YOUTH GROUP CURRICULUM · AGES 11–18

PSALMS · EMOTIONS · PRAYER



WEEK 1 OF 5

Real Talk

Theme: Honest prayer · Main text: Psalm 142

RAW.

Honest prayers from the Psalms.

Inside: 45 / 60 / 75-minute plans · word-for-word scripts · 4 game options · response activity · Joys & Concerns · 3 student pages

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WEEK 1 · LEADER GUIDE

Real Talk

Theme: Honest prayer · Main text: Psalm 142 · Memory verse: Psalm 142:2

THE BIG IDEA

The Psalms show we can bring God the real stuff, even complaints. Honest prayer is still prayer.

The question to carry all night

"What do I say to God when I'm not okay?"

By the end, students will…

- Notice how often "I'm fine" hides what's really going on
- See David *pour out his complaint* to God from a cave, and still call God his refuge
- Write the first stanza of **My Psalm** and pick one step

NIGHT AT A GLANCE · PICK YOUR LENGTH

SEGMENT	WHAT HAPPENS	45 MIN	60 MIN	75 MIN
Welcome	Greet new students by name and grade; your announcements	—	—	5
Game 1	Pick from the Activity Menu (next page)	8	10	10
Game 2	A second game from the menu (optional)	—	—	10
Hook + Message	"The Many Meanings of Fine" · Psalm 142	10	12	12
Response Activity	Pour It Out + My Psalm, Stanza 1 + My One Step	10	12	12
Small Group Talk	Pick 3–4 questions	—	8	10
Joys & Concerns	"I lift up ___ to God." / "Lord, hear our prayer."	10	10	10
Pastoral Prayer	Leader prays over what was shared + send-off	5	5	5

Supplies

- Student pages (last 3 pages), one set per student, plus extras
- Pens, a few clipboards or hard surfaces for writing
- Game extras: Fine Translator cards, paper for teams (see menu)
- Optional: a blanket or table to make a "cave" for the hook
- Bibles · phone timer · a quiet song for writing time

Before students arrive

- Choose your games using the Activity Menu
- Read 1 Samuel 22:1–2 and Psalm 142 (the cave story)
- Practice saying "fine" five different ways for the hook
- Think of a time *you* said "I'm fine" when you weren't
- Read the Care Note and know who to call; pray for each student by name

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CHOOSE WHAT FITS YOUR GROUP

Activity Menu

Every group is different. Some nights you have fifteen students bouncing off the walls; some nights you have four quiet ones and a visitor. Tonight's topic is honest, but the games are not heavy. They're about feelings words, funny tones of voice, and tiny everyday annoyances. Nobody has to reveal how they really feel in any game. Pick one or two games, then finish with the response activity. Every game ends with a debrief that points back to tonight's question.

ACTIVITY	ENERGY	PREP	BEST WHEN…	MIN
A. Cave Crowd Huddle into "caves" of the size called; answer the Cave Question	High	Open space	Students need to move; you want everyone talking to everyone	10
B. Fine Translator Say only "I'm fine" in a secret mood; partners guess the real feeling	Medium	Cards, 5 min	You want big laughs and the strongest link to the message	10–12
C. More Than Fine Word Race Teams race to list feelings words, then share a light story	Medium	Paper, pens	Lots of new students; you want an easy, competitive start	8–10
D. Tiny Troubles Psalm Lab Trios write dramatic mini-psalms about tiny problems	Low	Paper, pens	Small or quiet group; students who like writing or acting	8–10
E. Pour It Out Response activity (after message)	Reflective	Student pages, pens	Every night: this is the heart of the week and starts My Psalm	12

SUGGESTED COMBINATIONS

Big, high-energy group (10–15)

A. Cave Crowd → B. Fine Translator → Message → E. Pour It Out

Small group (4–6)

D. Tiny Troubles Psalm Lab (whole group) → Message → E. Pour It Out in a circle

Lots of first-time visitors

C. More Than Fine Word Race → A. Cave Crowd → Message → E. Pour It Out (low-pressure option)

Short on time (45 min)

B. Fine Translator → Message → E. Pour It Out → Joys & Concerns

GROUND RULES FOR EVERY GAME *Nobody is forced to share. Nobody is the punchline. New students get paired with a regular. Games stay light: we laugh about soggy cereal, not about real pain. If a game ever starts to single someone out, change the round and keep moving.*

