

SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY

Processing Together

A FOUR PART STUDY FOLLOWING A
SHARED CRISIS AND/OR DISASTER



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This study is a gift from your friends at Fresh Hope for Mental Health. We pray that it will be a blessing to you and your group.

We believe that when people have a safe place to process their distress following a shared crisis or natural disaster, they become emotionally and spiritually empowered to move forward in life. We also believe that too often in life, many of us struggle with various issues that hold us back in our walk with the Lord. Thus, we are committed to helping people work through issues that they might enjoy spiritual health to the fullest. After all, this is what it means to bear one another's burdens.

All of the videos for this study are stored on Vimeo. You may access them by click on the word VIDEO or copy and paste this link into your browser: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/7177070>

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When our lives are interrupted by events such as a significant crisis or a natural disaster, it can easily cause trauma. One definition of trauma is a psychological, emotional response to an event or an experience that is deeply distressing or disturbing. When the stress of a situation is not processed, it can create trauma and can develop into Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This study provides a safe way to de-stress from the shared stress and potential trauma created by a shared crisis or natural disaster.

Kudos to your small group for doing this study! — By doing this study, you are truly learning to "bear one another's burdens." Good for you! Together you can process what happened. What happened and how you experienced it as well as the stress created by it matters. Together you can provide a safe place to work through it, and in doing so, you are Jesus with "skin on" for one another.



How to Use This Study Guide

The material within this study guide is laid out in four parts. Each part will most likely take an average sized small group approximately 60 to 90 minutes. We encourage the group to start each session with opening and closing prayer. We also encourage the content of each of the sessions be read aloud within your group meeting.

It is also key that each of the members of your group has ample time to share their thoughts and feelings within each meeting. Group leaders should be sensitive to make sure that no one person's sharing keeps others from having a chance to share. If time allows, you can always come back to those who need a bit more time to share after everyone has had a chance to initially share.

This study is focused on people having the opportunity to share and process. This is key to the success of this study and small group process. Processing trauma created by a crisis or natural disaster is key in people healing from these sorts of things. This study offers the opportunity for processing and healing from a shared crisis and/or natural disaster.

All the videos for the series are linked to the word 'Video', so you just need to click on the word when you have the PDF opened on your device. If that does not work, you can access all of the videos on VIMEO by copying and pasting this link into your browser: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/7177070>. There is also an introductory video which you can access with this URL: <https://vimeo.com/422914504>



#1

Bearing One Another's Burdens

LISTENING WELL

Often when we face difficulties, some major life-altering interruption in life, we tend to just get through it and press on without ever really talking about how we experienced emotionally, physically and spiritually. It's that mentality that says, "It happened; no need to dwell on it." And so, we "pull ourselves up by our bootstraps" and move on only to find out that in the long run, that doesn't work.

The truth is, that if we don't process our feelings and emotions about painful and/or difficult things, sooner or later the emotions and feelings fester under the surface causing us to find ways to cover them up in ways that are not helpful to us or those around us. The research following natural disasters shows that mental health issues increase by over 100% in a community following a natural and/or major crisis. The statistics are staggering.



The research also shows that when people simply talk about what happened and how it made them feel, that this kind of de-stressing actually helps people process the scars of the disaster or crisis. And in return, this lowers the negative effects of a disaster on their emotional and spiritual health.

Interestingly enough, the Bible gives directions how to do this. In Galatians 6:2 Paul instructs us to “bear one another’s burdens.”

These words of Paul apply to all kinds of burdens, not just the burdens that would follow someone’s fall into sin. Paul’s command implies that we must always bear one another’s burdens. And that in bearing one another’s burdens we indeed fulfill the law of Christ.

"bear one another's burdens"

Galatians 6:2

In other words, by the act of compassion and self-sacrifice in bearing one another's burdens, we are carrying out the love of Christ and His call upon our lives.

Paul's command to carry one another's burdens not only deals with the physical aspects of bearing one another's burdens, but the spiritual and emotional aspects also. Thus, listening and sharing is part of this "bearing" that he commands us to do. When we are vulnerable and transparent with one another by listening and sharing, we begin to love one another in the Lord and are full filling what He has called us to be and do in His name.

This session is about sharing and listening to one another's individual experiences, feelings and emotions following this shared crisis and/or disaster.

While we may have experienced the crisis and/or disaster together, each of us has uniquely experienced it as individuals also. Let's bear one another's burdens and be Jesus to one another by listening and sharing.



