

SESSION 1:
LIFE IN AN ANXIOUS WORLD

LOOK INSIDE: SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

BIG IDEA

In this session, students will understand that anxiety exists, and begin to recognize some of its symptoms. Culture, technology, academic achievement, competition, self-comparison—all of these add to the pressure that builds around us and inside of us. When life starts to feel unsteady, we can look up, look inside, and look around to see God at work in the midst of our anxiety.

FOR THIS SESSION, YOU'LL NEED:

- A Bible
- A copy of the **Session 1 Look around** student take-home sheet for each student
- Pens or pencils
- **Session 1 Video: *Life in an anxious world*** and a means to play it, if you are using the videos included with this curriculum during your small group time
- Any additional materials needed based on your chosen “ideas to try,” which are offered throughout this session guide

LEADER TIP

Your curriculum includes an additional video, titled ***The Daily Replay***. You can use it in your small groups to inspire and encourage young people as they try this helpful prayer practice.

To begin, explain that when we're feeling anxious we can look up and seek God's help, and we can look inward at what anxiety might be trying to tell us. In our small group for the next few weeks, we want to be a safe space for each person to process what anxiety might be saying to them, and where they can see God at work in their anxious lives and in our anxious world. Review the suggested group boundaries offered in *Tips for meaningful small groups* found in the "Leaders Start Here" folder included with this curriculum.

LEADER TIP

If your small groups meet on different days throughout the week, consider re-reading the story in Mark 6:45–51 together (see **Session 1 Look up** material), and ask students to review what they observed about the story when the group last met.

*If you are using the videos included with this curriculum in your **Look inside** small group time, show **Session 1 Video: Life in an anxious world** here to open your session. Then, use the questions below to help students process and respond to the experiences of other young people shared in the video.*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. **What's your anxiety level like these days? Would you say it's high, low, or somewhere in between?**
2. **Sometimes we're very aware of how we're feeling, but other times our feelings of anxiousness can fly under our radar. I have a list of some of the most common triggers for stress and anxiety in young people. I wonder if anyone in our group would be surprised to find how many of the items on this list align with their own experiences.**

As you read this list of researched anxiety points for teens, ask students to make a mental note how many are pressure points they've experienced personally:

School	Getting into college or deciding what to do after high school
Keeping up with classmates	Pleasing teachers or parents
Family financial concerns	Bullying
Friendships	Relationships
Dating violence	Peer pressure
Illness of a family member	Natural disasters
Stories you hear in the news	Fear for personal safety
Death of a family member or friend	Emotional or physical abuse
Moving	Starting a new school
Big family changes	

Observe whether the members of your group were aware or unaware of the many anxiety and stress points they've experienced in and around themselves.

3. What are some of the physical feelings or symptoms you experience when you feel anxious?
4. Does anyone have a place they go or a strategy they try that helps them calm down those feelings of anxiety?
5. You may not have thought about it this way before, but what do you feel your anxiety might be trying to tell you?

A HELPFUL WAY TO PRAY

Say: **Some of the prayers we say and traditions that we practice as a church are not only acts of worship to God, but are also practices to help center and focus ourselves. In a sense, as we do them we invite God to come and meet us in our own unsteady boat.**

Pass out the **Session 1 Look around** student take-home sheet and encourage students to look at the section marked “A helpful way to pray.” Make sure each person in your group has a pencil or pen.

LEADER TIP

Ideas to try: Every young person is going to have their own comfort level when it comes to prayer. When introducing a new spiritual practice, consider the unique qualities of your group of students, and plan your prayer time according to what is going to be most helpful for them. Here are a few different ways you could guide your students through the Daily Replay for the first time:

- Create a quiet, reflective moment to lead students through the prayer and ask them to write down their responses to each prayer prompt in a journal.
- Use a video liturgy ([FULLER studio offers a series of Examen videos online](#)) to help students embrace and enter into concepts such as *presence*, *gratitude*, or *forgiveness*, and then give them time and a quiet space to work through the prayer themselves.
- If you are limited on time, talk the group through the steps and encourage them to journal as they pray at home.

Explain that you’re going to try a prayer that people have been using for hundreds of years. Some people go through the steps of prayer daily, and others use it to refocus when they feel like life is getting a little out of control. Either way, you can follow the prayer’s five steps any time you want to spend some moments listening to God and aren’t sure how.

The Daily Replay is based on the Ignatian Prayer of Examen, and adapted for teenagers. Find out more about this prayer practice at www.ignatianspirituality.com.

THE DAILY REPLAY

FIRST, BECOME AWARE OF GOD'S PRESENCE.

Lead your students through the following breathing exercise:

Settle your body and mind as you become aware of God's presence.

Sometimes settling our body and mind is really difficult, especially when we have a lot going on. One trick is to focus on our breathing. When we breathe slow and deep, we let our body and souls know that it is ok to relax and rest in God's presence. Sounds simple, right? We all know how to breathe!

It can be a bit strange at first, but learning how to breathe with your belly instead of with your chest can be very helpful. All you have to do is slowly take three seconds to breathe in through your nose, making sure to fill your belly with air . . . and then take three seconds to slowly breathe out through your mouth.

Now, as you continue to breathe deep and slow, take a moment to simply notice God's presence with each breath that you take.

THEN, REVIEW THE DAY WITH GRATITUDE.

What are the good things that have happened today?

What can you give thanks for?

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR EMOTIONS.

What moments have been difficult or tense? Why?

Where is God at work in the midst of your anxious moments?

What might God—or anxiety—be trying to tell you?

FORGIVE, AND ASK FOR FORGIVENESS.

Who are you angry or frustrated with?

Are there things you can forgive and let go of in order to have peace?

What would you like to be forgiven for?

FINALLY, LOOK TOWARD TOMORROW.

How can tomorrow be different?

What would you like to ask God to help you with?

When the prayer is finished, spend a few moments checking in with your students about their experience praying the Daily Replay for the first time. What was difficult, and what was easy? Was anyone surprised by the emotions that came up as they reflected?

LEADER TIP

Idea to try: The Daily Replay prayer can be done anywhere, at any time. Give each student five sticky notes and a pen, and ask them to write one of the prayer steps on each sticky note. As a group, come up with ideas on where students could place their sticky notes (bathroom mirror, bedside lamp, or in the car) to remind them to stop and reflect throughout the day.

GROW YOUR CIRCLE

Invite students to turn their take-home sheet over and notice the section titled “Grow your circle.”

Say: Just as Jesus traveled with his group of disciples, we want you to build yourself a “circle” of trusted adults you can call on whenever you need to talk about how you feel.

Explain that each week their take-home sheet will recommend a conversation they can have with a trusted adult. This can be the same adult weekly, or they can grow a wider net by strengthening their relationship with different people.

Say: Talk with a parent and look over your schedule to see if you can find an hour to meet with someone you trust and have an open conversation. For this week, your challenge is simply to tell that person about your list of things that are making you feel anxious lately. Then ask that person about what makes them anxious, and what helpful practices they’ve learned over the years to listen to and learn from their anxiety. If you feel comfortable, ask them to pray with you.

REMEMBER, this person should be a trusted adult. And be sure to talk with your parents about who you will be meeting with beforehand.

Pray as you conclude your time together.