

# 1

# Naming Our Big Feelings

PSALM 137:1–6



## GOAL

Children are introduced to the practice of lament and begin to recognize naming their hurts and struggles as a spiritual practice grounded in recognition of God’s love for them.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



## PRAYER

Holy God, be present with me as I explore the sacredness of lament with these children. May I walk with them, attuned to their wisdom and your love. Amen.

## THIS SESSION

Lament is a spiritual practice that arises out of hope but is firmly rooted in human experiences of hurt. The practice of lament is often ignored in modern spirituality, and it is a forgotten source of hope. This session explores the practice of naming hurts to God who loves us and hears us. This is a foundational piece of the practice of lament.

## THE BIBLE STORY

After our Jewish ancestors watched their city Jerusalem destroyed in 587 BCE, they wrote much of the lament literature that we have as part of our Scriptures. They had seen their community enslaved, people torn from their homes and their land. They felt abandoned by God. Psalm 137 was written as an expression of the writer’s intense feelings of loss and abandonment by God, written to the God who listens.

## CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Understanding feelings and the need or desire to numb or deny the unpleasant ones is at the root of many mental health issues. Yet young children can be our greatest teachers when it comes to willingness to name how they are feeling and what has made them feel sad, angry, and hurt. Having young children name feelings not only helps them recognize and differentiate feelings but also validates these feelings as real and important.

## SESSION PREPARATION

- “A Cozy Corner” (p. 8) Gather blankets and pillows; books such as children’s story Bibles, board books, and picture books; a music player and meditative music; objects for reflection such as a sand timer or meditation or sensory bottle; and other items of your choosing for a cozy corner.
- “How Do I Feel Today?” (p. 8): Laminate or cover Resource Page 1 in clear contact paper.


Depending on the options you choose:

- “Sad Feeling Rocks” (p. 10): Obtain river rocks. Laminate or cover Resource Page 3 in clear contact paper.
- “*The Rabbit Listened*” (p. 10): Obtain *The Rabbit Listened* by Cori Doerrfeld (Dial Books, 2018) or use the YouTube video “The Rabbit Listened—Virtual Read Aloud—Listening—Shon’s Stories” ([bit.ly/FMRabbitListened](https://bit.ly/FMRabbitListened), 3:37).
- “Feeling Sad Is OK” (p. 11): Obtain *When Sadness Is at Your Door* by Eva Eland (Random House Books for Young Reader, 2019) or use the YouTube video “When Sadness Is at Your Door by Eva Eland Read by Lolly Hopwood” ([bit.ly/FMSadnessDoor](https://bit.ly/FMSadnessDoor), 7:13).




# GETTING STARTED

- Blankets and pillows; books such as children’s story Bibles, board books, and picture books; a music player and meditative music; objects for reflection such as a sand timer or meditation or sensory bottle; and other items of your choosing for a cozy corner

 Keep the cozy corner in place, or plan to use the items to recreate it, for sessions 2, 3, and 4.

- Internet-connected device (optional)

 Don’t worry if the children don’t pick up on the lyrics to sing along. Exposure to sacred music is meaningful, especially music that clearly exhibits deep emotion, as this hymn does.

- Resource Page 1, laminated or covered in clear contact paper
- Two sets of small stickers, such as stars or colored dots

## A COZY CORNER



Place the items you have gathered for a cozy corner in the room. Greet the children as they enter, and invite them to create a cozy corner using supplies you have gathered and they find in the room. Explain that this cozy corner is a space for them to go when they want comfort, quiet, or peace. Encourage the children to set up the cozy corner as they wish, stressing that it is not a place for play, so toys and noisy items would not be appropriate.

When everyone has arrived, gather in the cozy corner. Wonder about each of the items and why they might be helpful in this cozy corner. Encourage the children to use the cozy corner when they are feeling overwhelmed or need a moment of quiet. Tell the children it will be there for them to use in each session of this unit.

## GOD IS THERE



Gather the children together and invite them to repeat after you as you lead them in speaking the first verse of “In Deepest Night” below.<sup>1</sup> Then repeat the verse, wondering about the meaning of each line.