Sharing & Listening

Make sure that each person has an opportunity to share their answers and thoughts with the group.

1. How did you personally experience the time of crisis?

2. What was the hardest part?

3. How are you feeling about what happened?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes,

“Just as love to God begins with listening to his Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them.”

Video 1

Click on the word VIDEO when you have this document open on your device.

WHEN THE PAIN IS DEEP

LAMENTING HELPS

Sometimes it's necessary to process our pain and experience with the Lord himself through a Biblical lament.

The Lord in his word encourages us to come to him with anything and everything. He cares and his word says that he is close to the broken-hearted. So, we can come to him as King David did many times through a Biblical Lament.

What is a Biblical Lament? A lament includes several basic components:

1. Addressing the Lord – as the one who holds all things in his hands.
2. Recalling his past faithfulness.
3. Complaint – the problem/issue you are bringing before the Lord.
4. Statement of faith.

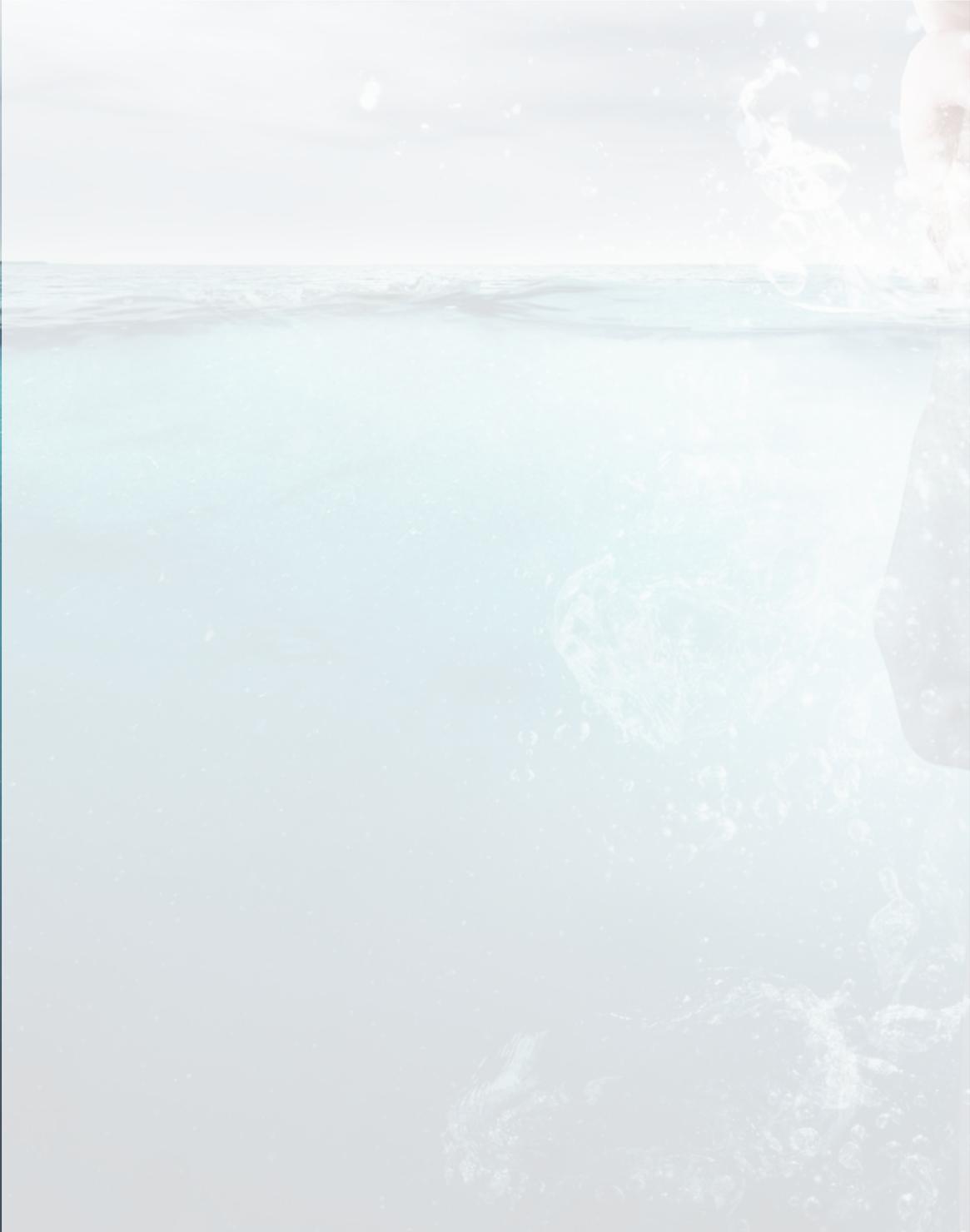
WHEN THERE ARE NO WORDS

Sometimes we are deeply troubled and have no words. Sometimes a present crisis can trigger unresolved pain from the past. Yet, we have no words for it. If that is the case, drawing out your trauma can access that pain which is stored in a part of our brain that does not "use" words.

If you are feeling this way, you might consider drawing out your stress or trauma out. It can be just a simple drawing.

BIBLICAL LAMENTING

EXPRESSING THE PAIN





#2

Grieving the Losses Together

PROCESSING THE PAIN

In this second session, we want to begin by sharing with one another our laments. Speaking the lament outloud helps each of us in processing and destressing what has happened.

Take time for those who are willing to share their laments one by one with the group.

Lamenting in some ways is a form of grieving. Sometimes Christians get the idea that it's a lack of faith if we grieve "too much", or grieve at all! The Lord, through the Apostle Paul, gives us permission to grieve, but to do so with hope. Grieving is part of this side of heaven. Grieving is not only something we do when we lose a loved one, but when we lose a job, a relationship – any loss. It is healthy to grieve. And believe it not, even good changes can cause us to grieve, like a child's graduation, a job promotion, or moving to a new neighborhood.

Indeed, when life is interrupted by a crisis or natural disaster, there are usually some losses and changes. And grieving these losses and changes is a key in moving forward healthily.



So, in this session to want to give one another the opportunity to talk about those things that we have lost and are grieving due to crisis or natural disaster.

Again, it is important to allow enough time for each person to be able to share. Being heard is so important in processing a stressful situation. Don't be afraid to affirm one another's shared grief when someone shares something that you feel too.