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A. Cave Crowd

10 min · High energy

Purpose: When David hid in a cave, a crowd of people showed up and squeezed in with him (1 Samuel 22:1–2). In this game, students wander the room until the leader calls "Cave of 3!" (or 4, or 5). Everyone huddles into a "cave" of that size, makes a roof with their arms, and answers the Cave Question. It's fast, a little chaotic, and mixes everyone up.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Everyone walks around the room. Fast walking only, no running. Play music if you have it.
2. The leader shouts **"Cave of ___!"** with a number (2, 3, 4, or 5).
3. Students quickly huddle into groups of that size and make a cave: arms up, hands touching in the middle like a roof.
4. **Nobody is ever out.** If a group is short or has extras, that's fine. Leftovers join the closest cave and make it bigger. The leader can jump in, too.
5. The leader reads the **Cave Question**. Everyone in the cave answers (about 45 seconds). Then "Cave-in!" and everyone walks again. Play 8–10 rounds.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "This game is called Cave Crowd. Walk around the room. Walking only. When I yell 'Cave of three,' you find two other people and make a cave. Arms up, hands together, like a little roof over your heads. Then I'll give you a question, and everybody in your cave answers it. Here's the most important rule: nobody is ever out. If your cave has extra people, great, bigger cave. Ready? Start walking."
>
> "Cave of three! Question: *What's the best hiding spot you ever found in hide-and-seek?*"

CAVE QUESTIONS (ONE PER ROUND)

- Best hiding spot you ever found in hide-and-seek?
- Best fort or blanket cave you ever built?
- Camping in a tent: love it or no thanks?
- Where's your favorite spot to just think?
- Rainy day: nap, game, or movie?
- Your go-to snack when you've had a long day?
- A sound that instantly annoys you?
- Zombie apocalypse: which famous person is in your cave?
- Are you a talk-it-out person or a quiet-time person?
- Who's someone you'd want with you on a bad day?

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Skip the numbers. Everyone makes one big cave together in the middle, and the leader asks each Cave Question around the circle.
- **Lights low:** Dim the lights a bit and let students use phone flashlights inside their caves. Feels like a real cave.
- **Student callers:** After a few rounds, let a student call the number and pick a question from the list.

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LEADER NOTE *Watch the edges. If anyone is drifting without a group, steer them into the nearest cave yourself before you read the question. The whole point is that nobody hides alone.*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
>
> "Fun fact: there's a real cave in the Bible where a guy named David hid when his life was falling apart. He was alone in there, and he wrote a prayer. Later a whole crowd of people squeezed in with him. Tonight we're going to read the prayer he wrote in that cave, because it answers the question we're asking for the next five weeks: **what do I say to God when I'm not okay?**"

B. Fine Translator

10–12 min · Medium energy

Purpose: "Fine" might be the most overworked word in English. In this game, one partner draws a card and says only **"I'm fine."** in the mood on the card. The other partner has to "translate" what they really mean. It's emotion charades with just your voice and face, and it's hilarious. After each card, partners answer a light talk question. It sets up the message perfectly: we say "fine" all the time, but the Psalms say the real thing.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Students pair up (or trios). New students pair with a regular.
2. One partner draws a **Fine Card** and reads the situation silently. They may only say: "I'm fine." Tone, face, and body language are allowed. No other words.
3. The partner guesses the real feeling. Close counts. ("Annoyed?" "Grumpy?" Both work.)
4. Reveal the card and read the situation out loud. Then both partners answer the **talk question** (about 45 seconds).
5. Switch roles every card. Play 8–10 cards. For the last round, the leader does the Bridge card for the whole room.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "Grab a partner. Here's the deal. One of you gets a card with a situation and a secret feeling. You're only allowed to say two words: 'I'm fine.' That's it. But you have to say it the way that person would really feel. Your partner has to translate. Watch me." (*Say "I'm fine" through clenched teeth, arms crossed.*) "What am I really feeling?" (*Let them guess "mad."*) "Yep. My little brother ate my leftover pizza. Okay, draw a card. Go!"

FINE CARDS + TALK QUESTIONS

SITUATION	REAL FEELING	TALK QUESTION (AFTER THE REVEAL)
Someone ate your leftover pizza	Annoyed	"What food would you be mad to lose?"

