____ in green pastures.

He _____ me beside _____.

He _____ my _____.

He _____ me in _____ of _____.

- 2. What are some of the places this psalm says God is with us?

- 3. What do you think “the darkest valley” could represent in a person’s life?

4. Why should a person not be afraid when he or she encounters these places?

5. “You prepare a table before me” refers to someone setting a table for a feast. Why does the location for this feast seem strange?

6. What is used to anoint the person?

7. What do you think the term “my cup overflows,” means?

8. What two things will follow us all the days of our lives?

9. Where will we dwell forever?

dig

Throughout the Bible, God uses this illustration of a shepherd to help us understand what He means when He says He is always with us. For example, in Isaiah 40:11 we read, “He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.” However, because so few of us know anything about what a shepherd does, we can easily miss the significance of what God is saying. So let’s take a closer look at the shepherding process.

the shepherd

We’ll begin by looking at a few of the qualities and characteristics of the shepherd.

1. Let’s say you are a sheep owner. You start with 30 sheep. In 10 years, what will happen to the amount of sheep that you have?

2. Now say you have 100 sheep and 1 small meadow behind your house. What will happen to that meadow in a short amount of time? Why will this be a problem for you and your sheep?

As you’ve probably have guessed, your flock of sheep would grow over time and the amount of grazing land would be much less than you need to feed your growing flock. You would need to expand

where the sheep feed—and you would need to find help watching a flock of this size. You could solve the problem by putting someone from your family in charge of the sheep (a shepherd). Because the shepherd would be a member of your family, that person would know how important it is to take good care of the sheep.

3. One of the shepherd's jobs was to move the flock through wilderness areas from meadow to meadow so there would always be enough food. The shepherd would also make sure the sheep had water and see that they were protected. From what types of things do you think a shepherd would need to protect the flock?

4. To protect the sheep, the shepherd had to be with them 24/7. Why do you think this was important?

A shepherd had to constantly watch his flock. If the weather became too hot, he would have to move his flock to a cooler place. If one of the sheep went missing, he would have to find that sheep and bring it back to the flock. If one of the sheep needed medical attention, he had to be the veterinarian who would treat the sheep. If a wild animal decided it wanted one of the sheep for dinner, the shepherd would have to fight it off to keep the sheep safe.

the sheep

Now let's look at a bit more closely at the sheep. Sheep need a leader from among the flock. They don't care who the leader is, as long as some sheep—any sheep—does the job. Sometimes, the leader of a flock is the first sheep that decides to move forward, and all the other sheep get behind that one. This instinct to follow is so strong that people tend to think sheep are stupid; however, they are actually fairly smart. Sheep have long-term facial recognition, which means they can learn to recognize the face of their shepherd.²

1. What are some benefits of the sheep's instinct to follow?

2. What are some of the drawbacks of this instinct?

3. Why is long-term facial recognition important if you are a sheep?

A sheep's ability to recognize its shepherd's face often means the difference between life and death. When the sheep sees the shepherd, it knows and follows that person—the one who is always with it, always protects it, and always provides for all its needs. The sheep finds security and comfort in the presence of the shepherd.

apply

In John 10:14, Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” Like any good shepherd, Jesus is always there for His “sheep” (us), protecting them and providing for their needs. He has promised to never leave us: “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Jesus knows when we are feeling lonely, and He wants us to know that He is always there beside us.

1. Can you remember a specific time in your life when you were lonely? Explain.

2. Circle the letter below that best describes what you are most likely to do when you are feeling lonely:

- a. Go into your bedroom and crank up your music
- b. Call your best friend and tell him/her how you feel
- c. Go to the mall and start conversations with all the people you can find who are your age (or at least don't look scary)
- d. Start doing something—alphabetize your music collection, bake all the recipes from your international cook-book, paint the walls of your bedroom, or run five miles

3. How do these things help you to feel not so lonely?

4. Jesus wants to be your shepherd even in the darkest times of your life. Look at each of the situations below. How would knowing that Jesus is your shepherd change in the way you handle them? In other words, what difference would it make to know that Jesus is right there with you and helping you?

a. Your dad just lost his job, and your family might have to move to another state.

b. You find out that you have diabetes and will need to get several shots every day for the rest of your life.

c. Your best friend just got in trouble with the police for shoplifting.

d. A close family member was just diagnosed with cancer.

5. The following are seven statements about loneliness. Answer whether or not you think each statement is true, and why you think this way.

a. Everyone experiences loneliness.

b. Sometimes loneliness can be helpful.

c. When you are lonely, it isn't healthy to withdraw from everyone and everything.

6. Now here are a few things you can do when you are lonely. After each idea, write down one practical way you could put this into practice the next time you are feeling this way.

a. *Take a risk.* Reach out to others and develop friendships.

b. *Enjoy yourself.* When you feel the lonely bug come over you, do something you enjoy, such as going for a walk, read-

ing a good book, writing a letter, reading the Bible (Psalms and Proverbs can be especially helpful), treating yourself to a movie, or calling a friend and having fun together.

- c. **Be others-centered.** Do something that takes the focus off yourself and the way you are feeling and begin to focus on the needs of others.

- d. **Talk to the Shepherd.** Talk to Jesus about your loneliness and ask Him to be your closest friend.

reflect

1. Turn once more to Psalm 23. What does each of the following statements mean in terms of how God has promised to care for you, be with you, and watch over you?

"I shall not be in want" (verse 1)

“He restores my soul” (verse 3)

“He guides me in paths of righteousness” (verse 3)

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me” (verse 4)

2. Psalm 23:4 states, “Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” In biblical times, shepherds used a rod (a long stick) not only to protect their sheep but also to discipline them when they wandered their own way. Why do you think David would say that this gave him comfort?

3. The shepherd’s staff was a long and slender stick with a hook on one end. A shepherd used this item to reach out and catch a sheep so he could bring it closer to himself and to guide it

down a difficult path. In what ways do you think David would consider this to be a comfort?

4. In Psalm 23:5, David writes, “You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies” (*THE MESSAGE*). Why would God want your enemies to see this? What would it do to them? How would it help you?

5. Who are some people in your life that you would like to become closer friends with? List three or four names.

6. What could you do with each person during the next two weeks to strengthen your relationship (for example, have lunch together, go shopping, go bike riding)?

7. Make a list of five special things you like to do. (Keep this list handy, and the next time you feel lonely, read through it and do one or more of the things you have suggested.)

8. What can you do to become a more others-centered person? List several service-oriented things you can do. Be as specific as possible (for example, bake cookies for Grandma, mow the lawn this afternoon, write an encouraging note to someone).

9. Close by taking some time now to talk to God. Let Him know how you feel and what you need. Write down anything He tells you or any feelings you have about Him.

meditation



Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

PSALM 139:7-8