It's OK to grieve. It is part of life on this side of heaven. The Bible tells us that our heavenly Father is familiar with loss. It is not foreign to him. In fact, scripture tells us that Jesus is acquainted with sorrow, not just any sorrow, but your sorrow! He understands your pain. He draws near to the brokenhearted to bring you comfort and to assure you that you are not alone in your loss. Grieving is a journey, and we all grieve differently. But as we grieve, as we noted earlier, we do so in God's hope.

"He draws near to the brokenhearted"

Psalm 34:18

"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of deep sorrows who was no stranger to suffering and grief. We hid our faces from him in disgust and considered him a nobody, not worthy of respect. Yet he was the one who carried our sicknesses and endured the torment of our sufferings. We viewed him as one who was being punished for something he himself had done, as one who was struck down by God and brought low. But it was because of our rebellious deeds that he was pierced and because of our sins that he was crushed. He endured the punishment that made us completely whole, and in his wounding we found our healing."

Isaiah 53:3-5 TPT

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

2 Corinthians 1:3-4



It's very important that we not minimize what we are grieving nor what others are grieving. By listening to one another we in fact honor each other and are able to speak God's comfort to one another.

Sharing & Listening

Make sure that each person has an opportunity to share their answers and thoughts with the group.

1. What has changed for you due to the crisis?

2. Do you feel a sense of loss or grief about any of these changes?

3. What will you miss the most?

“No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear.”

— C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

Video II

NO SHORTCUTS

NO BYPASSING

We sometimes think that we can bypass our feelings by covering them up with a type of spiritual fortitude of pressing on without dealing with our feelings. This can become a potential emotional train wreck waiting to happen.

No one likes to feel pain, including emotional pain. So when we do have painful emotions such as grief and those caused by loss, we sometimes attempt to by-pass the feelings and press on "in-faith," so to speak. We end up pulling our up our bootstraps in "faith" and don't process our feelings. It's like spiritually sugar coating the wounds, but only for the emotional wounds to fester and become more of a problem.

Think of it this way; imagine that you have a deep cut in the palm of your hand. The wound is deep, it's bleeding, you most likely need stitches, and it certainly needs to be cleaned out and bandaged. Yet you do nothing other than declaring that you are going to press on in faith. What do you think could happen to your hand? Unless the Lord healed your hand supernaturally, you could end up with an infection in the wound and possibly lose your hand or life!

