

Anxiety as Opportunity for Spiritual Growth

Participant Workbook



Redeeming Babel

Session 1

Spiritual growth *through* anxiety

Introduction



Notes:

Anxiety as Opportunity



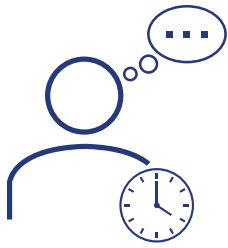
Notes:

Common Christian approaches to anxiety:

1.

2.

What is different about this course's approach:



Individual exercise #1:

Describe a current anxiety

Write out in the space below one thing you have been anxious about recently. This could be something at work, in family, in a relationship, about finances, health, something happening in society.

Try to describe the scenario(s) that you fear will happen:

List adjectives that describe your experience of this anxiety. Here are some starter options: *angry, scared, insecure, vulnerable, overwhelmed, paralyzed, obsessed*, etc.)

Approaching Jesus through anxiety



Notes:

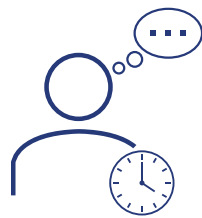
Group Poll

Which type of anxiety do you tend to feel most strongly?

Health
Interpersonal
Performance
Provision

Reputation
Safety
Spiritual
Other

Inserting yourself into the Gospel story



Individual exercise #2:

The woman with the flow of blood

Read the story found in in Mark 5:23-34 below, following the steps listed on the following page.

²² Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet ²³ and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.” ²⁴ So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. ²⁵ Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶ She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” ²⁹ Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰ Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” ³¹ And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” ³² He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

1. The first time, read it so that you can visualize the basic action of the story. Try to picture the scene.
2. The second time, read it more with your emotions. Imagine what the woman feels as she approaches Jesus. Imagine what she feels as Jesus responds.
3. Now, pause and refresh yourself on the anxiety you identified at the beginning of the session. Recall how you experience this anxiety.
4. For your third and final reading, insert that experience into the story. Imagine yourself as the person approaching Jesus with your own feelings of anxiety. Imagine what it is like to experience Jesus' response to you.

Notes on the experience:



In between sessions exercise - from Session 1

Practice inserting yourself into another story of an anxious person approaching Jesus. Choose one of the passages below, and follow the steps outlined above in the woman with flow of blood exercise.

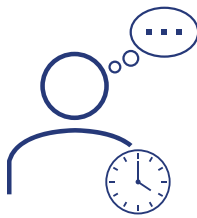
- Mark 4:35-41: The disciples afraid in a storm at sea
- Mark 6: 30-44: The disciples worried about not having enough for the crowds
- Mark 9: 33-37 and Mark 10: 35-41: The disciples anxious about their comparative status

Session 2

Get Present

G.R.A.I.N.*

G: Get present
R: Recognize
A: Accept
I: Investigate
N: Nurture holding capacity



Individual exercise #1:

Get Present to Nature

When you are outside or at least looking outside, do the following.

- Pay close attention to at least three things in nature that are at least 10 feet away from you. For each thing, try to observe some new detail you may not have noticed before.
- Then engage as many other senses as you can. What do you smell? What do you hear? What does the air feel like on your skin? Pay close attention to each sensation.
- Jot down what you noticed in the space below.

* Note: This framework takes inspiration from Tara Brach's R.A.I.N. material found at <https://www.tarabrach.com/rain/>

Small group discussion

Take 3 minutes for everyone to read the passage individually.

- Underline where Jesus talks about the following topics: ***anxiety***, ***observing nature***, and ***present versus future***.
- How does Jesus connect these three topics?

Matthew 6:25-34 (ESV):

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing?

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

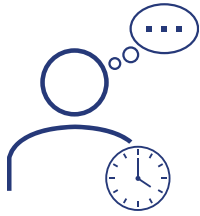
³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

³⁴ “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Take 7 minutes to have a “popcorn discussion” as a small group where everyone offers quick observations.



Notes:



Individual exercise #2:

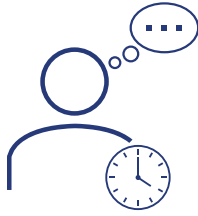
Make a plan for nature

- When during this week will you get present to nature?
- Where will this happen?
- What do you need to arrange to make this happen?
- How will you try to get present *to* nature (and not just have nature serve as background scenery to your anxiety)? What exercises of observation could be helpful?

Mindful Breath



Notes:



Individual exercise #3:

Making a practice plan for mindful breathing

Do you wish to practice mindful breathing more regularly? (YES / NO)

If “No,” can you identify another practice of getting present that might be more attractive? What is it?

If “Yes,” identify 5 minutes during the day that you can practice mindful breathing regularly.

