

## WHY WORRY

Chances are good that either you or someone you know struggles with anxiety. Experts believe that more than six million American teens struggle with an anxiety disorder. Some experts believe the number is higher, considering that many adolescents don't always seek treatment.

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health disorders of childhood and adolescence. "Researchers believe brain changes in adolescence increase a teenager's vulnerability to depression and anxiety." According to the Child Mind Institute, nearly one in three adolescents (31.9 percent) will meet criteria for an anxiety disorder by the age of eighteen (<https://childmind.org/report/2017-childrens-mental-health-report/anxiety-depression-adolescence/>).

"When I first started counseling twenty-four years ago, probably one out of every twenty kids coming in were dealing with anxiety," says Sissy Goff, a licensed Christian counselor for teens and children in the Nashville, TN, area. "Now, out of my new appointments, I would say at least sixteen of every twenty families are here for that reason, if not more."

### What Does God Think?

Jesus specifically tells us not to worry about what we will eat, drink, or wear: "Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life?" (Luke 12:25). Jesus didn't intend to make us feel guilty for anxiety that seemingly can come from nowhere at times. Our food and clothing are items of essential security and, if they were scarce, then we would undoubtedly be concerned. However, Megan Croft, another family therapist in the Nashville area reminds us that "Christ did not come to prevent people from ever experiencing suffering but to be a constant presence through pain and worry" (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2017/january/parenting-in-age-of-anxiety-children-teens.html>).

Jesus invites his followers to lean on God and trust beyond what we can see. Ultimately, whether or not we receive a high grade, make the team, or are accepted into the perfect school does not affect the realization of God's kingdom. What matters most is our faithfulness and openness to God's purpose for our lives.



## TIP FOR THIS ISSUE

Today's topic may prompt some great discussion and anecdotes from your students, hopefully sharing real-life experiences about their worries. Be sure to offer compassion and understanding for common anxieties experienced by teens. Be careful that no one walks away from this session feeling guilty, judged, or chastised about their worries. Preferably teens will gain: solidarity through sharing; a new awareness and strength to re-prioritize any unnecessary commitments that could be increasing anxiety; and, most importantly, hope and renewal by focusing on God's enduring presence.



## DO NOT WORRY

**Question of the Day:** How do you calm down when anxiety starts to take hold?

**Purpose:** To remind teens that worry is not part of God's plan for peace.

**Cultural Connection:** Anxiety on the Rise

**Topic:** Worry

### ADDING TIME

**Luke 12:22-31**

*Consider the ravens: they neither plant nor harvest, they have no silo or barn, yet God feeds them. You are worth so much more than birds! Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life? —Luke 12:24-25*

#### Commentary:

Once again we hear some tough words from Jesus. If we can follow them, we will experience tremendous liberation, but oh, how challenging! He offers two important comparisons: birds and lilies. He then talks about their sustenance and beauty. Both birds and flowers come and go, subjected to many forces beyond their control. And yet each continues to fulfill its purpose while contributing to the beauty of God's creation. Jesus urges us to keep God first, refusing to reorder our priorities due to worry and concerns.

#### Questions to think about:

- ▶ Do you think Jesus was being fair with the disciples?
- ▶ What is something that never worries you?
- ▶ Do any of your friends or family members worry about food or clothing?
- ▶ Do you tend to dwell on the way life could go wrong?

### JUST FOR TODAY

**Exodus 16:2-5**

*Then the LORD said to Moses, "I'm going to make bread rain down from the sky for you. The people will go out each day and gather just enough for that day. In this way, I'll test them to see whether or not they follow my Instruction."*

—Exodus 16:4

#### Commentary:

This story offers a beautiful overarching lesson about God's provision. The Israelites were rightfully concerned about

having enough food to eat. They were starting out on a long journey with no end in sight and very limited supplies. We can safely say the Hebrews' relationship with God was still in the dating stage; they weren't quite ready to trust and obey. Through Moses and Aaron, God gives specific instructions for the Israelites to gather only enough food for the day. These baby steps offered a slow growth opportunity so that ultimately they would fully trust in God's care for them.