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You just woke up from a three-hour nap	Groggy	"Are you a napper or a never-napper?"
You aced a test you studied hard for	Secretly thrilled	"What's something you're proud of this year?"
You're waiting in the dentist's chair	Nervous	"What's a small thing that makes you nervous?"
Someone spoiled the ending of your show	Betrayed	"What show are you watching right now?"
You just stubbed your toe on the couch	In pain	"Clumsiest thing you've ever done?"
It's the first snow day of the year	Overjoyed	"Perfect snow day: what do you do?"
Your ride is 25 minutes late	Impatient	"What's the longest you've ever had to wait?"
You found $20 in your old jeans	Delighted	"What would you spend surprise money on?"
Your team lost by one point	Frustrated	"Are you a good loser or a sore loser? Be honest."
Bridge (leader): "Someone asks, 'How are you?' in the hallway"	Could be anything	Lead into the debrief

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Play as one group. One person performs "I'm fine," and everyone else guesses. Go around the circle for the talk question.
- **Other words:** Swap "I'm fine" for "Okay," "Sure," or "Whatever." Same game, new laughs.
- **Student-made cards:** Pairs write their own funny situation and secret feeling for another pair to act out.

LEADER NOTE *Write the cards on index cards before group (situation and feeling on one side, talk question on the other). Every card is a funny, everyday situation on purpose. Nobody acts out their own real feelings in this game.*

DEBRIEF

SAY

"So 'I'm fine' can mean annoyed, thrilled, nervous, in pain, or 'I just woke up.' It's like a box we stuff every feeling into. And when somebody in the hallway asks, 'How are you?' we all say, 'Fine.' Tonight we're going to see that the Bible has a whole book of prayers where people stopped saying 'fine' to God. So here's our question: **what do I say to God when I'm not okay?**"

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C. More Than Fine Word Race

8–10 min · Medium energy

Purpose: Most of us use about four feelings words: good, bad, fine, and tired. In this race, teams have 60 seconds to list as many words as they can for one feeling (like "mad" or "happy"). Words nobody else wrote score extra. Then each person picks one word and tells a quick, *light* story about it. Students build a bigger feelings vocabulary and learn funny, real things about each other.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Split into teams of 3–4. Mix it up: "Find people you haven't talked to yet tonight." Each team gets paper and a pen.
2. The leader calls a **feeling category**. Teams have 60 seconds to list every word that fits ("Mad: annoyed, grumpy, furious, salty…").
3. Teams read their lists. A word only one team wrote = 2 points. A word more than one team wrote = 1 point.
4. **Story time (1 minute):** Inside their team, each person picks one word from the list and finishes: "The last time I felt ___ was when…" Keep it light: Wi-Fi, siblings, sports, food. Anyone can say "pass."
5. Play 5–6 categories. Always end with the Bridge category.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
> "Teams of three or four. I'm going to call out a feeling. You've got sixty seconds to write down every word you can think of that means that feeling. Slang counts. Words nobody else has are worth two points. Then everybody on your team picks one word and tells a quick story: 'The last time I felt annoyed was when the Wi-Fi died in the middle of my game.' Keep it light. First category: *mad*. Go!"

CATEGORIES + STORY STARTERS

CATEGORY	SAMPLE WORDS	STORY STARTER (KEEP IT LIGHT)
Mad	annoyed, grumpy, salty, furious	"The last time I felt annoyed was when…"
Happy	glad, hyped, thrilled, content	"Something that made me hyped this month…"
Scared	nervous, jumpy, uneasy, terrified	"A movie or ride that made me jumpy…"
Tired	sleepy, drained, wiped out, groggy	"The most wiped out I've ever been after…"
Surprised	shocked, stunned, caught off guard	"The best surprise I ever got…"
Calm	peaceful, chill, relaxed, cozy	"Where I feel the most chill…"
Excited	pumped, eager, can't wait, giddy	"Something coming up that I can't wait for…"

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Bored	restless, meh, blah, dull	"The most bored I've ever been was..."
Bridge: Ways to say "fine"	okay, good, alright, I'm chillin'	Lead into the debrief

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Play as one team trying to beat a target number (try 10 words in 60 seconds). Everyone shares a story each round.
- **Emoji round:** Instead of words, teams draw as many different faces for one feeling as they can.
- **Act it out:** One person from each team acts out their team's best word, and the room guesses.

