



**SERIES GOAL:** This series is designed to help students realize that anxiety and depression don't define their story. You will use Scripture, practical tools, and attention-grabbing object lessons to help students discover how God's truth speaks peace into anxious hearts and gives hope for better days on the horizon.

**THE MAIN IDEA:** Better Days begin when we realize that it is OK to admit we are not OK.

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 13:1-6; Philippians 4:6-8

**SET UP:**

[TEACHER NOTE: Prior to your meeting, stuff a large backpack with things students incorporate into their lives on a daily basis. It is vital for the backpack to appear full and heavy.

An important step in this setup is to select one or more books upon which to place book covers. I used two sets of covers. One set was bright-colored while the other set was solid black.

Using white paint or permanent marker, write anxiety-related labels on the black book covers. Then, using dark paint or permanent marker, write identity-related labels on the bright book covers. It is important for the labels to contrast. For example, you might write "abandoned" on a black cover and "adopted" on a bright cover. To complete the setup, you would put the bright cover on the book under the black cover. That way, when you remove the cover labeled "abandoned" it will reveal the cover labeled "adopted." You will see why later.]

**HOOK:**

[TEACHER NOTE: Walk into the meeting room carrying the stuffed backpack on your back. Make sure to shuffle your feet, groan, grunt, huff, and breath hard as if the backpack is a terrible burden.]

[SLIDE 1]

Oh man, I don't know why I have to lug this thing around all day. I know it may look excessive, but it contains everything that makes me who I am. It's

not that I **want** to carry this thing around... I **have** to carry it. Don't believe me? Let's just take a look at what is inside.

[TEACHER NOTE: Make a big production out of removing the backpack. Remember, this thing is super heavy! Unzip the compartments and pull stuff out one-by-one. Explain why you need the stuff and toss it to the side. I've included a few examples below.]

[Soccer Cleat] Yeah, see, I need this for soccer practice after school.

[Body Spray.] Oh, and this is for after soccer practice. I call this "shower in a can." [Spray yourself liberally and toss it to the side.]

[Water Bottle.] See here, because... hydration, duh! [Take a swig and toss the bottle to the side.]

[Rubber Snake. In one motion, toss it onto students in the first row.] Sorry about that! That guy was left over from my science experiment! Why are you screaming like that? You guys probably scared him to death!

[English Book] Ugh! I aint no good at no English!

[Book with a cover labeled "ANXIETY." Make sure to pull it out far enough for all to see then hastily shove it back in the backpack.] Oh... you weren't supposed to see that.

[TEACHER NOTE: Follow the same pattern with a few other anxiety-labeled books.]

[TEACHER NOTE: Put the backpack on your back.]

Imagine having to carry this backpack everywhere you go, school, sports, church, hanging out with friends. Some of the stuff in there is necessary for life. I have to carry those things, but they really shouldn't bog me down. But there was plenty of other stuff in there that I shouldn't have to carry. What did you guys see that shouldn't be there?

This backpack is a good representation of what anxiety and depression can feel like: carrying a heavy load that weighs you down, even if no one else can see it. Every step is harder, every movement more exhausting. By a show of hands, who has ever felt weighed down by worry, sadness, or stress?

Let's talk honestly tonight. Anxiety and depression are real. They are something that just about everyone deals with at some point in their lives.

According to the CDC, in the last two weeks, 20% of teens have experienced anxiety and 18% have experienced depression. What is even more alarming is that 20% of teens have seriously considered suicide within the past year. If the statistics are true for our community, that would mean one out of every five students here tonight have battled anxiety, depression, and maybe even considered ending their life.

[TEACHER NOTE: See <https://www.cdc.gov/children-mental-health/data-research/index.html>]

It is safe to say that if you have experienced anxiety or depression, you are not alone. In fact, the Bible has a lot to say about those things. Scripture contains several examples of people dealing with the weight of these issues. Over the next four weeks, we are going to look at some examples and see what advice the Bible gives us for handling anxiety and depression. And more importantly, we're going to show how the Bible gives us hope for Better Days on the horizon.

## **BOOK**

We are going to start with an example from the life of King David. This guy lived an extraordinary life. Let me just list off a few highlights from his resume. When David was a young shepherd boy, he used to protect his father's flocks from lions and bears by catching them by their jaws and beating them with a club. And we all know the famous story of him killing Goliath, the giant, with a sling and stone. If that wasn't enough, he was later crowned King of Israel, and his biggest accolade was that God called him a man after His own heart.

You might be wondering how a guy like David, a sort of who's who in the Bible, could be an example of someone who struggled with anxiety and depression. Well, the reason is because David's life wasn't all about slaying wild animals and giants and being crowned King. He had several enemies. One was King Saul, who was an enemy because of jealousy. But others were David's enemies because of some really bad decisions he made.

You could say that David's life had more ups and downs than a roller coaster at an amusement park. We talked about some of his mountaintop experiences, but now, let's look at some of his life's deep valleys using Psalm 13 as an example.

**[SLIDE 2] Psalm 13:1-4 (NLT)**

*O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way? How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day? How long will my enemy have the upper hand? Turn and answer me, O Lord my God! Restore the sparkle to my eyes, or I will die. Don't let my enemies gloat, saying, "We have defeated him!" Don't let them rejoice at my downfall.*

It's obvious that this portion of the Psalm was written at a particularly low point in David's life. Four times in the first two verses, David lamented, asking God how long he would have to endure such pain and heartache. Note that David thought it would go on forever and might even lead to his ultimate demise.

We typically know David as a hero, but he spent much of his life dealing with hardship. For example, David played the harp in an attempt to calm King Saul, and Saul responded by chunking spears at David's head. I guess Saul wasn't a fan of his music.

David also experienced the death of an infant child, the rape and murder of his daughter, and the murder of a son who was killed by his other son. To make it worse, King David was forced to go into hiding because one of his sons wanted to kill him so he could take over as king. Can you say family dysfunction?

David had lots of horrible things he could dwell on, and I can understand how it weighed him down. It's kind of like this backpack... it's hard to focus on anything but this heavy load.

**LOOK**

You know, if you think about it, we really aren't that much different than David.

[TEACHER NOTE: ILLUSTRATION: Take off the backpack and retrieve one of the anxiety-labeled books. Open and "read" something written about your life. The illustration will be more powerful if you make it personal.]

[TEACHER NOTE: Reading from the book labeled "Abandoned".]

Abandoned by your dad at seven years of age. You are forgotten, unloved by anyone. Accept this! Besides, what choice do you have? Your only



**THE MAIN IDEA:** Be liberated from negative labels by taking every thought captive.

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Corinthians 10:5

### **WARM UP**

- If you had to wear a funny warning label on your shirt all week, what would it say?
- If your personality was a brand or logo, which one would it be?

### **DIVING IN**

- Why do you think lies and negative labels can feel more powerful than the truth sometimes?
- Why is it important to remember that our struggles aren't just "people vs. people," but part of a spiritual battle?
- Why is it powerful to replace a lie with a specific verse instead of just trying to "think positive"?

### **DIGGING DEEPER**

- What's a label (true or false) you've carried that has stuck with you over time?
- How do labels pile up like sticky notes or "ticks" in your life?
- Have you ever had a friend (like "Grace" in the illustration) speak truth over you? How did it impact you?
- Which truth about your identity in Christ (like "Loved," "Chosen," "Wonderfully Made") do you most need to remember right now?

### **APPLICATION**

- What's one negative thought you can take captive and replace with God's truth this week?
- Who can you invite to hold you accountable when you start slipping back into old labels?
- Who in your life needs encouragement right now, and what's one truth you could speak over them?

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