#### Questions to think about:

- ▶ How could we compare the Israelites' forty-year Exodus in the wilderness to the journey of adolescents? (*wilderness—a time of wildness and wandering; a time of growth in relationship with God; leaving behind old ways to mature in life/faith; unable to set down roots; heading towards the promised land of finishing education*)
- ▶ In what area of your life do you need to trust God more?
- ▶ Do you believe God cares for us? What evidence do we have to prove or disprove God's care?

### INTO PRAYER

**1 Samuel 1:2-11**

*Hannah was very upset and couldn't stop crying as she prayed to the LORD. Then she made this promise: "LORD of heavenly forces, just look at your servant's pain and remember me! Don't forget your servant! Give her a boy! Then I'll give him to the LORD for his entire life. No razor will ever touch his head."*

—1 Samuel 1:10-11

#### Commentary:

In this society a woman was considered a failure if she was unable to have children, bringing tremendous

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embarrassment and shame upon the family. As if that weren't enough, Hannah's rival, Elkanah's other wife, mocked her relentlessly. While Old Testament custom allowed a husband to leave a barren wife, Elkanah had compassion on Hannah and remained committed to her. God's plan took a little longer for Hannah but, in fervent prayer, she boldly and faithfully carried her deep angst and pain to God.

## Questions to think about:

- ▶ Why would Hannah be so upset about not having children?
- ▶ Do you have any deep passions and heart's desires that you feel like will never come to fruition?
- ▶ What might happen if you daily and faithfully prayed to God about some of your most common worries?
- ▶ How else could you transform worry into faith?



More than six million teens struggle with some form of anxiety disorder.

## **DEVOTION: TOWARDS FAITH**

Who wouldn't worry when dealing with major life challenges? Whether we are awaiting a doctor's call, anticipating uprooting our family to another state, or sending a child off to the military, there are some moments in life when not worrying is not an option.

Still, let's remember: Worry is not the absence of faith; it's a vehicle toward faith. Much like doubt, where our questions create more space for God, worry opens our eyes to our utter dependence upon the grace and peace of God. We can remember with great relief and joy what Jesus told his disciples in John 16:32-33:

*"Look! A time is coming—and is here!—when each of you will be scattered to your own homes and you will leave me alone. I'm not really alone, for the Father is with me. I've said these things to you so that you will have peace in me. In the world you have distress. But be encouraged! I have conquered the world."*

Let us be encouraged by the truth that Jesus has indeed overcome this world!



**NEXT WEEK:** In today's always-on technological culture, a person can go from unknown to viral in a split second—whether intentional or not. Next week in LINC we'll talk about how we can pay better attention to our image at all times.

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**Getting Ready:** You will need copies of Youth Page 6, pens or pencils, writing paper, Bibles, markers, a prize; Monopoly money (20-, 10-, 5-, and 1-dollar bills); sticky notes, and index cards.

**Optional:** worship music and candle

## OPEN

### Game On!

(10–15 minutes)

Play a game that requires an annoying, stress-inducing timer. Catch Phrase works well. Make sure the timer is audible and ramp up the competition by offering a dozen donuts (or some other treat) to the winning team.

After the game, ask and talk about the following:

- ▶ Did you like the game? Did you feel stressed while playing?
- ▶ Was it hard to focus? Why or why not?
- ▶ What happens when we are focusing on the wrong thing in life?

Say: “We can worry about a lot of different things in life, and it’s funny how much we can worry (like on a game) when we get distracted and focus on the wrong thing.” Use Page 1 to introduce today’s cultural connection, then ask, “What new information did you learn about anxiety?”

## EXPLORE

### Talk Topic 1: Be in the Now (20 minutes)

Introduce this section by saying: “In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus basically said, ‘Don’t worry about your life,’—to which all of us in 2019 would like to say, ‘Easy for you to say, Jesus.’ But when we truly ponder his words, we know there is great truth at the heart of Jesus’ message. Working and

planning responsibly is good; dwelling on all the ways our planning could go wrong is not good! Worry is both pointless (it can’t fill any of our needs) and foolish (the Creator of the universe loves us and knows what we need). God promises to provide what we truly need but not necessarily all that we desire.” Read aloud Luke 12:22-31, or ask one or two teens to do so. Present the commentary and discuss the questions provided in Teacher Bible Prep.