Unprocessed grief can easily become an infection in our day to day living. Processing the grief, talking about it, feeling it is like cleaning out the wound, getting the "stitches" if necessary, and then allowing the Lord's healing to begin. You see, unless the Lord has supernaturally removed your grief, you have to process it. Unprocessed emotions such as grief can cause a lot of emotional and spiritual turmoil for us that often cause even more issues for us "down-the-line."



FEELING TO HEAL

LIST HERE WHAT YOU ARE FEELING

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#3

Repurposed Pain

REFRAMING OUR PERSPECTIVE

The Lord is in the work of redemption. He not only has redeemed us on the cross, but he also redeems our lives even on this side of heaven. He is able to take all of our brokenness, hurts and even our pain and repurpose it. Redeeming it as "liquid gold" for his Kingdom. Romans 8:28 gives us that promise:

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

There is no situation, no life, and no pain that is out of his redemptive reach – which includes your situation, your life, and your pain! The Lord never wastes pain. Never! His word tells us that he makes all things new, and in doing so he reframes our perspective to the point we can even rejoice in our suffering. Why? Because we know that it produces perseverance which is all part of the Lord's redemption of our pain.



"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." James 1:2-3

One might argue that considering difficulties pure joy is THE sign of the work of the Holy Spirit! Why? Because it takes the Holy Spirit's work within us to bring us to seeing our problems from a perspective of joy. None of us from a strictly broken human perspective believe that there is good, much less joy that can be gleaned from difficulties. Only the Holy Spirit can work that within us.

Within our difficulties of this life, the Lord, through his Holy Spirit, empowers us to see our problems from a perspective of gaining, learning and growing through the problems. Therefore, we can rejoice, and have joy, when we face any trial or tribulation. In other words, the Lord, by his Spirit, reframes our perspective on the adversity we experience in this life. And as the Lord works this within us, we grow in our ability to persevere through all things in this life.

"Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say rejoice!"

Philippians 4:4

When the Apostle Paul wrote Philippians he was in prison. Yet, Philippians is known as the book of joy in the New Testament! How can that be? Well, because Paul saw the redemption of his trial and tribulation as advancing the Gospel.

In Philippians 1:12- he writes, *"Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, [b] that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard[c] and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear."*

He had a "reframed" view of the situation. He was seeing and understanding how the Lord was using his "problem" for the good of the Kingdom.

In the last chapter of Philippians (Philippians 4:4-7) Paul says, *"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* Remarkable words considering he was in prison!

There is purpose in our pain. And the Lord never wastes the pain, he repurposes it, reframes it, grows us, teaches us, uses it for his good and through it we learn perseverance.



Sharing & Listening

Make sure that each person has an opportunity to share their answers and thoughts with the group.

1. Has the Lord repurposed the pain of any of your past trials and situations? If so, please share...

2. Are there good things that have come about through this crisis? If so, what are they?

3. Counting it pure joy takes time. Are you counting what you have gone through as pure joy yet? Why?

4. Can you see a way forward into the future? What does it look like?

Video III

PURPOSE WITHIN THE PAIN

FINDING THE GIFT

Finding the gift within the pain means that you and I have to have taken the time to grieve and process the pain, and in doing so, we will find gifts that the Lord gives even through the pain and difficulties that we go through.

Too often within Christianity we find some very faulty doctrine. And one of those false doctrines, something that is taught but is not Biblical is this: if you believe and are faithful to the Lord, you won't have so many troubles. Or put another way, we tend to think that if we are facing a trial or tribulation we wonder what we did "wrong" as though by doing things "right" we shouldn't have to face trials and tribulations. This kind of thinking simply is not Biblical.

In fact, Jesus, himself, tells us that in this world we will have many troubles.

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." John 16:33

Finding the Lord's gifts that he gives through the pains of life requires that we look for those gifts. Are you looking for the gifts?



"Trauma creates change you don't choose.
Healing is about creating change you do choose."

-Michelle Rosenthal

6 Ways Pain Has a Purpose

GIFTS OF PAIN

Take time to read through these as a group. And as you do, feel free to comment on them thinking about prior painful or difficult situations in your life, as well as the recent crisis (natural disaster) that your group has been processing together.

1. YOU DISCOVER THE STRENGTH OF YOUR FAITH.

When James talks about the trials of life he describes them as a test, but not so God can see how strong your faith is. God already knows that. Pain is an opportunity for you to see how strong your faith is.