In deepest night, /  
in darkest days /  
when harps are hung, /  
no songs we raise /  
when silence must suffice as praise,  
yet sounding in us quietly /  
there is the song of God. /

Try singing the verse together, if you wish. Show the YouTube video “In Deepest Night, Glory to God Hymn #785, arr. Lee Hoffman” ([bit.ly /FMDeepestNight](https://bit.ly/FMDeepestNight), 2:22, first verse ends at 0:43) and invite children to sing along with the soloist. If the children prefer to listen instead of sing, encourage them to move their bodies in the way the music makes them feel while they listen. Lead by example, moving your body as you sing.



## INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

### HOW DO I FEEL TODAY?




Show the children Resource Page 1 and display it in the center of the children. Point out each of the faces and corresponding feelings that are portrayed. Tell the children that they will take turns putting a sticker by a feeling they were having yesterday or before they came to the session and then another sticker by how they are feeling now. Use the two sets of stickers to differentiate between earlier feelings and present feelings.

1. Susan Palo Cherwien, “In Deepest Night,” in *Glory to God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), #785. © 1995 Susan Palo Cherwien (admin. Augsburg Fortress). Used by permission.

Invite the children to place their stickers. They may offer an explanation or not. Don't comment on their choices or explanations but rather thank them for sharing their feelings.

Once everyone, including you, has placed stickers on feelings, invite the children to reflect on what they see. Wonder together about certain feelings being more prevalent than others or a wide range of feelings expressed. Tell the children that all feelings are important and true.

 Remove the stickers and place Resource Page 1 in the cozy corner, letting the children know that you are putting it there for them to identify feelings as they choose.

## FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE







### REFLECTING AND CONNECTING




Resource Page 2

Set the scene for the Bible story today by telling the children that today's reading is not like a regular story with a beginning, middle, and end; it is a prayer to God. Explain that this prayer was a response to something that happened to God's people long, long ago. Tell the children that God's people had been captured in war. Their city, Jerusalem, had been destroyed. Many of their families had been taken away from their homes and had been enslaved in another country. Some people had been left behind in the destroyed city. They felt like God had left them. Read aloud adapted Psalm 137:1–6 from Resource Page 2.

Reflect on the psalm with the children using the following questions to help spur some conversation about the psalm and the story behind it.

-  How did God's people feel in this psalm?
-  Who were they praying to?
-  What can you tell happened that made someone pray this prayer?  
*(Point out that the people praying wept or cried when they remembered Jerusalem, their homeland, meaning that they were taken from their homes. The people who took them from the land that they loved wanted them to sing and be happy, but God's people were too sad to sing.)*
-  Why do you think they prayed these words?
-  How do you think it made God's people feel to have this psalm written down and prayed together over the years?
-  Why might people use this psalm as a prayer today?

Comment that God's people knew that, even if they felt alone, they could talk to God and tell God how horrible they felt and how sad they were. Suggest that we too can read this psalm to remember that we can talk to God about how sad we can be sometimes. Tell the children that God hears our prayers with all of our feelings and is always with us, even when we may feel sad and alone.

 It is all right for some silence after you ask questions. Give the children time to think, up to seven seconds, before you move on with your next question or activity.



# FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

- River rocks
- Cozy corner space from “A Cozy Corner” (p. 8)
- Resource Page 3, laminated or covered in clear contact paper

## SAD FEELING ROCKS



Tell the children that sometimes our feelings, especially our feelings of sadness, feel awfully big and hard to talk about with God. Give each child a river rock and tell them that this rock can represent a feeling of sadness they may have about something. Invite them to hold the rock in their hands and let it hold their sadness. Invite the children to follow you to the cozy corner you made in “A Cozy Corner” (p. 8). Show the children Resource Page 3 and read it aloud. Create a special space for the children to place their rocks using Resource Page 3 to mark the space. Pray the following prayer:

Dear God, sometimes we get sad and it’s hard to talk about with other people and with you. These rocks hold our sadness when it feels too big. We know that you feel our sadness and wrap us in your love and presence. Thank you for always being with us. Amen.