### Middle School Option

Form groups of four to five each, hand out writing paper, and ask groups to rewrite Luke 12:22-31 with a modern flair. Encourage youth to be creative, especially with the verses where Jesus is making comparisons. Allow three to four minutes for work, then invite each group (if you have time) to share its version. Follow up by leading a discussion around the following questions:

- ▶ What do you think Jesus would say about our worrying, especially in view of our technology and fast-paced lives?
- ▶ When you wake up in the morning, what do you think about first?
- ▶ Do you think we worry because our minds are focused on the wrong things? Why or why not?

### High School Option

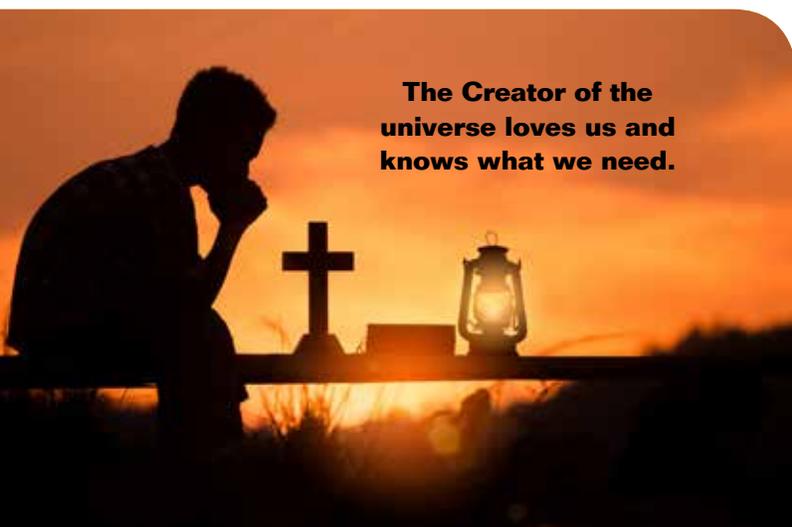
Follow up the discussion questions in Teacher Bible Prep by using the conversation prompts below:

- ▶ How does the game we played earlier compare to life at your age?
- ▶ Which of you works better under pressure?
- ▶ Who does their best writing or work at the last minute?
- ▶ What is at the root of our worry?
- ▶ Do you think we worry because our minds are focused on the wrong things?

### BONUS SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

If your group responds well to contemplative settings and activities, consider the following idea. Print or copy the text of *both* of these Scriptures on index cards: Psalm 142:1-2 and Matthew 11:28—one card with both Scriptures per each teen you expect. Set up a prayerful space, light a candle, and play soft worship music. Hand out cards and suggest teens move apart in the space for privacy, then allow about 10 minutes for them to sit in silence, reflect on the Scripture passages, and simply spend time in prayerful listening.

After a few minutes, lead a time of sharing and reflection about burdens teens are carrying. Close the sharing time with a brief prayer.



**The Creator of the  
universe loves us and  
knows what we need.**



## Talk Topic 2: Enough (20 minutes)

### Combined Middle School and High School Option

For this talk topic, form groups of three and hand each group \$55 of Monopoly money and a piece of paper, along with a pen or pencil. Instruct each group to devise a plan for using the money to feed themselves for an entire week—that's seven whole days! Explain that the group should plan as if teens live on their own without any additional source of income. Suggest they brainstorm ideas and make notes using the paper. Allow five minutes for teens to develop their strategy for the following: 1—How much they will spend per day, per meal, or per person; 2—What the group will purchase and where; 3—Creative ideas for stretching the money. (Encourage students to use their technology to research actual prices.)

When groups are finished, call on each to share its strategies and discuss the following questions:

- ▶ Do you have enough money for your group?
- ▶ Do you think there would be enough food to make it through your normal week of activities? If not, what would be enough?
- ▶ What else could you do if you were actually in this situation?