- What time:
- What is the setting:
- What you need to do to remind yourself:



In between sessions exercise - from Session 2

Practice getting present

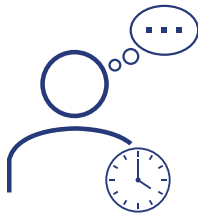
Carry out your plans to get present to nature and/or practice mindful breathing.

Record here how it went:

Session 3

Recognize

Anxiety as “out there” versus “in here”



Individual exercise #1:

Reading the story of Jairus (Mark 5:22-42)

²² Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet ²³ and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.” ²⁴ So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. ²⁵ Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶ She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” ²⁹ Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰ Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” ³¹ And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” ³² He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

³⁵ While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” ³⁶ But overhearing what they

said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” ³⁷ He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” ⁴⁰ And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” ⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement.

Read the passage imaginatively and consider the following questions:

- Where is Jairus’ attention throughout this story?
- How is Jesus trying to direct Jairus’ attention?

Recognizing physical symptoms of anxiety



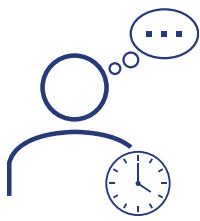
Notes:

Group Poll

Which physical symptoms do you feel most strongly when you are anxious?

Stomach discomfort
Headache
Pounding heart
Rapid breathing

Tight chest
Trouble sleeping
Muscle tension or pain
Trembling or shaking



Individual exercise #2:

Recognizing relational symptoms of anxiety

“FIGHT”	“FLIGHT”
<p>Toward the threat</p> <p>Insisting and aggressive</p> <p>Critical and irritated (with others)</p> <p>Jumpy and flitting</p> <p>Angry</p> <p>Loud</p> <p>Demanding immediate action</p> <p>Putting self forth</p> <p>Obsessively consume news, charts, experts</p>	<p>Away from the threat</p> <p>Deferring and passive</p> <p>Self-critical and self-blaming</p> <p>Paralyzed</p> <p>Sad</p> <p>Quiet</p> <p>Resistant to change</p> <p>Hiding</p> <p>Cat videos</p>

Which side (“Fight” or “Flight”) do you tend to lean?

Think of a relationship interaction where you noticed a “Fight or Flight” response to anxiety in yourself or in the other person.

Try to name what were/are the underlying anxieties.



In between sessions exercise - from Session 3

Develop Your Anxiety Profile

Which areas in life trigger anxiety for you: family, friendships, work, finances, health, something happening in society?

How does it show up?

How does it feel physically?

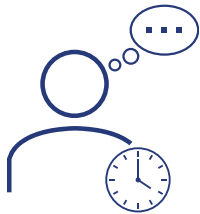
How does it show up in relational patterns?

What are the Fight or Flight dynamics?

Session 4

Accept

Why acceptance matters for anxiety



Individual exercise #1:

Your feelings about your Anxious Self

1. What is your picture of your Idealized Self? What image do you want to project to others? Write out some adjectives that describe how you want others to view you.
2. Review your Anxiety Profile again. What does this picture of your Anxious Self do to your picture of your Idealized Self?

3. How do you feel about your Anxious Self?

To help you get started, here are some possible feelings. Circle the ones that describe how you feel about your Anxious Self.

Compassion

Confused

Contempt

Attraction

Neutral

Repulsed

Warmth

Indifferent

Cold

Embracing

Aloof

Embarrassed

Appreciative

Avoidant

Judgmental

Sympathetic

Frustrated

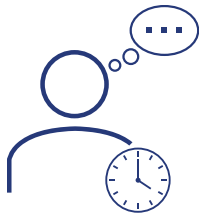
Disgust

4. Describe the internal battle between your Idealized Self and Anxious Self.

Jesus and the Leper



Notes:



Individual exercise #2:

Coming to Jesus as our Anxious Self

Set a timer and do one minute of mindful breathing.

Then, read the passage below in the imaginative fashion. Read the passage three times slowly:

1. Read it to imagine the action
2. Read it to imagine the emotions of the characters
3. Read it by inserting your own Anxious Self in the place of the leper.

Mark 1:40-42

⁴⁰ And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." ⁴¹ Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." ⁴² And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

After your third reading, consider the following questions:

- As you imagine your Anxious Self coming before Jesus, how does Jesus respond?
- What does Jesus say to you?
- How do you respond?
- How is your Idealized Self responding?

The Acceptance Move



In between sessions exercise - from Session 4

Discovering your “Acceptance Move”

- Spend 5 minutes doing Jesus-centered mindful breathing.
 - Ask Jesus to give you some ideas for an “Acceptance Move” - some action that will remind you that your Anxious Self is accepted by Him. This move could involve touch, movement, repetition of words, or anything else.
 - Write down what comes to mind:
-
- Close by asking Jesus to remind you to practice this “Acceptance Move” the next time you are feeling very anxious.