Invite the children to place their rocks in the space provided. After placing the rocks down, wonder together with the children how they feel after putting their rocks down. Ask them if it feels different than holding the rock. Let them know that they can go to the cozy corner, hold a rock, and place it back in its place to remember that God is with them when they are sad. Suggest that they can do this at home as well by choosing a rock and placing it in a special place in their home. They can hold the rock when they feel sad and the sad feelings feel too big to talk about and then put the rock in its special place as a reminder that God knows their sadness and is with them always.

- The Rabbit Listened* by Cori Doerrfeld (Dial Books, 2018) or internet-connected device

## THE RABBIT LISTENED



Tell the children that they are going to hear a story about a little child named Taylor and some of his animal friends. As they hear the story, pause at the appropriate times and invite the children to act out the actions each of the animals suggest to Taylor. Wonder what feelings the children notice in the story. Read aloud *The Rabbit Listened* by Cori Doerrfeld or show the YouTube video “The Rabbit Listened—Virtual Read Aloud—Listening—Shon’s Stories” ([bit.ly/FMRabbitListened](https://bit.ly/FMRabbitListened), 3:37).

After reading, wonder with the children why the chicken, the bear, and the hyena don’t make Taylor feel better. Ask the children to recall what the rabbit did for Taylor and how that made Taylor feel.

Comment that Taylor wanted someone to listen to all the different feelings he had about his block tower falling down. The rabbit listened carefully to everything that Taylor felt and had to say. Wonder who are the people like the rabbit in the children’s lives, the people who listen to their feelings, even their big feelings or hard feelings.



## PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

### EXAMINING YOUR DAY

A QC C

Tell the children that one way to practice naming their feelings is by taking a daily inventory each evening. The simplest way to begin is by answering three questions. Provide copies of Resource Page 4 and crayons. Read through the three questions with the children and then begin with question 1 again, inviting the children to draw a picture or use colors to express their feelings in the space provided. Continue with questions 2 and 3 in the same manner. Then pray the prayer provided on Resource Page 4, inviting the children to repeat after you as you pray.

Give the children extra copies of Resource Page 4 to take home and use with their parents/caregivers and other members of their families. Encourage them to answer the three questions in conversation or drawing each evening.

- Copies of Resource Page 4
- Crayons



Touch base with the children's parents/caregivers at the end of your session and encourage them to continue this practice with their children.

### FEELING SAD IS OK

C T

Invite the children to name some feelings or emotions that people have at different times. Wonder together if some feelings are better than other feelings. Comment that we often think that happy feelings are better than sad feelings because we feel better when we are happy rather than sad. Tell the children that all feelings are good because they are our feelings, even though they may be harder to feel.

Read aloud *When Sadness Is at Your Door* by Eva Eland or show the YouTube video "When Sadness Is at Your Door by Eva Eland Read by Lolly Hopwood" ([bit.ly/FMSadnessDoor](https://bit.ly/FMSadnessDoor), 7:13). After the story, engage the children in conversation about the feeling of sadness by using the following questions:

- How did the story show sadness?
- When have you felt sadness like the story showed?
- How have you felt sadness in a different way?
- What are some ways the story showed to be *with* sadness?
- What are some ways that we have talked about being with sadness today?
- How can God help you when you are sad?

- When Sadness Is at Your Door* by Eva Eland (Random House Books for Young Reader, 2019) or internet-connected device



## FOLLOWING JESUS

### ONE-WORD PRAYER

QC C

Invite the children to sit in a circle, and thank them for their willingness to share honestly about their feelings. It could be a meaningful moment to tell them about how much adults can learn from their willingness to be honest about how they are feeling. Remind the children that God listens to their feelings, their happiness, and their sadness.

