

JESUS FOR THE ANXIOUS

Group Study Guide

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INTRODUCTION

This is not a group about anxiety. Groups that focus on a person's anxiety should be run by a licensed therapist and are typically designed for people who meet diagnostic criteria for a mental health disorder.

This is not one of those groups.

Instead, **this group is for people committed to practicing peaceful habits in their daily lives**, regardless of whether or not they struggle with chronic anxiety. This guide is designed for coed or single-gender groups, offering questions that allow for both personal and community growth. We can all benefit from using the tools learned in *Jesus for the Anxious*, so the groups are designed to encourage you to use those tools, grow closer to Jesus, and grow in relationship with each other.

Group Member Roles

Each Group Member should have their own copy of *Jesus for the Anxious: 8 Weeks of Practicing Peace to Calm Your Worry and Fear*. Group Members are expected to read the material and participate in the activities in the book. During the gatherings, Group Members participate as appropriate, seeking to grow themselves and encourage others in the group. If you tend to speak often in groups, try stepping back and allowing others time and space to speak. If you tend to hold back in group, try stepping forward and speaking up.

Group Facilitator Roles

The Group Facilitator is not a licensed therapist and should not be treated as one, nor should they be expected to fulfill such roles. The Group Facilitator will open, lead, and close the gatherings. They are a guide, responsible for keeping things on track, asking members to step forward or step back when necessary. In addition, Group Facilitators are co-learners with you. They will help facilitate conversation and encourage members to use the tools they are learning. The Group Study questions are designed for a 1-hour meeting, but feel free to spend less or more time on each as it applies to your group setting.



Roles of All Members

If a member of the group seems to be facing a mental health crisis, *all* members are responsible for referring them immediately to the resources below:

For immediate help (if someone is in danger): Call 911.

For a non-emergency crisis, try the following resources:

National Suicide Crisis Prevention: Call 988

National Crisis Help Text Line: Text HOME or HOLA to 741741

If a member is not in crisis but needs mental health help, refer the member to a local licensed counselor. I strongly urge the Group Facilitator to research and list three local counselors or counseling centers below for quick reference, before the first day of your group begins. If you need help, ask your local church for referrals or try searching at [psychologytoday.com](https://www.psychologytoday.com)

- _____
- _____
- _____

I hope you make deeper connections with those around you, find comfort in difficult times, and learn to practice peaceful habits in your daily lives. And I hope that, as you do this, you grow closer to Jesus because, as you will learn, he is always rooting for us—for the strong, the weak, the humble, and for the anxious.

Melissa



WEEK ONE

LEARN WITH JESUS

Opening Prayer

Recap

- Anxiety is both an emotion and a collection of symptoms.
- Anxiety is not a sin.
- Meditation means to focus on something.
- “True and helpful” can be one form of meditation.

Group Discussion

- What is something dismissive you’ve heard given in response to anxiety (whether to you, or to another person)?
- What is ONE worry or fear that circles in your mind?
- How does it cause you to miss out on life?
- What is ONE true and helpful thought you can focus on instead?
- How do you feel about meditation?
- Name a verse you will meditate on this week.
- As a group, make a list of 20 or more characteristics of Jesus (kind, compassionate, stern, etc.). It’s okay if you disagree, just write them all down. Then, have each member answer the following question: What is ONE characteristic of Jesus you can use for meditation?
- What are your two main takeaways from this week’s readings? These can be concepts you learned, revelations about yourself, new insights about Jesus, etc.
- What is one area where you need encouragement this week?
- If you have time and need additional conversation pieces, review each day’s lessons as a group, discussing personal thoughts and insights.

Share prayer requests as a group, one minute each.

Pray for each other in pairs

WEEK TWO

BREATHE WITH JESUS

Opening Prayer

Recap

- Breath is the gift of life, allowing oxygen to reach our brains.
- Deep breathing has significant mental health and emotional implications.
- Belly breathing, 4-5-6 breathing and box breathing are all types of diaphragmatic breathing.
- Practice makes habit.

Group Discussion

- What is one aspect of deep breathing that you find interesting?
- What is your favorite deep breathing tool?
- Take a glance at the introduction story on day 3. Where in life do you need simplicity?
- As a group, do the Practice Peace exercise together from day 3. The Group Facilitator can read each step aloud, giving several seconds between each step.
- How have you (or how can you) integrate one of these deep breathing skills into your daily or weekly routine? Where might it be helpful?
- What are your two main takeaways from this week's readings? For example, these can be concepts you learned, revelations about yourself, or new insights about Jesus.
- What is one area where you need encouragement this week?
- If you have time and need additional conversation pieces, review each day's lessons as a group, discussing personal thoughts and insights.

