

DIVINE DESERT [spiritual dry spells — Psalm 143]

THIS WEEK

All Christians have ups and downs in their relationship with God. But this isn't a sign that God has abandoned them. God doesn't move! It's people that move away from God in different ways. This TalkSheet discusses emotional and spiritual ups and downs—and how do deal with those as Christians.

OPENER

Start off by asking your kids to make a map or chart of their relationship with God. Provide paper and pens for them to do this. Let them create their own chart—pinpointing specific times when they felt up or down in their relationship with God. Ask them to write down what times those were and what was going on in their lives at the time. Be sure to have them mark the beginning of their relationship with God and where they are today. They won't have to share these maps or charts with anyone else, so encourage them to be honest about the challenges they've faced. Afterwards, ask the group to summarize what causes someone to lose touch with God. Why do they think people go through highs and lows? How do they think God responds when he sees them going through really good times and rough times, too?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Without forcing your kids to share their individual answers, ask them to make a list of the things that tend to make them feel distant from God. You may want to hang a large sheet of white paper for them to write their answers on. Make it clear that there's a big difference between feeling that God is far off and him really being far off.
2. In these verses David felt hopeless and depressed. He felt faint and dismayed. His trials were severe (verse 3) and it had been a long time since he felt good (verse 5). And it seems that he hadn't gotten any answers to his prayers (verse 7). But despite all this, he didn't feel that God was far away. He still turned to God in prayer, recognizing that God was near.
3. How did your kids respond to these items? Ask them to explain why they answered yes or no. Then relate these items to David in Psalm 143. Was he committing a sin or not praying? Was he committed to God?
4. So when the down times come, how will your kids respond? What answers did they chose from these items? Ask for a few volunteers to share their responses and why they chose the ones they did. Take a poll among your group members

to see how they answered. How easy or difficult is it to follow through with these suggestions? Why or why not?

5. What did Jesus say to his followers in these verses? If your group had to paraphrase the verses in their own words, what would they say? How do these verses apply directly to the lives of your kids today?

THE CLOSE

Your kids have control over their emotions—and over how they respond to the down times in Christianity. To illustrate this, ask your kids to describe the possible emotional responses a girl might have to being asked out by a guy. She could be happy (if she liked him), mad (if he was going steady with someone else), disgusted (if he was a creep), and so forth. The emotional response is up to her. The same thing applies to down times with God. If you're going through a hard time, how will your kids respond to God? Will they walk away? Or will they lean harder on him? The choice is up to them. God never moves.

MORE

- Have your kids take a look at the charts or maps from the introduction. Looking at the down times, how could they have handled these situations differently? What would have made a difference at the time? During these times, did they move toward God or away from him? Would it have helped to talk with someone, like a youth pastor or teacher? Were their prayers answered? If so, how? Did God prove himself to be faithful through these times? If your group is comfortable with each other, you may want to let them share a few struggles—and the results—with each other.
- Maybe you have some group members who need some encouragement in their relationship with God. You may want to form a small prayer group or a daily e-mail verse and encouragement. Or make a goal to have lunch with one student every week to see how they're doing in their walk with God. Some of your kids may be dealing with some pretty heavy issues, such as depression, abuse, social struggles, problems at home and more. They may be asking the question why? and may need to find professional help or someone to help them deal with these issues.