Invite the children to take turns going around the circle and saying one word as part of a group prayer. Explain that their word could be a feeling they have felt today, something that they are excited about or worried for. Close with the following prayer, inviting the children to repeat after you and say their one word when indicated:

Holy God, you know us and love us. /

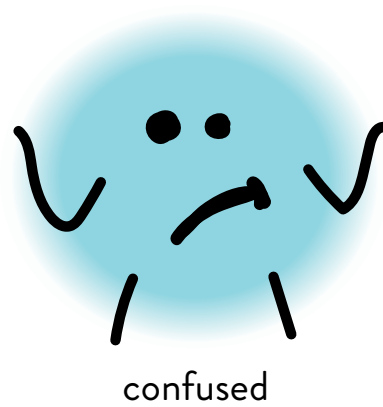
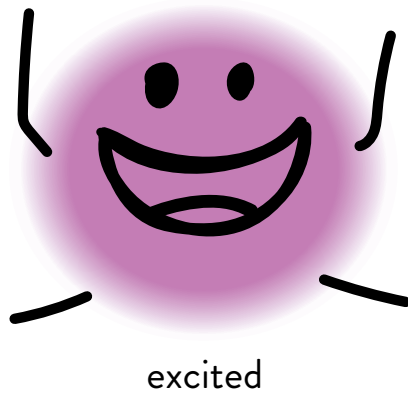
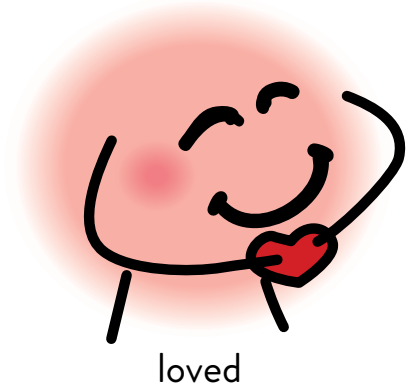
Hear our prayers . . . (*children share their one word*).

Thank you for all that we feel. /

Thank you for being with us always. /

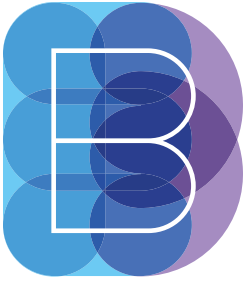
Amen. /

# I feel ...









## BIBLE STORY

### BASED ON PSALM 137:1-6

We sat down by the rivers of Babylon, far away from home,  
and we cried when we remembered Jerusalem, our home.  
We put away our instruments because we were too sad to sing together.  
The people who enslaved us wanted us to sing and be happy.  
How could we sing our songs when we were so sad and so far from home?  
God, never let me forget how beautiful Jerusalem was  
and all my family and friends there.  
Help me remember how special my home was.

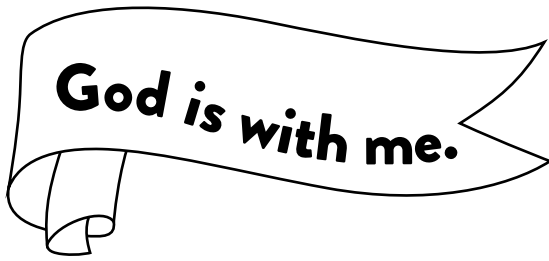






**God holds our sad feelings  
and surrounds us with love.  
God is always with us.**



A notepad with a paperclip at the top left. The text on the notepad reads: "1. What is a great thing that happened today?"

**1.** What is a great thing that happened today?

A notepad with a decorative border of diagonal lines. The text on the notepad reads: "2. What happened today that made me upset, sad, or angry?"

**2.** What happened today that made me upset, sad, or angry?

A notepad with a ribbon across the top. The text on the notepad reads: "3. What am I looking forward to tomorrow?"

**3.** What am I looking forward to tomorrow?

A rounded rectangular box with the text "4. Pray" inside.

**4.** Pray

An arrow-shaped box pointing to the right, containing the text "Dear God, I know you are with me when I am feeling . . .".

Dear God, I know you are with me when I am feeling . . .

A banner-shaped box containing the text "Thank you! Amen.".

Thank you!  
Amen.

