BEYOND THE BLUES

Lanecia A. Rouse

“In the Habit” session for use with devozine meditations for December 14–20, 2015.

MAKING THE CONNECTION

“I am no stranger to depression. I believe I have struggled with it off and on since I was sixteen. Most of my life, it went untreated. When, at twenty-seven, I visited my first therapist and received treatment for the mild situational depression I was experiencing, I wished I had sought help years before. For various reasons I had tried to hide it, hoping that magically one day I would wake up and joy would have flooded all the places I felt darkness and hurt.

“When I took the brave steps of facing depression head on, I opened the door for healing to begin. The journey has made a profound impact in all my relationships, including my relationship with God and with myself. The best part of the work of healing has been embracing the freedom to journey with people who love me and whom I love and to find joy in all of life. I have become less afraid of getting the help and doing the work needed to live through every situation.

“Youth in our communities suffer from depression. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry writes that ‘about five percent of children and adolescents in the general population suffer from depression at any given point in time.’ Many are suffering silently and coping in unhealthy ways because of shame and fear. They don’t know they are depressed, don’t have the words to articulate what they are experiencing, and don’t know what resources are available for treatment.

“In this session, we will explore with teens the difference between sadness and depression and ways of speaking honestly about feelings with God, others, and ourselves to avoid suffering through depression or sadness alone and without help.” — Lanecia

MEET THE WRITER

Lanecia A. Rouse is my name. I am a creative (photographer, artist, writer, speaker) living in Houston, Texas. Before becoming a fulltime creative in September 2014, I served as the Project Director of The Art Project, Houston, a therapeutic art and self-empowerment project of the Bread of Life, Inc. for my neighbors living on the streets of Houston, Texas. Prior to the move to Houston in March 2011, I served in youth ministry for thirteen years, most received with the brilliant, bursting, beautiful, youth of Belmont United Methodist Church in Nashville, Tennessee. Find out more about Lanecia at https://www.instagram.com/larartstudio/.
STUFF YOU WILL NEED
• newsprint
• markers
• sticky notes (two different colors)
• paper
• pencils
• Bibles
• paper face masks
• crayons
• colored pencils
• glue sticks and/or Modge Podge
• sponge brushes for the Modge Podge
• images from magazines (faces, objects, colors, textures and so on)
• a candle and matches

PLUGGED IN
The resources below provide information about depression, especially among teenagers, and include information about signs, causes, treatment, and statistics. These resources could also be helpful resources for parents.

+ “Myths & Meanings: Support For Depression,” by Rebecca Bass-Ching; Darling Magazine—The Art of Being a Woman (http://darlingmagazine.org/myths-meanings-support-depression/). The article includes twelve links to resources that offer information about and support for depression, as well as local resources for people living in the United States.

+ “Depression Resource Center” at the American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry website answers questions about causes, symptoms, treatment of depression as well as suggestions about getting help. (http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Resource_Centers/Depression_Resource_Center/Home.aspx)

+ “Depression in Teens” on the website Mental Health America talks about causes, symptoms, treatment, and the risk of suicide. (http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/depression-teens)


CHECKING IN
A great daily practice is receiving time to be in prayer for those you lead and the ministry you share. Before the youth arrive, pray for the time you will spend together, for those who will enter into the space, for those who will not be present, and for the life of your church community.
Before the group arrives, write statements (one statement one each sheet of newsprint) about what could lead a teenager to feel sad or to be depressed—for example:

- Your parents are getting a divorce.
- You cannot be yourself without fear of judgment or ridicule.
- You drop your laptop and break the screen.
- You ask someone to the prom and he or she says no.
- Your parents finally let you drive the family car; you back into a pole at the gas station, leaving a huge dent in the car.
- You try out for a part in the school play, but you do not get it.

Place by each sheet of newsprint sticky notes in two different colors, one for “Feeling Sad” and the other for “Feeling Depressed.” As the youth arrive, welcome everyone, extending a special welcome to those joining you for the first time. Instruct the youth to walk around the room, to read the statements written on newsprint, and to stick one note onto the paper, indicating how they would feel in the situation described.

Bring the group together to discuss these questions:

Look around the room at the statements and responses. What do you think are the differences between feeling sad and feeling depressed? What are the similarities?

What are some of the reasons a situation might make you depressed and not just sad?

What are some other reasons you might feel depressed?

Is depression easy for you and your friends to talk about honestly? Why? Why not?

Then say something like this:

“As we journey through life, we all experience situations that affect our emotions. We experience great joy and also heartbreak that leaves us feeling blue. Being sad or unhappy is a part of life. Depression, however, is when we feel deeply sad and hopeless for an extended period of time; and these feelings interfere with our ability to function and to make healthy decisions. Often people suffer through depression alone and struggle to find the words to articulate how they are truly feeling and why. One of the many difficult aspects of depression is finding safe places to be honest about what they are feeling. Depression is a dark and lonely place to be. In our exploration of the Bible today, you will discover that some of the people in the Bible also experienced times of deep sorrow and depression.”

