

SESSION 1

Feelings...

Objective:

To understand that God loves us so deeply that He suffers with His children.

Icebreaker: "This or that?"

Preparation:

Place large signs on opposite walls - one saying "THIS"; and the other saying "THAT." Add one more sign for the middle of the room (on the floor, a table or chair) labelled, "I DON'T CARE." Participants will "vote" on which response is better by running to the side of the room you indicate for each option.

For example, shout "sports car" and point to the "THIS" sign; then shout "or pickup truck?" and point to the "THAT" sign. If your group is sometimes a bit noisy, consider making a large card with each "This or That" option on it so the choices are clear, regardless of the noise level.

Create your own list or use the options below.

There are a lot of things that are hard to clearly communicate; for example, how much we *love* chemistry class (or not); who we have a secret crush on; the fact that we actually *do love* language arts; and even some of *our feelings*.

Of course, we sometimes share other feelings without any hesitation; for instance, whether we like (mention a local sports team) or (mention a rival); whether we prefer this pizza place or that one; which band we like best; and the list goes on....

We're going to play a game of "This or That." You'll tell me how you feel about all of these options. Run to the sign that tells us how you feel about these *highly* controversial topics. If you choose the "this" option (point to the "THIS" sign), run to this sign. If you choose the "that" option (point to the "THAT" sign), run to that sign. If you really don't care, just stand here in the middle with the "I DON'T CARE" sign. Let's go!

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• sports car or pickup truck?• fruit or meat?• coffee or pop?• video games or board games?• books or hikes?• Disney® or Marvel®?• clean toilets or shovel sidewalks?• potato chips or French fries? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• hamburger or hot dog?• Jell-O® or pudding?• runners or flip-flops?• matching or mismatched socks?• name brand item or discount equivalent?• chocolate or vanilla?• Facebook or Pinterest?• quiet space or crazy crowd? <p><i>(You might have some uncomfortable glances around the room, since this is a more personal question.)</i></p> |
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Instruct participants to be seated.

We have strong *feelings* about a lot of things. Those feelings dictate how we respond when someone brings them up. The fact is, it's not important that we let the world know whether we like Coke® or Pepsi®. Sometimes, though, life throws unexpected and painful "stuff" at us, and we just react. We do that because of who we are; individuals who are deeply moved by some things. That could be a death in the family, a breakup, a petty "friend," or even a test that keeps us awake all night. I'm going to give you some more, "This or That" options. Please answer these questions in your own mind. When you're facing a hard time, do you opt for:

- A Facebook rant, or do you deal with it by yourself?
- If you call someone, do you call a friend or talk to a parent or leader?
- Do you cry it out, or punch the wall?

We know there's a lot of suffering in the world. We've learned from Richard Wurmbbrand's life - and many others - that some of this suffering *is a direct result of following God*. Where is God in all of it? Does He experience pain? Is He angry when His children are hurt? Does He ever cry? What is He *feeling* when we go through pain?¹

Isaiah 63:9 says, "In all their afflictions, He was afflicted." God... the unchanging God... was *afflicted* by the *afflictions of His people*.

What do the following passages tell us about God's interaction with people?

- Jeremiah 48:31,32 (He weeps)
- Isaiah 53:3,4 (Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief)
- Ephesians 4:30 (He can be grieved)

Christians believe that God doesn't change. If He doesn't change, how can He respond this way towards people who are *just... so... emotional*? Is God really that emotional too?

Think about your favourite doctor. What makes him or her your favourite? It's likely because that doctor shows a caring attitude. When that person became a doctor, did he or she believe that it would be the easiest job possible? Of course not! That doctor stepped into the career to make a difference in the world and *chose* to care. When you care that much, you often feel what others are feeling. Why? Because we always enjoy it? No, because that doctor is truly a caring individual... He or she chooses to sympathize with your suffering.

Now let's think about our Heavenly Father. Mentally answer the following "This or That" options to indicate GOD'S perspective. (You can point to the "THIS" and "THAT" signs.)

- Have a perfect Heaven without imperfect people (like us!), or dive into their pain in order to have a relationship?
- Write us off, or sacrifice His Son so we could know Him?
- Leave us to struggle on our own, or suffer *with* us?

¹ This addresses the doctrine of impassibility. We encourage you to read *In the Shadow of the Cross* for a thorough discussion on this matter, starting at page 89.

Feel free to reword the following question for your group if needed.

Now I am looking for some of your thoughts. If our Heavenly Father actually is the kind of God who walks with us through our pain, is He controlled by our experiences or does He choose to enter into our lives, *even in our worst pain*, because of Who He is: a God of love, compassion, sympathy and... *pain?*

(Hold up the "I DON'T CARE" sign.) We know that *this* is never an option for God! (Rip the sign in half.)

Consider these statements from three different Christian authors:

"If God does not grieve, then can He love at all?"²

"God chooses to suffer; the God of suffering does not passively endure pain, but actively chooses to embrace it."³

"When those who are suffering cry out, 'God, where are You?' God replies with a name, 'Emmanuel.'"⁴

God loves you! He feels your pain... and He feels the pain of every persecuted believer!

Wrap-up questions:

1. What does the name, "Emmanuel" mean?

"God with us."

Richard Wurmland's guards worked hard to convince him that he was entirely alone; that he was forgotten. How would the fact that God is *Emmanuel* have affected his time "alone"?

He could talk to God and listen to Him. He could pray for His friends and family. He could remain hopeful.

Encourage the participants to think creatively.

Verses for more discussion if you have the time:

Psalm 139:7-10 - No matter where we are, God is with us.

John 14:15-17 - Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit will be with us and in us.

2. Read Matthew 25:34-40. While prison ministry and feeding the poor of any religious persuasion are great ministries, who is Jesus specifically talking about in *this* passage (verse 40)?

Those who belong to Him.

How can we offer water, bring food and clothing, or visit in prison those who are part of Jesus' family? In other words, how can we be the hands and heart of *Emmanuel... God with us...* to those who are suffering for their faith?

Encourage the participants to be creative. They can write letters, have fundraisers, speak up on behalf of persecuted believers, etc.

For more information visit www.vomcanada.com/take-action.htm.

3. Think about a time that was very hard for you, or perhaps even something that you're going through right now. Understanding that God loves you and *feels your pain*, how does that influence your perspective?

Give them a moment to consider this.

How can you comfort persecuted Christians with the same truth? (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)

Consider providing small cards so the students can write notes of encouragement to prisoners of the faith, assuring these imprisoned believers that God is there with them. A list of names and addresses can be found at www.PrisonerAlert.com.