Share prayer requests

Pray for each other in pairs

WEEK THREE

ENGAGE THE MIND WITH JESUS

Group Facilitator Prep: Bring an activity for the group mindfulness exercise below

Opening Prayer

Recap

- Mind time describes your thought patterns. Mind time can be healthy (focusing on positive or helpful thoughts) or unhealthy (focusing on negative or unhelpful thoughts).
- Visualization, the imagined use of your five senses in an imaginary place, can be helpful in moments when you need to escape for a limited time.
- Mindfulness, the use of your five senses in your present moment, can be helpful when you need to refocus on what is around you.
- Distractions should be temporary, enjoyable and easy. They are helpful only when not overused, and only for a limited time, so you can return to your present moment.

Group Discussion

- Were any of this week's peace practices uncomfortable for you?
- Think about your mind time. What kinds of thoughts take up your mind most of the day? Anxious thoughts? Neutral thoughts? Annoyed thoughts? Worried thoughts? Others?
- As a group, do a mindfulness exercise together. This can include drinking a glass of water or juice, sipping tea or coffee, blowing bubbles, eating a peppermint candy, putting on lotion, etc. Spend one minute in silence doing the activity at the same time. Then, as a group, share what you each saw, smelled, tasted (if appropriate), heard, and felt (physically and emotionally).
- What is one thing you do throughout your week that you'd like to do more mindfully? In other words, what is something you already do that you could spend time noticing the experience with your five senses (e.g. eating, driving, spending time with kids/spouse/friends, walking in nature, etc.)?
- What are your two main takeaways from this week's readings? For example, these can be concepts you learned, revelations about yourself, or new insights about Jesus.
- What is one area where you need encouragement this week?
- If you have time and need additional conversation pieces, review each day's lessons as a group, discussing personal thoughts and insights.

Share prayer requests

Pray for each other in pairs

WEEK FOUR

THE POWER OF THE BODY - GOD'S IMPRESSIVE CREATION

Opening Prayer

Recap

- Posture matters to our emotional health.
- Writing Scripture helps to engage the body and brain in helpful ways.

Group Discussion

- What is one storm you are currently facing that you are comfortable sharing with the group?
- What is one thing you've learned so far that can help you in the midst of this storm?
- Have the Group Facilitator read through the progressive muscle relaxation steps in the Practice Peace portion of day 1 while the whole group participates.
- Have the Group Facilitator read the following verses aloud, in short phrases, while the other members write the verses on paper.
 - Psalm 62:5
 - John 16:33
- What are your two main takeaways from this week's readings? These can be concepts you learned, revelations about yourself, new insights about Jesus, etc.
- What is one area where you need encouragement this week?
- If you have time and need additional conversation pieces, review each day's lessons as a group, discussing personal thoughts and insights.

Share prayer requests

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WEEK FIVE

FOLLOW JESUS IN REST

Opening Prayer

Recap

- Rest is an important aspect of following Jesus.
- We avoid rest due to cultural influences.
- Practicing simplicity can be one way to move toward a restful life.
- The Sabbath is not just a requirement, but a benefit for us. It is an obedience of trust.

Group Discussion

- Do you struggle with busy anxiety, overachiever anxiety, and/or perfectionist anxiety?
- Did you do your rest times that you selected on day 1? If so, what did you do?
- After learning about practicing simplicity in day 3, what dish did you remove?
- Do you normally practice the Sabbath? What preparation do you need to make in order to practice the Sabbath? What Sabbath activities seem enjoyable and restful to you?
- Did you remove any cups, as described in day 5? What keeps you from removing others? How can others in the group encourage you?
- What are your two main takeaways from this week's readings? These can be concepts you learned, revelations about yourself, new insights about Jesus, etc.
- What is one area where you need encouragement this week?
- If you have time and need additional conversation pieces, review each day's lessons as a group, discussing personal thoughts and insights.

