

WHERE IS JESUS WHEN TRAGEDY STRIKES?

by Chad Unrein, Michele Hershberger and Carol Duerksen

KEY VERSE:

While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. Luke 24:15-16

FAITH STORY:

Luke 24:13-35

FAITH FOCUS:

Two disciples of Jesus were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, discussing all that happened to Jesus. In the course of their exchange, Jesus began to walk with them, but they didn't recognize him. When Jesus asked what they were discussing, they couldn't believe their ears. How could this stranger not know about the tragic events that had taken place in Jerusalem? They recounted the events to him, and Jesus proceeded to interpret the Scriptures for them regarding the Messiah. They still didn't "get it" until later, when they invited him to a meal with them. It was in the breaking of the bread that they recognized who had been walking with them, and then Jesus disappeared. The disciples hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples what they had experienced.

SESSION GOAL:

Help students understand that the presence of tragedy and catastrophe does not mean the absence of Jesus—Jesus is walking alongside those who are hurting.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Recall personal or worldwide catastrophes or tragedies
- Know the story of the disciples on the walk to Emmaus
- Learn that Jesus is present, not absent, in tragedies and catastrophes

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 If possible, locate and read the book "Where was God on Sept. 11?"
- 2 Bibles for all students
- 3 Video clips or pictures of some worldwide or local catastrophes or tragedies. This could include 9-11, Hurricane Katrina, the tsunami, a car accident that claimed the life of someone your class members know—whatever you can locate that you'd like to discuss with your class.
- 4 Stories of people who have felt God's presence with them during a bad time, tragedy or catastrophe. These could come from people in your congregation or stories from other sources.
- 5 A snack for the students

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5–10 minutes)

Pass around the pictures or show the video clips of the tragedies. Share your own feelings about these events and encourage students to share their thoughts and feelings.

CONNECT: (2 minutes)

Ask: *What do you think was the biggest tragedy in the life of Jesus' disciples?*

After students have shared their answers (which should be the crucifixion of Jesus), **say:** *Many unusual things happened to the disciples after the death of Jesus. Let's look at one of those stories.*

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (15–20 minutes)

Hand out Bibles to all students. Ask them to follow along as you or a student reads the story from Luke 24:13-35. Then ask for volunteers to act out this story—three students for verses 13-27 and the rest of the students for verses 28-35 (three for the parts of Jesus and the two disciples, and the remainder for the disciples back in Jerusalem.) Give students time to read the passage again and be familiar with it so they can paraphrase the conversations.

After the story has been acted out, ask:

What was the tragedy the disciples were discussing?

Where was Jesus when they were talking about it?

APPLY: (5–15 minutes)

Look at the pictures and video clips again.

Ask: *Where do you think Jesus was when these things were happening?*

If you read the book, "Where was God on Sept. 11?" share insights you gained from that book.

Say: *Just like Jesus was with the disciples when they were walking along the road and they didn't recognize him, Jesus is with us when tragedy hits but we don't always recognize him. Bad things do happen to people, but Jesus is walking with us in those bad times.*

Share stories of persons who have felt God with them during a bad time. This could include persons from your congregation, students, or stories you have collected and brought to class.

RESPOND: (5–7 minutes)

Share the snack with the class.

Say: *The two disciples recognized Jesus when they shared a meal together. We are sharing this snack to symbolically remind us to look and be aware of Jesus' presence in our lives—during the bad times as well as the good times and the "just average" times.*

Close by inviting students to offer sentence prayers for Jesus to be with persons they know who are going through tough times, either on a local or worldwide level.