After some discussion, invite a teen to read aloud Exodus 16:2-5, recounting when the Israelites received manna in the wilderness. Take a few minutes to discuss the commentary and questions provided in Teacher Bible Prep, as well as the questions below.

- ▶ Are you ever content with what you have, or do you find yourself consistently wanting more? Why or why not?
- ▶ What is enough for you?
- ▶ How would you manage life if every day you had to beg for food to survive?

## Talk Topic 3: From Fret to Faith (15 minutes)

Before handing out copies of Youth Page 6, read and talk about 1 Samuel 1:2-11. Present the commentary provided in Teacher Bible

Prep and lead a discussion comparing Hannah's circumstance to what could occur in today's society. Also, ask and discuss the questions provided there.

### Middle School Option

Hand out sticky notes and invite teens to write their most common and pressing worries, one per sticky note. Ask teens to stick their notes on one wall in the meeting space. Explain that you will take a photo of the notes so you can pray for everyone in the week ahead; encourage students to do the same. Finally, hand out Youth Page 6 and ask teens to craft their individual prayers using the instructions provided.

Close by asking the following questions:

- ▶ Does anyone want to share their breath prayer?
- ▶ What are some things that you worried about before but don't any longer? Why?
- ▶ What do you pray about most often now?
- ▶ How is worry different from prayer?

### High School Option

After discussing the Scripture, hand out Youth Page 6. Allow time for teens to write their prayers, using the instructions provided. When most everyone is finished, transition by saying, "If you are not a natural worrier, then count yourself as blessed and be grateful. That's a gift! But many folks your age (and mine) struggle with anxiety and, as a result, begin making harmful decisions. Often bad habits are formed to mask the worry, even though that only complicates matters."

Ask and talk about the following questions:

- ▶ What do you tend to worry about most?
- ▶ Instead of turning to God, how do some people cope with anxiety?
- ▶ Are you an anxious person? Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10: 1 = Not at all; 10 = I'm barely keeping it together.
- ▶ How can you help friends or family members who tend to get overwhelmed by anxiety?
- ▶ What is the longest you've prayed for something specific?

Call on volunteers to read aloud their breath prayers in closing. No pressure!

### TAKE AWAY

We cannot add a single moment to our lives through worry. Let's focus on God and learn to trust in God ever more sincerely.

# WORKING IT OUT

## BREATH PRAYER

What is a breath prayer? I'm glad you asked! Bob Hostetler on *Guideposts* website<sup>1</sup> says: "They are simple prayers. Short. Easy. They can be spoken in a single breath and repeated numerous times throughout the day. But the habit of 'breath prayers' can make a huge difference in your life as they help you to 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thessalonians 5:17)."<sup>2</sup> These prayers are best when repeated over and over, helping you stay centered, even in the midst of a chaotic day. Some examples include:

- ❖ Lord, have mercy.
- ❖ Not my will, but yours.
- ❖ Help everything I do, revolve around you.

In the space below, write your own brief, heartfelt prayer. Remember, the prayer should be a phrase or sentence you can say in the span of a single inhale and exhale. After writing your prayer, practice it in silence.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.guideposts.org/faith-and-prayer/prayer-stories/pray-effectively/10-breath-prayers>

<sup>2</sup> Scripture is from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. <http://nrsvbibles.org/>

Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad! Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people. The Lord is near. Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. —Philippians 4:4-7

### In the Bible: Readings for the Week

**MONDAY:** Read Psalm 94:18-19.

How can I focus on you today, God?

**TUESDAY:** Read Philippians 4:4-7.

Make this my prayer, O Lord.

**WEDNESDAY:** Read Mark 4:35-41.

What storms can God calm in my life?

**THURSDAY:** Read Mark 13:11.

Lord, help me trust in you so deeply that I will wait for your words.

**FRIDAY:** Read Psalm 139:23-24.

God, you know my anxious thoughts.  
Help them fade from my mind.

**SATURDAY:** Read Ecclesiastes 7:21-22.

God, help me not to worry about what others think or say about me.

### Inherit the Mirth



### WHAT'S TRENDING?

What's the most recent struggle you've moved past? Tweet or post your response with the hashtag #noworries on Twitter to @YMPartners or on facebook.com/youthministypartners