session 2 study guide

the stress of mood swings

starter

PET PEEVES: Gather the group members together into teams of three or four people and ask them to answer the following questions in their groups:

1. What are my two greatest pet peeves?
2. What is one thing in my life that I really don't like?
3. If I could change something about my family, what would it be?
4. When I become an adult, what will I let teenagers do?
5. If I were the person in charge of teenagers, what would I do?

Ask volunteers to share their responses and describe the attitudes/moods that accompany their feelings about each question. Explain that we all have moods and attitudes that pull us down at times, which are influenced by a number of different factors. Recognizing how our emotions affect us can help us manage our feelings in healthy ways.

message

King David was an emotional man. He was also an honest man. When you read through the psalms he wrote, you can see his emotional ups and downs—and there were some pretty serious mood triggers going on in his life as well. However, David found the key to dealing with his emotions and trials through his solid relationship with God. He knew that no matter what happened, God would always be there to help him. He knew God would always be faithful to him, even when he wasn't so faithful in return.

grateful for God's faithfulness

One psalm that David wrote to express his gratitude to God for His faithfulness was Psalm 145:

> *I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. . . . Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The* LORD *is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. The* LORD *upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. . . . The* LORD *is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made. The* LORD *is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.*

1. What are some words in this psalm that lead you to believe God is going to be around for a long time—forever, in fact?

2. According to these verses, when God promises to do something, can you trust that He will do it? Why?

3. Look at the verses below. After each one, write down how God shows His people He is faithful and worthy of trust.

For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock (Psalm 27:5).

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

the faithful father

Another example of God's faithful love is found in a parable Jesus told in Luke 15:11-24:

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the estate." So he divided his property between them.

Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men." So he got up and went to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

1. What did the son ask the father to give him in the beginning of the parable?

2. What did the younger son do with the money? What happened as a result?

3. What happened in the country where he went to live?

4. How would you describe the mood of the younger son?

5. What made him finally decide to return home to his father?

6. What happens when the son gets close to his father's home? What do you think the father was doing in order to see the son "while he was still a long way off"?

7. How do you think the younger son see himself at this point?

8. What do the actions of the father say about his character and how he sees his son?

dig

The word "faithful" means "having or showing true and constant support or loyalty; deserving trust; keeping your promises or doing what you are supposed to do."[1] Given this definition, one opposite of faithfulness would be moodiness. Our moods change constantly, so they are very unreliable for us to use when making decisions. However, faithfulness is a reflection of God's character that exists in *spite* of our moods. Faithfulness will help us weather life's storms regardless of what we are feeling.

1. Consider the parable of the lost son that Jesus told in Luke 15:11-24. If the father represents God and the younger son represents us, which of the following indicate how God sees us when our emotions and impulses pull us away from Him?

   - ❑ He gets upset and tells us to snap out of it.
   - ❑ He feels disappointed that we can't seem to get our emotions under control.
   - ❑ He loves us and is always there with His arms opened wide no matter what mood we are in.
   - ❑ He no longer trusts us and keeps us at a distance.

2. In Psalm 145:13, David writes, "The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down." Let's say you make a bad decision and you "fall." Based on this verse, which of the following would likely be God's response to you?

   - ❑ God leaves you on your own with the parting words, "I told you so! Maybe next time you'll listen to Me!"
   - ❑ God is so embarrassed by your mistake that He pretends not to know you.
   - ❑ God runs to you and scoops you up in His arms.
   - ❑ God laughs at you for being so foolish.

3. Put a *T* next to the statements you think are true and an *F* next to the ones you think are false.

   ___ The Lord only acts righteously toward people who do good.
   ___ The Lord is always faithful regardless of the situation.
   ___ The Lord is righteous no matter what.
   ___ If you call on the Lord for help, it had better be an emergency or He will be angry with you.
   ___ The Lord is faithful only to those who have faith in Him.
   ___ The Lord is near to a person who calls to Him in truth.