Share prayer requests

Pray for each other in pairs

WEEK SIX

SELF-EXAMINATION WITH JESUS

Opening Prayer

Recap

- True self-awareness means understanding ourselves from God's perspective.
- God-awareness increases self-awareness. Self-awareness + others-awareness lead to healthier ways of relating to others, which reduces anxiety.
- Head knowledge comes through information. Heart knowledge comes through experience. We can believe something in our heads but struggle to believe it in our hearts.
- Your lens impacts how you relate to God, yourself, and the world around you.

Group Discussion

- What is something you head-know, but you struggle to heart-know? (Example: "I know God sees me, but I often feel unseen by Him").
- Practice Lectio Divina as a group. The Group Facilitator should read Luke 17:11-19 aloud three times.
 - During the first reading, just listen to the story.
 - During the second reading, imagine yourself in the passage. What do you see, hear, taste, touch, or feel? Are you in the role of one of the characters, or somewhere else in the scene?
 - During the third reading, listeners are to look for a word or phrase that catches your attention. (Group Facilitator: Read a bit slower during the third reading)
- Discuss this experience as a group. What did you notice? What was your word or phrase? Only share as you are comfortable, as some of these answers may feel too vulnerable for now.
- What are your main core values?
- What is one identity statement you formed?
- What are your two main takeaways from this week's readings? These can be concepts you learned, revelations about yourself, new insights about Jesus, etc.
- What is one area where you need encouragement this week?
- If you have time and need additional conversation pieces, review each day's lessons as a group, discussing personal thoughts and insights.

Share prayer requests

Pray for each other in pairs

WEEK 7

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS WITH JESUS

Opening Prayer

Recap

- Relationships are fundamental to early brain development and ongoing emotional regulation.
- We only control half of the contents in the relationship jar.
- Changing how you interact with others helps you, even if others never change.
- Choosing engagements means choosing when (or if), what, and how we speak to others.
- We only need to set boundaries with those who don't naturally respect them.
- We must know who we are before we can declare who we are.
- Instead of apologizing profusely, we need to consider the size of the mistake, not the size of the anger.
- With difficult people, speak with matter of fact and verbatim, and try being curious.

Group Discussion

- Think of one relationship that feels like a struggle. You don't have to name this person (in fact, it might be more appropriate *not* to name this person, if it leads to gossip). What are some tools from this week that you can use with this person?
- "As far as it depends on you" means part of the relationship depends on you, and part of it does not. Is there a relationship where you need to offer more grace, mercy, or love? Give a concrete example of one thing you can do this week to act on this.
- Which of the tools discussed this week feel most natural to you?
- Which of the tools discussed this week feel most unnatural to you? If you want help, ask the group for suggestions on how to practice this.
- Are you an over- or underapologizer? How can you work on this?
- What are your two main takeaways from this week's readings? These can be concepts you learned, revelations about yourself, new insights about Jesus, etc.
- What is one area where you need encouragement this week?
- If you have time and need additional conversation pieces, review each day's lessons as a group, discussing personal thoughts and insights.

Share prayer requests

Pray for each other in pairs

WEEK 8

MOVING FORWARD

Opening Prayer

Recap

- Guilt anxiety assumes you are always wrong and others are always right.
- Others' reactions say more about them than they do about us.
- Access to worldly resources leads to reliance upon wooden beams. It weakens our faith.
- God's character and truth become our steel beams.
- Ignoring emotional health stymies spiritual health.
- Overcoming anxiety doesn't mean you'll never experience anxiety again; it means it no longer dominates your life.

Group Discussion

- Discuss the Serenity Chart as a group, avoiding gossip about others. What did you learn during this exercise? Is there any advice or encouragement you need from the group?
- Name any wooden beams you've come to rely on over the years.
- Name steel beams that can replace those wooden beams. These are often more effective if they relate to the wooden beam. (e.g. "Finances" and "Success" wooden beams could be replaced by "God Provides" or "God gives me my worth").
- How are you doing with your three main symptoms? Discuss if you feel safe to do so, otherwise feel free to pass on this question.
- Share your Calm Skills Toolbox with the group. Which tools did you choose? Where will you keep the Toolbox so that it's handy in a future storm? (Suggestions: Put the Calm Skills in a "notes" app on your phone or keep the paper in a wallet or bedside table).
- What is your next step?
- What are your two main takeaways from this week's readings? These can be concepts you learned, revelations about yourself, new insights about Jesus, etc.
- What is one area where you need encouragement this week?
- What is your next step?
- If you have time and need additional conversation pieces, review each day's lessons as a group, discussing personal thoughts and insights.

Share prayer requests

Pray for each other in pairs