



Sample Lesson – Anxious Heart

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STRESS

Sample Lesson: Dealing with an Anxious Heart

Bible: Philippians 4:6-7

Bottom Line: Through prayer and thankfulness and resting in God, you can say no to anxiety.

Description: Stressful things are a part of our lives, and we cannot make them go away. The stress of everyday life can often lead to having an anxious heart, which is something the Bible says we should not have. Thankfully, we are not alone in our fight against anxiousness. We have God on our side.

Supplies:

Opening Game:

- Thirty Books
- Loud fast music
- Tape

Teaching:

- Foam or rubber balls that won't hurt if you throw them at someone.
- A "shield" (a toy shield, a Rubbermaid lid, or anything that someone can use to block something)
- Pack of Mentos
- Kidde swimming pool or large tarp
- 6-8, 2-liter pop bottles with pop taken out and filled with water, completely covered so you cannot see what is in it. (Color the water if you want)
- 1, 2-liter bottle of Coke, covered so you cannot see what is in it.
- 4 pair of goggles

Small Groups:

- 2-3 blindfolds for each group
- Bag of sour candy
- Canned Brussel sprouts
- Spoons
- Napkins
- Paper plates

Opening Game

All Stacked Up

Mark a “finish line” on the floor with tape. Split the group into two teams and have them line up on the opposite side of the room from the finish line. Have the loud fast music playing during the entire game to add to the chaos.

Directions:

Have the first student from each team stand with their palms facing upwards, and stack two books on their hands. They have to make it to the finish line and back without dropping the books. Each time they come back, have someone add a book to their stack.

When their stack gets too heavy or wobbly, they can tag the next player to take one of their books. Then, the two students have to walk to the finish line together, and each one gets a new book added to their stack when they get back.

Every time someone’s stack gets too heavy, they can tag the next player to take a book. All of the players on the team must walk and cross the finish line together. If anyone drops a book, all the players from that team who currently have books have to start over, carrying only one book each.

Continue this until one team is able to get fifteen books across the finish line and back.

Teach

(Slide 1: Cover)

What are some things that make you feel stressed? Homework? Sports practice? Family? What else? *Allow preteens to yell out some answers.*

There are a lot of things in your day-to-day life that are stressful. Being a preteen is stressful—you've got school and friends and family and hobbies and homework...it's a lot to handle!

It's not that those things are *bad* things. You have to go to school, right? It's not a bad thing; it's where you learn! Friendships aren't a bad thing, and neither are hobbies or sports. Just because they aren't bad, though, doesn't mean that they won't be cause life to be a little bit stressful.

Sometimes, the stress of life can be overwhelming. When that happens, it can lead to having an anxious heart. Lets look and see what the Bible says about that.

(Slide 2: Philippians 4:6-7)

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” - Philippians 4:6-7

Well, we sure cleared that up really fast! What does the Bible say about being anxious? It says do not do it!

But you still have those stressful things in your life. How are you supposed to deal with those without being anxious?

(Slide 3: By Praying)

By praying! The verse says to pray **“in every situation.”** That means even in the most stressful of times, you shouldn't be anxious. Instead of being anxious, you should pray. And not only should you just pray, but you should pray **“with thanksgiving.”**

Lie out the tarp or kiddie pool before class starts and put all the 2-liter bottles in the pool; make sure you know which one is the coke.

Invite 2-3 preteens to the front to play this game, give each of them a pair of goggles. Then put on the final pair yourself.

Ask the preteens to tell you one bad thing that has happened this week, something that has made them anxious or stressed them out. Give a Mentos Candy to each of them when they come up with one thing.

Have everyone stand back and go to the one bottle of real Coke.

Anxiety and stress are like this little piece of candy—they seem harmless and like they really can't hurt you, right? But when we continue to try and keep the stress in and hold it down and do nothing about it, it can grow. It can actually get so bad it feels like we are going to explode. Then we think we cannot take it any longer and BOOM.

- **Drop your Mentos into your Coke bottle and let the crazyness happen.**

The things in your life that cause you anxiety and stress can cause a huge mess, just like this one little Mentos candy. We don't understand why it happens, just that we let it. God helps us see things that are truly important in our lives and those things make the stress seem so small and un-important.

Now I want each of you to choose a bottle of pop, but before you drop your Mentos in, ask God to take the stress or anxious feeling you are having away. Then when I count to three, drop your candy.

Everyone counts: One, Two, Three, Drop!

WOW, nothing happened, did it? See, what is totally awesome is that God wants to guard us against the stressful things in our lives. When we focus on things that we are thankful for rather than the stressful things, nothing gets out of control.

When you look at it that way, don't the stressful things in life seem to grow smaller and smaller? It's hard to stay anxious when you're too busy being thankful! That is why we are supposed to be thankful in all things.

(Slide 4: "The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.")

The last part of that verse is my very favorite. It says that if you pray with thankfulness instead of being anxious, **"The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."**

When you look at everything in your life that you have to deal with—family and relationships and sickness and homework and working—you may not understand how in the world you are supposed to deal with all of that without becoming anxious. And that's okay—you don't have to understand! Why? Because the peace that you can have, **the peace of God**, transcends all understanding.

I need a volunteer to come up here.

Okay, so we are going to pretend that these balls I have represent the stressful things in your life. They can represent school, group projects, chores, work...whatever it is in life that you find stressful.

Throw a couple at the volunteer, but throw them softly and wait a few seconds in between throwing them.

They aren't necessarily bad things, but the more you have to deal with, the more stressful they can become.

Throw several of the balls, faster this time.

And if you're all alone in dealing with this, it can become really overwhelming.

Throw all of the balls at the volunteer, very quickly and harder than the first time.

Can I get another volunteer?