LEADER NOTE *Skip the "sad" category in this game on purpose. The heavy feelings get their time later tonight, in a safer setting. If a story turns serious, thank the student and gently move on, then check in privately afterward (see the Care Note).*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "Look at all those words! You know way more feelings words than 'fine.' But when it's time to talk to God, a lot of us only use the polite ones. Tonight we're going to read a prayer where somebody used real, honest words with God. Keep this question in your head: **what do I say to God when I'm not okay?**"

D. Tiny Troubles Psalm Lab

8–10 min · Low energy

Purpose: A calm, creative game for small or quiet groups. Trios take a tiny, everyday problem (like a phone at 2 percent) and write a super dramatic three-line "psalm" about it, using the same pattern many psalms use: **Tell God how it is. Ask God for help. Remember who God is.** Then they perform it. It's funny, and it secretly teaches the pattern students will use for real in the response activity.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Split into trios. If you can, mix older and younger students.
2. Each trio picks a **Tiny Trouble** from the list below, or uses a real (small!) annoyance from someone in the trio.
3. Trios write three lines: **1. Tell God how it is** (as dramatically as possible). **2. Ask God for help. 3. Remember who God is.**
4. Keep it kind and respectful. We're laughing at the problem, not at God or at anyone in the room.
5. Each trio performs their psalm in their most dramatic voice. The group gives it a standing ovation, a slow clap, or a "Lord, hear our prayer."

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LEADER SCRIPT

SAY

"Groups of three. Pick a tiny trouble, a really small problem, and write a dramatic prayer about it in three lines. Line one: tell God how it is. Line two: ask God for help. Line three: remember something true about God. Here's mine: '*O Lord, my phone is at two percent, and the charger is in the other room, and I am SO comfortable. Please give me strength to stand up. You have carried me through worse, and you are still good.*' Your turn. Three minutes."

TINY TROUBLES TO CHOOSE FROM

- My phone is at 2 percent
- My cereal got soggy
- Someone took the last slice of pizza
- My earbuds are tangled again
- The Wi-Fi died mid-game
- I lost one sock. Just one.
- My sibling is chewing loudly
- Homework due tomorrow, started tonight
- The song I love got stuck in my head
- It's Monday

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Write one psalm together, one line per person, then perform it as a group (one person per line).
- **Psalm battle:** Two trios get the same tiny trouble. The group cheers for the most dramatic psalm.
- **Rap or slam style:** Let brave trios perform with a beat or as spoken word.

LEADER NOTE *Keep the troubles tiny. This game is for laughs and for learning the pattern. If a trio picks something heavy, gently steer them to a lighter one: "Let's save the big stuff for later tonight, okay?"*

DEBRIEF

SAY

"Those were amazing. And here's the funny thing: that three-line pattern you just used is real. People in the Bible prayed like that. Not about soggy cereal, but about really hard stuff. Tonight we'll read one, written by a guy hiding in a cave. Keep this question in your head: **what do I say to God when I'm not okay?**"

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Hook: "The Many Meanings of Fine"

2 min

SAY

"Quick question. How many times this week did somebody ask, 'How are you?' And how many times did you say, 'Fine'?" (*Let a few students guess numbers.*)

"Here's the thing about 'fine.' It means a lot of different things. Watch." (*Say "fine" five ways: cheerful, sarcastic, exhausted, through tears, with a shrug.*) "Which one of those actually meant fine?" (*Let them answer.*) "Right. Maybe one."

"Sometimes 'fine' is true. But sometimes it's a door we close so nobody sees what's inside. And a lot of us do that with God, too. We think prayer has to sound polite and happy. For the next five weeks we're doing a series called RAW, about honest prayers from the Psalms. And the question is: **what do I say to God when I'm not okay?**"

Message: A Prayer from the Cave

10 min

1. We're all pros at "fine"

SAY

"Most of us learned early: if you say 'fine,' people stop asking. And that's okay sometimes. Not everybody needs your whole story. But here's the problem. Some of us have gotten so good at 'fine' that we even say it to God. We pray the polite version. 'Dear God, thank you for this day, help me be good, amen.' Meanwhile, inside, we're stressed, mad, lonely, or scared. Tonight I want to show you that God never asked for the polite version. He asked for the real one."

LEADER NOTE *If you have a short, honest story about a time you said "I'm fine" (to someone, or to God) when you really weren't, tell it here. Keep it to thirty seconds and keep it appropriate. Students trust leaders who go first, and they'll remember that you were real.*

2. David in the cave

SAY

"There's a book in the middle of your Bible called Psalms. It's 150 prayers and songs. And a lot of them are not 'fine.' This one was written by David. Before he was king, David was on the run. King Saul was jealous and wanted him dead. David lost his home, his job, and his best friend in one stretch. He ended up hiding in a cave. The heading of this psalm says David prayed it 'when he was in the cave.' Listen to how he starts."