EXPLORING THE WORD
Scripture: Psalm 42

Introduce the scripture:

“The text we are going to explore together is Psalm 42. The psalmist speaks honestly about his struggles with God. The words of the psalm flow from a place of deep sorrow. The Temple in Jerusalem was in ruins, the psalmist spiritual leader was in exile, and all the land was being burned. Life around him was a mess, and he struggled to find some grounding and connection to God. We are going to look at his words and listen for how the psalm might help us think about our own journeys through difficult and disconcerting times, as well as ways we may journey through experiences of deep sadness or depression with God.”
Lectio Divina, Latin for “divine reading,” is a traditional way of reading and reflecting on scripture. It tunes our ears to listen to the scriptures with openness each time we approach them. Explain that the scripture passage will be read three times. Each time, group members are invited to write down one word or phrase that stands out to them.

Distribute paper and pencil. Then say a prayer before reading the scripture:

“Loving God, open our hearts and minds by the Holy Spirit, so that as we dive into the scriptures, we may hear and receive all the truth that is for us today; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Read aloud Psalm 42 the first time. Ask volunteers to read it a second and a third time. (If possible, designate your readers a day or two before the session, and encourage them to practice reading the psalm.) Allow about a minute of silence between the readings.

Ask these questions for reflection and discussion:

**What words or phrases stood out to you in Psalm 42?**

**Was the psalmist depressed? Why? Why not?**

The psalmist spoke about his feelings honestly. What were some of the feelings he expressed to God?

How might his vulnerability and honestly with God give him strength to get through a difficult time?

**Why is it difficult to talk about feelings honestly with God? friends? parents?**

What about the psalmist’s relationship with God give him strength and comfort? (See verses 6–8 and 11.)

**What can the psalmist’s experience teach us about getting through times of deep sadness and struggle?** (Remember what God has done; pray; continue to worship; look for love and light through people, nature, therapy—whatever brings life and helps us heal.)

**Activity: Inside/Out**

When teens are experiencing depression, they often separate themselves from their social groups and try to hide from other people. Typically, they have trouble talking about what they are feeling inside for fear of rejection, shame, appearing weak, and so on.

Invite each person to think about a time when they may have experienced depression or been sad but did not want anyone to know.

Distribute face masks. Have art supplies available. Instruct each person to make a mask, creating on the front of the mask one of the faces teens try to hide behind when they are depressed. Ask people to write on the inside of the mask what they wish other people knew about how they were feeling.

Then invite group members to reflect on some or all of these questions:

**What did you learn through the process of creating your mask?**

**What surprised you?**

**What are some reasons we wear masks instead of showing other people that we are sad or depressed?**

Are masks safe? Why? Why not?

**What are some healthy ways to let other people see what is on the inside of the mask?**

If you have time, invite the youth to form small groups to discuss what they have learned from making and reflecting on their masks.
Read aloud Romans 8:35–39. Then say something like this:

“No matter what we are going through, we walk in the promise that nothing can separate us from the love of God through Jesus Christ. God knows us inside and out. We can go to God with anything that is on our hearts. God can handle our sadness, anger, joy, pain, hopes, dreams, and thanksgiving.

“If you are feeling depressed or noticing signs of depression, talk to me. I will provide you with resources and healthy tools for treating the depression. None of us has to go it alone.”

SHARING IN PRAYER
Ask group members to form a circle around a lit Christ candle. Pass the Christ candle around the circle, inviting each person, as he or she holds the candle, to answer this question:

**Where did you see or experience God this week?**

If a person chooses not to speak, instruct him or her to pass the candle to the next person in the circle.

Close the session by saying a brief prayer, inviting everyone to join in praying The Lord’s Prayer or offering the benediction from Numbers 6:24–26 (NRSV):

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.”

TAKING IT FURTHER
Host a movie night for your group to watch the movie Inside Out. It provides a framework for exploring the importance of emotional acceptance and healthy ways of coping with life experiences that may otherwise give root to deep sadness or depression.

Here are some questions to help guide conversation after the movie:

What did you like about this movie? What surprised you?

Did you like the movie’s ending? Why? Why not?

Who was your favorite character? Why?

What scene stood out to you? Why?

What did the parents say or do when Riley was feeling sadness or anger? What did you think about their response? Was it helpful? What would you have liked for her parents to say or do?

Is sadness a bad feeling? Why? Why not? How did the movie express the importance of all emotions?

What emotions that you have felt were not in the movie?

What do you normally do when you are feeling sad? joyful? fearful? disgusted?

What are some ways you relate to people who are experiencing different emotions?

What new ways of relating did the movie provide for you?

Where did you encounter attributes of God in the movie?

What will you take away from the movie that will help you navigate through varied emotions or respond to others who are feeling sad, angry, joy, fearful, or disgusted?

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