Session 5

Investigate

The Prayer of Investigation

Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalm 139: 23-24



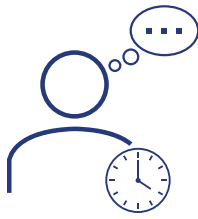
Notes:

The Anxiety Formula

ANXIETY = _____ X _____



Notes:



Individual exercise #1:

Investigating loss

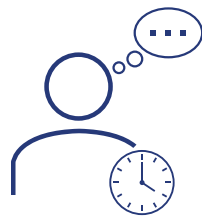
- Identify a particular anxiety that you have been feeling recently. You can use the one you identified in the beginning of Session 1 (see your workbook for a reminder), or you can pick another one.

Write out this anxiety:

- Practice a few Jesus-centered mindful breaths.
- Pray the words of Psalm 139:23-24 (see previous page)
- Investigate your anxiety through the mental formula “Anxiety = Loss.” Seek to identify the different kinds of feared loss that may be underneath your anxiety. To do this, set a timer for five minutes. During this time, write freely what comes to your mind, trusting that God is helping you in the process. Don’t self-edit or think too much. Don’t assume that you have to get to the “absolute bottom” in this exercise. Just start writing and see what comes out. Try not to stop until the time is up.

Free writing space:

Avoidance Moves



Individual exercise #2:

Investigating your Avoidance Move

“AWAY” (MENTAL “FLIGHT”) MOVES	“AROUND” (MENTAL “FIGHT”) MOVES
<p>Avoiding certain conversations</p> <p>Social media addiction</p> <p>Shopping impulses</p> <p>Workaholism and/or compulsive busyness</p> <p>Substance abuse of alcohol or other drugs</p> <p>Pornography</p>	<p>Rumination (looping thoughts)</p> <p>Obsessive compulsive behavior</p> <p>Rehearsing scenarios (past or present)</p> <p>Badgering others</p>

- Which way do you tend to lean in your Avoidance Move: Away or Around?

- Describe a particular Avoidance Move that you make.
- How does it feel to practice your Avoidance Move? What is its effect on you - especially on your anxiety levels?
- How convinced are you that your Avoidance Move is futile?

Confessing the Idolatry of our Avoidance Move



Notes:



In between sessions exercise - from Session 5

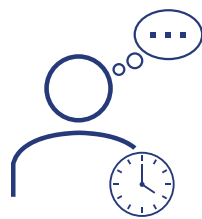
Investigate further your Avoidance Move

- What is your “go to” Avoidance Move that is related to anxiety?
- What tends to trigger this Move (time of day or week, context, event, etc.)?
- This week, try to notice when you are making that Avoidance Move. When this happens, stop for a moment. Try to trace it back to fear of loss. Try to name the underlying loss.
- Ask yourself, “How effective is this Avoidance Move in preventing any possibility of that loss occurring?”
- What is the possible “offensive way in me” involved in this Avoidance Move? Are you looking to this Move to accomplish something that only God can accomplish?
- If you sense that this Avoidance Move is actually a form of idolatry, confess this to God and ask him to “lead you into the way everlasting.”

Session 6

Nurture holding capacity

Loss is unavoidable



Individual exercise #1: *Facing the Loss of all Losses*

1. Prayerfully read John 12:24-25 again, asking Jesus to convey truth to your mind.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

John 12:24-25

Remember that “loves his life” here means thinking you can avoid loss and that “hates his life in this world” means rejecting this world’s preoccupation with avoidance of loss.

2. Go back to your worksheet exercise from Session 5: Investigating the Loss. Review the feared Loss that was a part of your own “Anxiety = Loss” formula.

3. Ask yourself: How does Death, the Loss of all Losses, make that loss unavoidable in the long run of your life?

Note: Ask Jesus to get at the underlying nature of that loss. For instance, you may fear losing your current job. Underneath that particular loss may be the deeper loss of security, self-image, sense of belonging, feeling of being productive, etc. It is those deeper losses that are ultimately unavoidable because of Death.

4. If you find yourself resistant or uncomfortable or angry, ask Jesus to show you the reasons for your reaction.

5. Rate your desire for an alternative to your current Avoidance formula? (0 is none and 5 is Very Strong).

The Jesus Alternative Formula

ANXIETY = _____ ÷ _____

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.