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[1] *I cry with my voice to Yahweh. With my voice, I ask Yahweh for mercy.* [2] *I pour out my complaint before him. I tell him my troubles.* [3] *When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, you knew my route. On the path in which I walk, they have hidden a snare for me.* [4] *Look on my right, and see; for there is no one who is concerned for me. Refuge has fled from me. No one cares for my soul.*

PSALM 142:1–4 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

> "Did you hear that? 'No one cares for my soul.' That is not a 'fine' prayer. That's David saying, 'God, I feel completely alone, and it's bad.' And this prayer is in the Bible. God kept it on purpose, so we'd know we're allowed to pray like that."

3. God can handle your complaint

> **SAY**
> "Look at verse 2 again. It's our memory verse."

I pour out my complaint before him. I tell him my troubles.

PSALM 142:2 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

> "'Pour out' is not a careful word. You don't pour out a glass of water one drop at a time. You tip it over and it all comes out. David didn't edit his feelings for God. He brought the real stuff, even his complaints. And notice where he took them: not behind God's back, but *before him*. Complaining *about* God to everyone else pushes him away. Complaining *to* God is still prayer. Another psalm even starts like this:"

How long, Yahweh? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

PSALM 13:1 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

> "That's in the Bible too. Honest prayer is still prayer. God is not shocked by your real feelings. He already knows them. He just wants you to bring them to him."

4. Honest prayer turns toward God

> **SAY**
> "But David doesn't stop at the complaint. Listen to how the psalm ends."

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[5] *I cried to you, Yahweh. I said, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."* [6] *Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need. Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me.* [7] *Bring my soul out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name. The righteous will surround me, for you will be good to me.*

PSALM 142:5–7 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

"David is still in the cave. Nothing has changed yet. But look at the pattern. First, he **tells God how it is**: 'No one cares for my soul.' Then he **asks God for help**: 'Listen to my cry.' Then he **remembers who God is**: 'You are my refuge.' And here's a cool detail: the cave didn't stay empty. Soon after, a whole crowd of people came and joined him there. God sent him people."

"That's the pattern we're going to use all series: tell God how it is, ask God for help, remember who God is. You don't have to clean up first. You don't have to say 'fine.' So, honestly: **what do I say to God when I'm not okay?** You say the real thing. And you say it to him."

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E. Response Activity: Pour It Out

12 min

Purpose: Give students a private, safe way to stop saying "fine" to God and tell him what's really going on. Tonight they also start **My Psalm**: each week of the series, students write one short stanza of their own psalm using the same pattern David used. By Week 5 they add a praise stanza, and their psalm is complete. Nobody ever has to read theirs out loud.

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Explain My Psalm: one stanza each week, written on student page 2 and kept in a Bible, notebook, or phone case.
2. **Under the Fine:** On student page 1, students circle any feelings words that fit their week and write privately what's under their "fine." Nobody shares this page.
3. **My Psalm · Stanza 1:** On student page 2, students write three short lines: **Tell God how it is. Ask God for help. Remember who God is.** Play a quiet song for 3–4 minutes.
4. **Pour It Out prayer:** Students who want to can find a partner and pray one sentence for each other: "God, hear ___'s real prayer this week." Others stay seated and pray silently.
5. **My One Step:** Students fill in "My One Step This Week" and copy a short title for Stanza 1 onto their My Psalm card.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY (MY PSALM)**
>
> "Every week of RAW, you're going to write one stanza of your own psalm. A stanza is just a short chunk, like a verse in a song. By the last week, you'll have a whole psalm that's yours. Nobody is going to collect it or read it. It's between you and God."
>
> **SAY (UNDER THE FINE)**
>
> "Find page one, the box called Under the Fine. Circle any words that describe your week. More than one is okay. Then, if you want, write what's really under your 'fine' right now. It could be big or small. A test. A friend. Home. Just being tired. Nobody will see this."
>
> **SAY (STANZA 1)**
>
> "Now flip to page two. Write three lines, just like David. Line one: tell God how it is. Be honest. Line two: ask God for help. Line three: remember one true thing about God. It doesn't have to rhyme or sound holy. 'God, I'm so tired of fighting with my sister. Help me not explode. You're patient with me.' That's a real psalm. I'll play some music. Take your time."
>
> **SAY (PRAYER + ONE STEP)**
>
> "If you want, find a partner and pray one sentence for each other: 'God, hear Jordan's real prayer this week.' You don't have to tell them what you wrote. If you'd rather stay put, pray silently. Last thing: write one small step on your page. Keep it tiny. Like: 'Every night before bed, I'll tell God one honest thing about my day.'"