4. Based on the verses we have studied so far, how can we know that God is the same yesterday, today and forever?

apply

Throughout the Bible, God shows that He is always faithful to those who put their trust in Him. As David writes, "Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me" (Psalm 54:4). But there will be others in our lives who will be less helpful when we are feeling moody or depressed, as the following skit illustrates. Read this skit to yourself or act it out as part of a group.

the no-help helpers

Cast: Moody Kid, Visitor #1, Visitor #2, Visitor #3
Time: The present
Place: Moody Kid's home

(As the skit begins, Moody Kid is sitting on a chair in the front of the room facing center stage. He is looking down and frowning. He remains this way throughout the skit.)

Visitor #1: Hey, c'mon. We're all going to the game. (Pulls on Moody Kid's arm.) What's the matter with you? You're no fun anymore. Well, if that's the way you feel, we'll just go without you. (Visitor #1 leaves. Moody Kid moves his chair a bit to the right.)

Visitor #2: What've you got to be miserable about, anyway? Now Ted—*he's* got problems. Andrea dumped him, he's failing math and he got cut from the basketball team. So snap out of it! (Visitor #2 waves her hand in disgust and walks off. Moody Kid moves his chair a bit more to the right, so that he is sitting sideways to the audience.)

Visitor #3: Hey, don't you know that good Christians don't have mood swings? If you'd just pray and read your Bible, you'd be fine. I'm never moody, and it's all because I'm a Christian. (Visitor #3 walks off, nose in the air. Moody Kid again moves his chair to the right, to the point that his back faces the audience.)[2]

1. Based on Moody Kid's body language, how do you think he or she was feeling?

2. What assumptions did each visitor make? Why wasn't their advice helpful?

3. How do you want friends to treat you if you are feeling moody?

God loves us and accepts us the way we are. He is waiting to help us, but He asks us to choose to participate in handling our moods. When we feel moody, we can choose to allow our emotions to overwhelm us, causing us to withdraw, be fearful, angry and distrustful of God; or we can turn to God—who is always there for us—and trust that He will take care of us. Along with prayer and digging into God's Word, God will also use people in our lives—such as a Christian friend, a parent, a pastor or a counselor—to help us. If negative moods persist, we can get feedback from some of these people.

triggers and symptoms of mood swings

To better understand our mood swings, it is helpful to look at some of the things that occur that often trigger them. Place an *X* or checkmark beside any of the following that you have experienced recently:

- ❑ Academic problems
- ❑ Alcohol abuse by family member(s)
- ❑ Physical and emotional changes associated with puberty and adolescence
- ❑ Domestic violence
- ❑ Drug abuse by family member(s)
- ❑ Emotional or psychological problems of family member(s)
- ❑ Excessive discipline
- ❑ Family tensions
- ❑ Fear of failure
- ❑ Illness or death of a close friend
- ❑ Illness or death of a family member
- ❑ Inadequate housing
- ❑ Inconsistent discipline
- ❑ Lack of effective communication between family members
- ❑ Living in a dangerous neighborhood
- ❑ Living in a single-parent household
- ❑ Moving/changing schools
- ❑ One or both parents are frequently absent from home
- ❑ Overcrowding at home
- ❑ Parental issues
- ❑ Parental separation or divorce
- ❑ Peer pressures
- ❑ Personal health problems
- ❑ Personal setbacks, disappointments or embarrassments
- ❑ Physical deformities
- ❑ Physical or emotional neglect
- ❑ Physical, sexual or psychological abuse
- ❑ Racism
- ❑ Rejection by family members, friends, peers or others
- ❑ School or athletic performance anxieties
- ❑ Sexual impulses
- ❑ Unrealistic parental expectations or demands
- ❑ Unrealistic teacher expectations or demands

Now place an X or checkmark beside any of the following symptoms you have experienced recently:

- ❑ Aggressiveness
- ❑ Anxiety
- ❑ Apathy
- ❑ Biting nails
- ❑ Boredom
- ❑ Clenching jaws
- ❑ Constipation
- ❑ Crying
- ❑ Depression
- ❑ Diarrhea
- ❑ Dizziness
- ❑ Eating disorders
- ❑ Excessive frustration
- ❑ Grinding teeth
- ❑ Habitual clearing of throat
- ❑ Headaches
- ❑ Hostility
- ❑ Inattention
- ❑ Insecurity
- ❑ Lethargy
- ❑ Loss of confidence
- ❑ Loud or rapid speech
- ❑ Mood swings
- ❑ Muscle aches
- ❑ Nightmares
- ❑ Nit-picking
- ❑ Pacing or wandering
- ❑ Picking at skin
- ❑ Panicky fears
- ❑ Persistent fatigue
- ❑ Poor concentration
- ❑ Poor self-esteem
- ❑ Rapid heartbeat
- ❑ Rashes and other skin disorders
- ❑ Restlessness
- ❑ Rudeness or use of shocking language
- ❑ Self-neglect
- ❑ Short-term memory loss
- ❑ Silence
- ❑ Stomachaches
- ❑ Stuttering
- ❑ Suicidal thoughts, gestures or attempts
- ❑ Tapping fingers or feet
- ❑ Teary-eyedness
- ❑ Tics or twitches
- ❑ Ulcers
- ❑ Unexplained irritability
- ❑ Unpreparedness
- ❑ Unusual perspiring
- ❑ Use/abuse of alcohol or other drugs
- ❑ Violence
- ❑ Withdrawal
- ❑ Worrying

coping with mood swings

Remember that addressing your mood swings requires a conscious choice on your part. God won't force you into action or magically remove a negative attitude without your permission—though He will be there to help and guide you along the way. So, when your emotions seem to be raging out of control, review the mood-swing triggers list above to see what might be causing

the problem, and then watch for any of the symptoms. In addition, it is important to guard yourself against these attacks.

1. Read Ephesians 6:10-18. How are we supposed to fight against things that attack us?

2. God gives us spiritual "armor" so we can stand firm and remember His faithfulness when we are under attack. Which of the pieces of armor that Paul listed do you most need to equip right now? Why?

3. If we are using God's power and are wearing His armor, whose fight is this?

4. Another thing you can do when you are feeling moody is to expose yourself to God's positive input. According to Philippians 4:8, on what types of things are you to focus your mind?

   whatever is _____
   whatever is _____
   whatever is _____
   whatever is _____
   whatever is _____
   whatever is _____
   anything [that] is _____ or _____

5. Choose one of the items from this list. What are some practical habits you could develop to start focusing your mind more on this thing?

6. Finally, when mood swings hit, you can (and *should*) ask God for help. The psalmist understood this well when he wrote, "O LORD, the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you" (Psalm 88:1). What is one situation in your life right now that is causing your emotions to go out of control?

7. Have you prayed about this situation? If not, write a short note to God asking Him for help. Remember that when you ask Him honestly, He will be there to help you!

reflect

As you conclude this study, remember that there is no situation that is too big for God to handle. Also remember that God loves you just the way you are—even when you are moody—and He wants to help you deal with your emotions.

1. Think about a stressful situation in the past that made your moods swing out of control. Do you remember having any physical symptoms (nausea, headache and so on) at the time? If so, what were they?

2. What was going on inside you? How did you feel emotionally?

3. Did you try to let go of the negative emotions and give them to God? If so, what did you do? What was the result?

4. Did you have a friend come beside you for support? If so, what did that person do to help you through this tough time?

5. How did you see God at work through this experience?

6. If you were facing this same situation today, what would you do differently to handle it?

7. Do you have a friend who is moody? If so, how can you help that person?

meditation

As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD *is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him. For who is God besides the* LORD*? And who is the Rock except our God? It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect.*
PSALM 18:30-32

Notes

1. Merriam-Webster Learner's Dictionary, s.v. "faithful." http://www.learnersdictionary.com/ search/faithful.
2. When Kids Have Personal Problems (Elgin, IL: David C. Cook Publishing, 1991), p. 13-A. Used by permission.