Mark 14:32-36

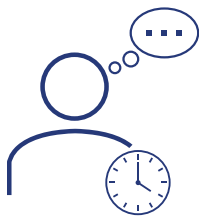
The Three Holding Moves of Jesus:

1. Choose to _____

2. Trust the _____

3. Take hold of _____

Choose to hold the loss



Individual exercise #2: *Grieving with Jesus*

1. Review again the feared loss identified in the last workbook exercise.
2. Write out how some aspects of that loss are already present. For example, you may be afraid of losing your job - and the associated sense of security and provision. Identify how you right now - in the present - are already experiencing some loss of security and provision.
3. Take a moment to ask Jesus to help you hold the loss and experience grief.

4. Set a timer for five minutes. During this time, just grieve with Jesus. This may include feeling sadness, anger, regret, or any other emotion. The key is to allow Jesus to bring up whatever feeling and not avoid what comes up. It is also OK if you struggle to feel much of anything. Just sit with the loss in Jesus' presence for these five minutes and accept whatever happens.

Free write space:

Trusting the hold of the Father through the loss

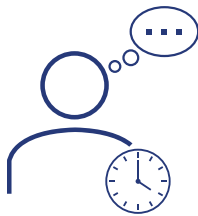


Notes:

Taking hold of calling



Notes:



Individual exercise #3:

What is my change in thinking?

What is a change in thinking that I desire to adopt from today's session?



In between sessions exercise - from Session 6

Practical steps toward nurturing our holding capacity

Gaining a correct understanding of the Resurrection promise - especially how it is a promise that takes us THROUGH loss and not AWAY/AROUND loss - is critical for spiritual growth.

Perhaps no Christian thinker of our contemporary era has done more to provide this correct understanding of the Resurrection than N.T. Wright. In our opinion, his book on this topic, *Surprised by Hope*, should be on the reading list of every Christian.

For your assignment, you are invited to engage this material in one or more of the following ways.


1. **Read the book *Surprised by Hope* yourself.** Consider reaching out to another friend in your small group and commit to reading it together. You could also choose to read and discuss the book as the next thing you do together as a small group (there is [a book group guide*](#) and even [a small group video curriculum](#) that you could use).
2. **Watch a video summary of the material by N.T. Wright.** Consider watching some excellent videos that Zondervan Press has produced with N.T. Wright. Start here with [this introduction available on YouTube.](#)
3. **Familiarize yourself with N.T. Wright's overall thinking** [with this visual guide](#) that summarizes his thinking in 50 pictures, including ones that clarify the true nature of Christian hope.


* These links are clickable in the PDF version of this workbook.

Session 7


Review and Making a Plan


Session 1

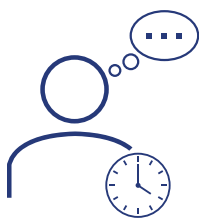
 Key Idea:

 Key Move:

Session 2

 Key Idea:

 Key Move:



Individual exercise #1:
Takeaways from Sessions 1 and 2

Which of the KEY IDEAS are especially helpful to me?

Which of these KEY MOVES do I want to keep practicing?

Session 3



Key Idea:

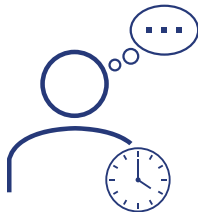
Key Move:

Session 4



Key Idea:

Key Move:



Individual exercise #2: *Review of Sessions 3 and 4*

Which of the KEY IDEAS are especially helpful to me?

Which of these KEY MOVES do I want to keep practicing?

Session 5



Key Idea:

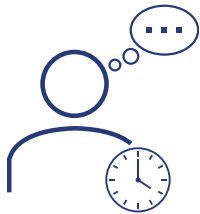
Key Move:

Session 6



Key Idea:

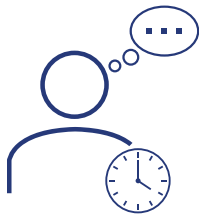
Key Move:



Individual exercise #3: *Review of Sessions 5 and 6*

Which of the KEY IDEAS are especially helpful to me?

Which of these KEY MOVES do I want to keep practicing?



Individual exercise #4: *Making a Plan*

Possible Key Moves to Try

1. Inserting yourself in a Gospel story of anxiety
2. Getting present to nature
3. Mindful breathing
4. Recognizing your physical symptoms
5. Recognizing your relational symptoms
6. Developing your “Acceptance Move”
7. Praying the “search my anxious thoughts” prayer
8. Grieving
9. Understanding the Resurrection promise

The Plan

The Key Move that I would like to practice:

When I will practice this move (how often during the week, which day, what time of day):

How long I am committing to practice this move (e.g. for the next month):

What I need to arrange in order to increase the likelihood that I will actually do so:

Who will hold me accountable (and how that person will do so):