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Example Stanza 1 (read aloud if stuck)

God, everybody thinks I'm fine, but I'm really stressed about school.

Please help me get through this week without falling apart.

You know my route even when I don't.

"Real talk" step ideas

- Tell God one honest thing at bedtime
- Pray Psalm 142:2 on the bus or before school
- Answer "How are you?" honestly with one safe person
- Swap "I'm fine" for one real feelings word in prayer
- Read one verse of Psalm 142 each day

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Sit in a circle and write together in silence. Then the leader prays one sentence for each person by name: "God, hear Sam's real prayer."
- **Low-pressure option:** Skip partner prayer. Students write their stanza, and the leader prays one prayer over everyone: "God, you heard every word we just wrote. Thank you that we don't have to be fine with you."
- **Can't think of anything?** Students can write a stanza for someone else they care about, or simply copy Psalm 142:2 and add one line.

LEADER NOTE *Never collect, read, or ask to see student pages, and never ask a student what they wrote. Give students room. If someone seems upset, sits frozen, or writes something that worries you, check in quietly afterward and follow the Care Note. Bring extra student pages for anyone who arrives next week.*

DEBRIEF

SAY

"You just did something brave. You told God the truth. Maybe for the first time in a while. That's what David did in the cave. **What do I say to God when I'm not okay?** Exactly what you just wrote. God isn't waiting for you to be fine. He's waiting for you to be real."

Small Group Talk

8–10 min · Optional

Groups of 3–5, with one adult or student leader per group if possible. Pick 3–4 questions that fit your group. Anyone can pass on any question.

WARM UP

1. When someone asks "How are you?", what's your usual answer?
   Follow-up: Who's someone you actually tell the truth to?
2. Which "fine" from the hook or the games sounded the most like you?
   Keep it light. It's a warm-up.

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GO DEEPER

3. Why do you think we try to sound polite or happy when we pray?
   Where did we learn that?
4. David said, "No one cares for my soul." Were you surprised that's in the Bible?
   Why or why not?
5. What's the difference between complaining *about* God and complaining *to* God?
6. David ends with "You are my refuge." What's one true thing about God you could hold on to on a bad day?

TAKE IT HOME

7. What would change if you stopped saying "fine" to God this week?
8. Who is one safe person you could be honest with, besides God?
   A parent, a leader, a counselor, a friend?

LEADER NOTE *Silence is okay. Count to seven in your head before rephrasing. If no one answers, answer it yourself briefly and honestly, then ask again. Never push a student to go deeper than they choose to.*

Joys & Concerns

10 min

Purpose: Students practice praying *for each other*, not just hearing about prayer. It's often the moment new students realize this group actually cares about them. Tonight it fits the theme perfectly: this is a place where we don't have to say "fine." We can bring the real stuff, good and hard, to God together.

HOW IT WORKS

1. Sit in a circle if you can. Explain the response: when someone shares, they end with "**I lift up ___ to God.**" Everyone responds together: "**Lord, hear our prayer.**"
2. Start with **joys** (things to thank God for), then move to **concerns** (things we're worried about or carrying).
3. The leader goes first to model it, with one joy and one concern.
4. Anyone can share, or pass. "Unspoken" requests are welcome, too.
5. Jot down what's shared (first names only) so you can pray for each one in the Pastoral Prayer.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "Tonight we saw that David didn't say 'fine' to God. He said the real thing. So let's practice that together. You don't have to share anything deep. But this is a place where you don't have to pretend. What's something good you're thankful for? Or something that's hard right now, for you, your family, or a friend?"
>
> "When you share, end with 'I lift up ___ to God.' And all of us will say together, 'Lord, hear our prayer.' Let's practice. I lift up this group to God..." (*All: "Lord, hear our prayer."*)
>
> "I'll go first. My joy is ___. I lift up ___ to God. My concern is ___. I lift up ___ to God."

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Joy starters (if students are stuck)

- Something that went better than I expected
- A friend who actually asked how I was
- My team, club, or class had a great week
- Someone I love got good news

Concern starters

- A week that's been harder than I let on
- A grandparent or relative who is sick
- A friend who's going through something
- "I have an unspoken request."