2. PAIN EXPANDS YOUR ENDURANCE.

There is no easy way to build up endurance. You simply have to endure something.

3. PAIN MATURES YOU.

When perseverance finishes its work you are mature, and maturity helps you see the world differently.

4. PAIN TEACHES YOU WHAT PLEASURE NEVER COULD.

When **James** says that perseverance will lead to completeness, he's referring to a fuller scope and understanding of life that only pain can teach you.

5. PAIN GIVES YOU WHAT PLEASURE NEVER COULD.

Pain heightens your senses and gives you a greater awareness of the more important things in life: love, God, family, hope.

6. PAIN IS THE PRICE FOR A GREATER REWARD.

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Corinthians 4:16-17, NIV)



#4

Moving Forward A NEW NORMAL

Besides the Lord, who changes not, life is full of change. Some say that one of the most consistent things in life is change. Something happens, life is interrupted temporarily, and we process what happened, assimilate the "new normal" into our lives, and move forward.

Might it be possible that the Lord allows all of the changes in this life so that we come to trust him who never changes? Change that is good and negative both bring stress with it. Many times we forget that even change that we choose can and does bring stress with it.

Think about deciding to move to a new house. Moving alone is listed as one of the top ten stressors in life! So, how much more difficult can change be when it comes about because of a crisis?

Moving forward after a crisis usually means moving forward into a "new normal," either someone is missing, life has changed, or the experience itself has changed you. Any prolonged stressful situation can and does create change, and the change is usually unwanted.



The crisis and the stress interrupt life and leave us with a new normal. A "normal" that is different than life was before the crisis. It can easily make us resentful as though we have no say in what life will be like moving forward. Yet the truth is, we usually have some say in what the "new normal" will be like; if nothing else, we have a say about our attitude about life following the crisis.

In Philippians 3:12-16, Paul says, *"Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you."*

Paul went through a lot of adversities in his life. From one crisis to the next, he kept pressing forward. There comes a point after taking time to grieve a crisis and reframing our perspective that we have a choice to make. In our new normal, we can decide as Paul did to press on to the goal and forget what lies behind us.

"Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead..."

Philippians 3:13

Spend time reading these passages. How do they apply to you today as you face a new normal?

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."

Isaiah 43:18-19

"Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"

Matthew 6:27

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Jeremiah 29:11

"For we walk by faith, not by sight."

2 Corinthians 5:7

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, 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 your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalms 23



Sharing & Listening

Make sure that each person has an opportunity to share their answers and thoughts with the group.

1. What do you believe your "new normal" will look like?

2. What are you most looking forward to when life gets to back to a "new normal?"

3. What are some of your goals for the future?

“Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.”