Give the second volunteer the "shield" and have them stand in front of the first volunteer.

Your job is to guard *volunteer's name*.

Start throwing the balls again, but this time, aim for the shield and let the second volunteer deflect the balls.

Now, just because there is someone guarding you, does that mean these things went away? No! They're still very much here. You could see them and hear them, and you knew they were coming, but they didn't hit and attack you, because you had someone guarding you.

That's what the peace of Jesus will do for you. The stressful things in life aren't going to go away, but He will guard your heart and mind and help keep you from becoming overwhelmed and anxious.

Let's look at another example of what Jesus can do for you and the stress in your life.

(Slide 5: Matthew 11:28-30)

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." - Matthew 11:28-30

Have you ever been so tired that you just couldn't imagine doing anything else? Do you remember how good it felt when you were finally able to just collapse into your bed after that? How refreshing it feels to just lay down in your own bed and go to sleep when you're so tired?

That's what Jesus does for us.

See, it can be hard to find rest in this life. Not physical rest, but emotional and spiritual rest. Rest for our souls.

Life is stressful. It's full of responsibilities that you have to take care of and choices that you have to make. And in the midst of all of that, our souls can get really, really tired and overwhelmed.

But Jesus is saying to come to Him, and we will find rest for our souls.

When you find yourself stressed and anxious, and you can't imagine being able to handle anything else, and you feel weary and burdened and you know you can't do it on your own, Jesus is there for you. He wants you to rest in Him and learn from Him. He wants to take your heavy burden and swap it out for His light one.

He wants to give your soul rest.

(Slide 6: Proverbs 12:25)

“Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.” -Proverbs 12:25

- What are some examples of things that weigh you down and make you feel even more stressed?
- What are some things that cheer you up? Hearing from a friend? Going out for ice cream? Watching your favorite movie?

This verse is plain and simple, and if it's something you can learn, it will make your life a lot easier: Anxiety weighs down the heart.

No one wants to go through life with a heavy heart. Life is hard enough as it is! Why spend every day feeling sad and weighed down?

In the game we played, you guys had to carry fifteen books across the finish line. That's a lot of heavy books! But you didn't have to do it on your own, because you were able to work together and help each other.

Anxiousness is what happens when you try to carry the stress of life all alone. It weighs you down and leaves you feeling worried, anxious, and like you are carrying a very heavy burden.

Just like it would have been really hard—maybe even impossible—to stack fifteen books on your hands and carry them across the finish line all alone, it's way too hard to deal with the stress of life alone.

And just like it would have been silly for you to try to carry all of those books by yourself and ignored your teammates being able to help you, it doesn't make any sense to try to carry the stress of life all by yourself when God is right there, waiting for you to come to Him.

The good news is that you don't have to go through being weighed down, all alone. You can just say no to anxiety. Stressful things are going to happen, that's just a part of life. But you don't have to let that lead to having an anxious heart.

(Slide 7: Bottom Line)

So our bottom line this week is:

Through prayer and thankfulness and resting in God, you can say no to anxiety.

Then, in turn, you can say no to going through life with a heavy heart.

(Slide 8 – Cover)

(Break up into small groups)

Small Group

Bring out the covered plate of canned Brussel sprouts and sour candy, making sure the preteens do not see what is under the cover.

I have a special treat here that I believe none of you can name for me just from the taste. I will need three volunteers to give this a try.

Choose three volunteers and blindfold them and have them sit in chairs.

Once they are blindfolded, uncover the tray and show it to the rest of your small group.

Tell them not to say what is on the tray. Have the rest of group pretend that it looks disgusting and gross.

Now I am going to ask each of you to smell the food first before I have your try it.

Have them smell the canned Brussel Sprouts only.

Tell them to hold on because you have to get a bigger piece to feed them. Do whatever you have to, to build the nervousness about eating what they just smelled. Then feed them a piece of sour candy.

Once everyone has had a piece of candy ask him or her to tell you what it was. After they all guess what they just ate, show them what they smelled and what they actually ate.

Just like in this game, in life we cannot always know what is going to happen, only that something is. This is when we begin to get anxious and stress out about things. I bet most of you that were blindfolded got really nervous after you smelled the food. Let's break down this down a little more.

1. Would you say that you have an anxious heart? Why?
2. What are some things in your life that are stressful?
3. Do those things cause you to be anxious?
4. Do you think it is possible to deal with the stress of everyday life without being anxious?
5. Do you think that focusing on praying and being thankful will actually help you to not be anxious?

6. Have you ever felt like the peace that Jesus gives was guarding your heart and mind?
7. Would you say that the things you are dealing with in your life right now are a heavy burden?
8. Do you believe that God wants you to have a lighter burden?
9. How are you going to work on not letting stress cause you to be anxious this week?

Teach Closing

This lesson on the subject of being anxious could have been started and finished in the time it took to read the first verse, because it tells you exactly what to do: Don't be anxious.

Thankfully, God doesn't just tell us not to not be anxious and leave it there. Instead, He gives us several ways to work through the issue of being anxious.

The verses we read tonight showed us that we aren't supposed to be anxious, but they also showed us that God is the one who will help us with that. We're not on our own down here.

He is waiting on us to come to Him so that He can give us peace and rest. He is waiting on us to come to Him so He can trade our heavy burden for His light one. He is waiting on us to pray so that He can offer His peace, which goes far beyond what we can even understand.

As you go through this week, and this month, and this year, you are going to face anxiety. With the stress you have to deal with, it's natural to become anxious. But the good news is that you're not alone in the fight against anxiousness. And when you feel like you are, just remember that you have God on your side. His peace is guarding you against anxiousness, just like a shield.

And when it comes to anxiousness, that is the best kind of protection you could have.