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Go around the circle so everyone gets a turn, and everyone is allowed to pass.
- **Big group (12+):** "Popcorn" style: anyone shares when ready. Cap it at about 8 minutes.
- **Written version:** Students write joys and concerns on slips of paper. The leader reads them (no names) and the group responds.

LEADER NOTE *Say once at the start: "What's shared here stays here, unless someone's safety is at risk." If a student shares something serious, thank them, pray, and follow up privately afterward (see the Care Note).*

Pastoral Prayer

3–5 min

Pray this over the group. The **[bracketed]** lines are where you name the joys and concerns students just shared.

God who hears us,

Thank you for every person in this room, especially anyone who is here for the very first time tonight. Thank you that we don't have to be fine to come to you.

Thank you for the good things you've given us this week. *[Name the joys shared: "Thank you for Maya's great game, for Chris's grandma coming home..."]* Every good gift comes from you.

And we bring you the real stuff we're carrying. *[Name the concerns: "Be with Ethan's family this week. Give Sophia peace about her test on Friday..."]* And for the things that stayed in our hearts tonight and weren't spoken out loud, you already know them. Hold them too.

You heard David when he cried out to you from a cave. You didn't turn away from his complaint. You were his refuge. Some of us are in our own kind of cave right now: stressed, lonely, angry, or just tired of pretending. Thank you that you know our route, even when we feel lost. Help us stop saying "fine" to you, and start telling you the truth. Hear our real prayers. And like you did for David, send us people who care for our souls.

For anyone who is new here, thank you for bringing them. Help them feel at home. And help each of us bring you one honest prayer this week.

In Jesus' name, amen.

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SEND-OFF

"Take your student pages home: a five-day devotional and a tracker for your one step. Keep your My Psalm card somewhere you'll see it. You wrote Stanza 1 tonight, and every week you'll add one more until your psalm is done. RAW also pairs with our PRAYER 101 series, but you don't need that one to keep going with this. Next time we're talking about a feeling everybody has and nobody likes to admit: **'Afraid.'** And every week we'll keep asking: **what do I say to God when I'm not okay?** See you then."

Next Week Follow-Up: Open Week 2 by asking students to look at their One Step tracker. "How many days did you tell God something real? What helped? What got in the way?" Celebrate any progress, even one day. Then: "Who still has their My Psalm card? You don't have to show it. Just hold it up." Have extra student pages ready so new students can start with Stanza 1 or jump in at Stanza 2.

Care Note for Leaders

This series invites real emotions, and tonight a student may tell you, or write, more than they've told anyone. Most "not okay" weeks pass. Some don't. Watch for signs of depression or anxiety (withdrawing, hopelessness, constant worry, big changes in sleep, eating, or grades), self-harm, grief, or a student who seems unsafe at home.

- **Take every statement about suicide or self-harm seriously,** even if it sounds like a joke. Stay with the student. Ask directly and calmly: "Are you thinking about hurting yourself?" Asking does not put the idea in their head.
- **Never promise to keep a secret** when safety is at risk. Say: "I care about you too much to keep this to myself."
- **Contact parents or guardians and your lead pastor the same day.** Follow your church's safety policy. If there is immediate danger, call **911**.
- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** anyone in the U.S. can call or text **988**, any time. Share it with students and parents.
- **Abuse or neglect:** if a student discloses abuse, listen, don't investigate, and follow your church's policy and your state's mandatory reporting law right away.
- **Grief:** don't rush it or fix it. Sit with them, pray, and let their family know you care.

You're not expected to be a counselor. Your job is to listen well, take it seriously, and make sure students are connected to the right people: parents, your lead pastor, a school counselor, a doctor, or a licensed counselor. Getting professional help is good and godly.