— Corrie Ten Boom

Video IV

FORWARD IN FAITH

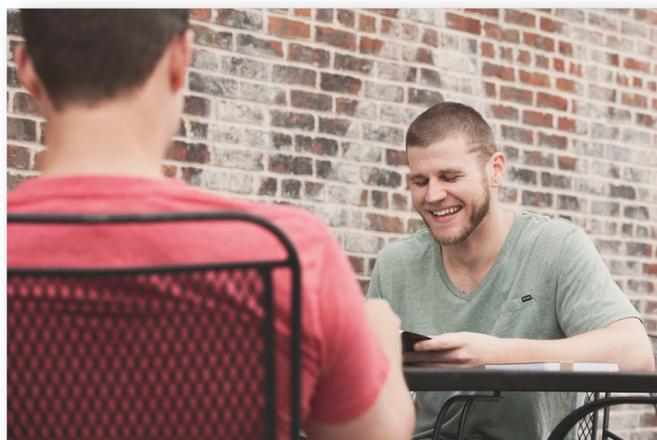
FAITHING IT

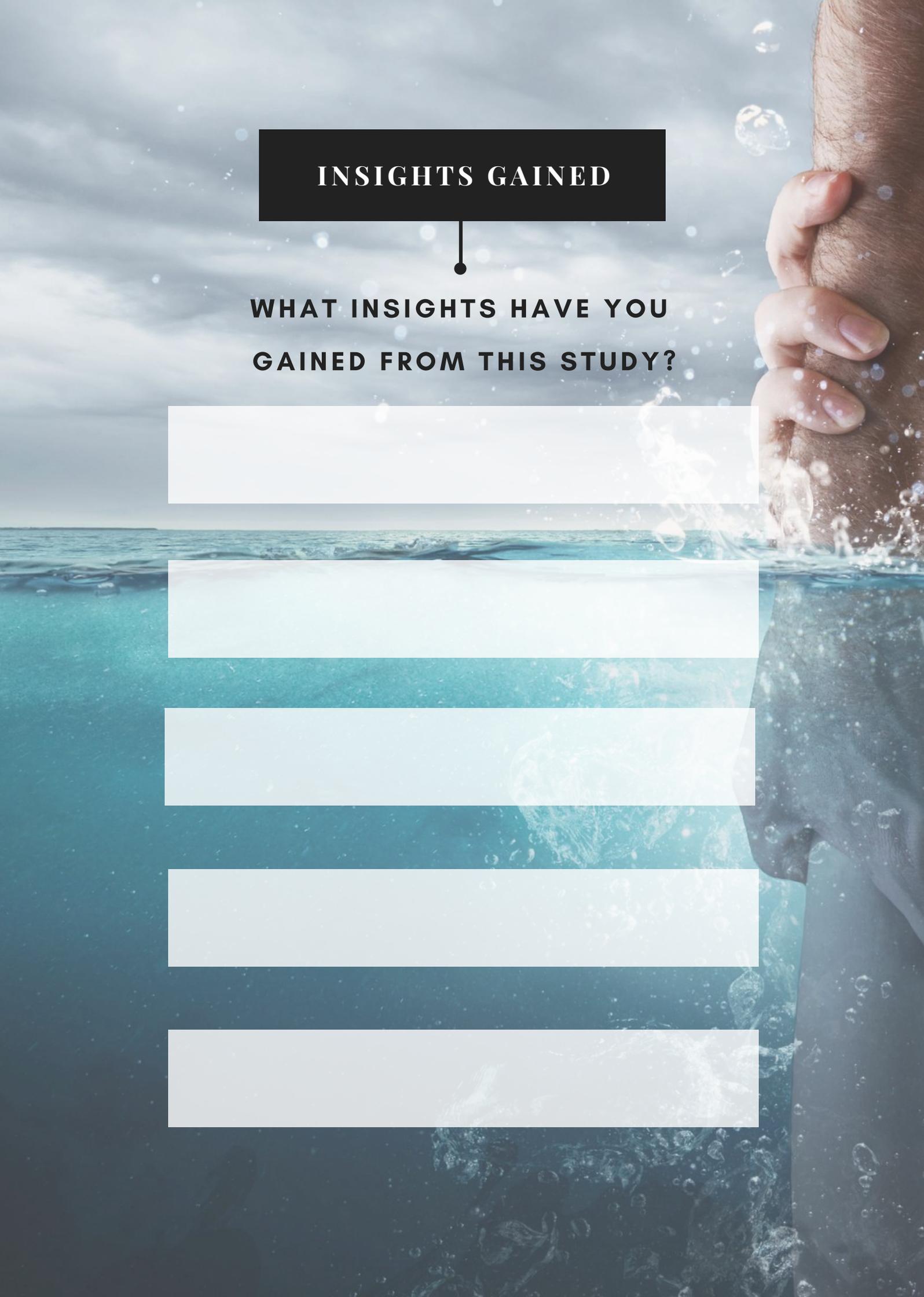
Sometimes you have to "faith-it" until you make it.

Within this life, we usually have little control over what happens. We can't always control the people and situations around us. But we can control how we react to those things we have no control over. However, we can take control of our thinking as Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 10:5, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

Our feelings come about from what we believe and what we think. So, sometimes we have to move forward in life when the future is unknown to us. We have to control our thinking about the future.

In other words, even though my feelings and emotions about the future may be rather shaky, I choose to believe, I choose to think about it in terms of the Lord being in control and having my best in mind. And sooner or later, our feelings and emotions catch up with our thinking and believing. To move forward following a crisis, sometimes you have to simply "faith-it" until you make it.





INSIGHTS GAINED

**WHAT INSIGHTS HAVE YOU
GAINED FROM THIS STUDY?**

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our hope



**We hope that this study was
a blessing to your group!**

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PROCESSING TOGETHER: A SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY



A Four-Part Small Group Bible Study Following a Shared Crisis and/or Natural Disaster

This study is focused on people having the opportunity to share and process. This is key to the success of this study and small group process. Processing trauma created by a crisis or natural disaster is key in people healing from these sorts of life events. This study offers the opportunity for processing and healing from a shared crisis and/or natural disaster.

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