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THE FULL SERIES

RAW · 5 Weeks

Each week stands alone, so new students can jump in any week. Taught in order, the five weeks use the Psalms to show students how to bring real emotions to God: honest complaint, fear, sadness, guilt, and joy. Each week students write one stanza of their own psalm. The question every week: *What do I say to God when I'm not okay?*

#	WEEK	TEXT
1	**Real Talk** Honest prayer	Psalm 142
2	**Afraid** Fear	Psalm 56
3	**Down** Sadness and discouragement	Psalm 42
4	**Sorry** Guilt and confession	Psalm 51:1–12
5	**Glad** Joy after the night	Psalm 30

Every week includes

- 45 / 60 / 75-minute schedules
- Activity Menu with 4+ game options
- Word-for-word leader scripts
- Scripture (World English Bible) and one big idea
- Response activity + "One Step" challenge
- A new stanza for My Psalm every week
- Tiered discussion questions
- Joys & Concerns prayer time
- Pastoral prayer with space for your group
- A Care Note for leaders
- Student pages and 5-day devotional
- Next-week follow-up

Built for real youth groups

These weeks are written for a real Wednesday night group: 5 to 15 students, often with a new face or two, led by a pastor or volunteer with limited prep time. Games stay light and never single anyone out. Every activity has a small-group version, and nobody is ever forced to share. Every leader script can be read word for word when you're short on time. RAW pairs well after PRAYER 101, another Daham series, but works on its own.

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Purchasers may photocopy and share the student pages and leader guide for use within their own church or ministry.
Scripture quotations are from the World English Bible (public domain).

Name: _____ Date: _____

TONIGHT'S BIG IDEA

I can bring God the real stuff, even complaints. Honest prayer is still prayer.

THE PRAYER FROM THE CAVE · PSALM 142:1–2, 5

"I cry with my _____ to Yahweh. With my voice, I ask Yahweh for _____.
I pour out my _____ before him. I tell him my _____."
"You are my _____, my portion in the land of the living."

FIND THE PATTERN

Look up each verse in Psalm 142. Write a few words from it, then check which part of the pattern it is.

VERSE	WHAT DAVID SAYS	TELLS GOD HOW IT IS	ASKS GOD FOR HELP	REMEMBERS WHO GOD IS
142:4		☐	☐	☐
142:3		☐	☐	☐
142:6		☐	☐	☐
142:5		☐	☐	☐

UNDER THE FINE

Private, just you and God. Circle any words that fit your week. Then write what's really under your "fine."

stressed happy tired lonely excited annoyed worried grateful
angry calm left out hopeful overwhelmed sad proud confused numb

One person besides God I could be honest with:

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MY ONE STEP THIS WEEK

Every _____ (morning / bus ride / after school / bedtime)

I will get real with God by _____

Example: "Every night before bed, I will tell God one honest thing about my day."

My Psalm · Stanza 1

Tell God how it is: _____

Ask God for help: _____

Remember who God is: _____

Copy one line onto your card below.

Pour It Out… (only you see this)

What I usually say to God: _____

What I really want to say: _____

_____

One true thing about God I'll hold on to: ____

MY WEEK TRACKER

Check each day you did your step.

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

MY PRAYER LIST

Write down the joys and concerns people shared tonight (first names only) and keep praying this week.

JOYS: THANK YOU, GOD, FOR…	CONCERNS: PLEASE BE WITH…

MY PSALM CARD

✂ Cut out along the dashed line. Keep it in your Bible, wallet, or phone case. Copy one line from each week's stanza. New this week? Start with Stanza 1.

RAW

My Psalm

"I pour out my complaint before him. I tell him my troubles."

PSALM 142:2

1. **Real Talk:** _____
2. Afraid: _____
3. Down: _____
4. Sorry: _____
5. Glad (praise): _____

Amen. Signed: _____

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5 Days of Real Talk

TAKE-HOME DEVOTIONAL · 5 MINUTES A DAY

Each day: read the verse, think about the question, write one honest sentence. That's it.

DAY 1 **Psalm 142:1–2 · Pour it out**

David didn't edit his prayer. What's one thing you've been keeping "fine" with God? Tell him the real version.

DAY 2 **Psalm 142:3 · You knew my route**

Even when David felt overwhelmed, God knew where he was going. Where do you feel lost or overwhelmed right now?

DAY 3 **Psalm 142:4–5 · You are my refuge**

David felt like no one cared, and he ran to God anyway. Who or what do you usually run to when it's bad?

DAY 4 **Psalm 13:1–2 · How long?**

This psalm asks God "How long?" four times. What are you tired of waiting for? Ask God about it honestly.

DAY 5 **Psalm 62:8 · Pour out your heart**

"Pour out your heart before him." Write one sentence that starts with "God, honestly…"

A prayer you can pray this week

God, I don't always feel fine, and I'm tired of pretending. Thank you that I can tell you the truth. Hear my real prayers, the good ones and the hard ones. You are my refuge. Amen.

Next week · Week 2: **Afraid**

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