

OVERCOMING

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 SEVEN
PRINCIPLES
FOR
UNLOCKING
PEACE



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Foreword

What makes you anxious?

You've probably got a list building in your head right now. My list used to look something like this:

- Hate and conflict on the news
- Filling multiple roles (parent, child, employee, manager, spouse, volunteer, sibling, teammate, etc.)
- Other people's feelings about me
- Things possibly going wrong in my future
- Lack of support around me

The common thread in most of these points is that they are external factors — things that I don't have control over. And you can't change what you can't control, right?

But it turns out that it wasn't really these things that were stressing me out — it was my approach to them. It was my internal state.

Our team has put together this guide to help you see how your approach to situations makes all the difference in the level of anxiety or peace you have.

So take a breath. Get ready. Together, we'll face our worries, and we'll learn how to find true peace on the other side.

*Jay Rabon,
eGroups Pastor*

How to Use this Guide

This study will explore the “I’s of Anxiety” and how they impact our lives. Each week, you’ll also discuss a strategy with your group for overcoming each of the I’s.

You’ll cover five I’s over the duration of your group, and if your group members want to continue the study, there are two more I’s as bonus content at the end.

Each week’s content is divided into four sections:

Group members should complete the first two sections before the group meeting. (If they have a busy week, encourage them to use the “Bottom Line Question” as a way to prepare if they can’t get to the other content.)

The group will complete the final two sections together.

WEEKLY SECTIONS:

Ready Your Mind

This gives an intro to the week’s topic through a short video and brief reading.

Reflect With God

This will help members connect with God to examine how that week’s “I” might be impacting their lives. At the end is one question — the Bottom Line Question — that they can be ready to discuss at your group meeting. There is also a short line of scripture to memorize for each of the first five weeks.

**Bonus Scripture* — at the end of these sections there are recommended “Bonus Scriptures” that provide more insight about the week’s topic.

Review With Your Group

This will help you engage with your group to discuss the “I” as well as that week’s strategy for overcoming it. There are conversation starters — lighthearted topics to help your group get ready to engage — just before the topic review.

Respond With A Goal

Each member will develop a goal for overcoming that week’s “I.”

Also, check in with group members on how they’re doing with Scripture. You might consider rewards for members who correctly memorize that week’s memory verse.

Week 1: Introduction



COMPLETE THIS SECTION ON YOUR OWN PRIOR TO GROUP

READY Your Mind

Look at the word “anxious.” What letter is right in the middle?

“i.”

This is interesting, because if we look carefully at most of the anxieties we deal with, we’ll see ourselves at the center. We’re in the middle because our approach to what’s going on around us matters much more than our environment.

There are seven main ways that we can make ourselves anxious — seven ways that our approach to life or a situation can easily cause stress instead of peace. These are the seven “I’s of Anxiety.”

INTAKE / IMBALANCE / INTEGRITY / INTENTION / IMAGINATION / INDECISION / ISOLATION

We’ll look at each word more in the coming weeks, but first, let’s look at what the disciple Matthew has to say about anxiety.

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?”

“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?”

“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own”

MATTHEW 6:25-34, NIV

Although Matthew specifically mentions only food, water, and clothing, he's driving at the point that God will meet ALL of our needs — including the most basic — as long as we seek His kingdom first. And so he tells us not to worry about tomorrow.

But is that actually possible, to "not worry about tomorrow"? Not always. But when we fix our approach, the things that make us anxious become opportunities to grow in our faith.

REFLECT With God

Take a few minutes to find a quiet space, and think about what you read. Spend some time in prayer, and ask God to prepare your heart to get the most out of this study. You can read the prayer below out loud as a guide.

Dear Lord,

Thank You for the opportunity to see You move while I pursue peace. Please show me the things in my life and in my mind that are making me anxious. Help me see beneath the surface to the roots of my stress. Make my heart receptive to how I can grow in the areas of my life where I'm struggling, and please guide me as I make adjustments.

In Jesus' name, amen.

MEMORIZE THIS SCRIPTURE

"Search me, God, and know my heart;"

PSALM 139:23, NIV

Asking God to look into your heart is the first step in discovering why you're anxious. Invite Him to take a look — He knows you better than you do.

BONUS SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 139. Pay special attention to how David begins speaking angrily about his enemies in verses 19-22, but then switches to asking God to search his own heart for what's making him anxious. How can you make a similar shift?



COMPLETE THIS SECTION WITH YOUR GROUP

REVIEW With Your eGroup

Take some time to introduce yourself to the group, and include details like where you're from, what you do, interesting facts, hobbies, etc. Ask them to introduce themselves, too.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Why did you decide to join this group study?
- What's something that used to make you anxious/scared as a kid that you can laugh about now?

GAME — WHICH "I" IS THE LIE?

Have each person tell the group three funny or unusual things that make them nervous, anxious, or uncomfortable. Two of them need to be true, and one needs to be false. Let the group guess which one is a lie. Be creative! You could say something like, "Swimming in murky water, dreams about clowns, and holding other people's babies make me anxious."

After everyone has had a chance to play, watch this video clip.



WATCH VIDEO: WHY AM I ANXIOUS? – PART 1

elevationchurch.org/curriculum/overcoming-anxiety-week-1-introduction

WHY AM I ANXIOUS?

Tell group members to think about what in their life makes them anxious. Ask them to be as specific as possible (for example, instead of "public speaking," you could say "presenting an idea to a group of people and feeling like I'm being judged unfairly.")

After everyone has had a few minutes to consider the question, go around the room and let each person give at least one answer. Encourage each other to ask follow-up questions so the group can understand why each person feels the way they do.

SAY: "Thanks for sharing what makes you anxious. I'm excited to see what the next few weeks hold for us as a group as we explore some ways to overcome those things."

RESPOND With A Goal

Now that the group has considered what makes them anxious, ask them to identify by the next meeting how they would like to feel about that anxiety when this study is over.

For closing prayer, you can pray, or the group can break into pairs to pray specifically for one another. You can use the prayer below as a guide.

Dear Lord,

Thank You that we can come together and talk about the challenges we're facing in our lives that are leading us to feel anxious. We're believing that You will produce growth and change in all of us during the coming weeks, and that You will shift our perspectives so that we see less of our circumstances, and more of Your presence. Help us lean on You and each other as You work on our hearts.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Week 2: Intake



COMPLETE THIS SECTION ON YOUR OWN PRIOR TO GROUP

READY Your Mind



WATCH VIDEO: THE THIRST TRAP

elevationchurch.org/curriculum/overcoming-anxiety-week-2-intake

What do you “take in” during your day?

That’s probably a lot to think about — how about just in the morning, for the first 30 minutes that you’re awake? Is it CNN while you drink your coffee? Instagram to see what your friends posted while you were asleep? Playing a quick game on your phone to get your brain to wake up?

What about other sources of intake?

Television. Facebook. Radio. Books. Magazines. Music. Twitter. Advertisements. Snapchat. News.

You’re probably exposed to most of these things *every day*. But how much of what you see and hear from these sources causes good thoughts and feelings?

We only have so much room in our hearts and minds, and if we fill up on emotional junk food, we won’t have room for the good stuff. We’ll drink without quenching our thirst.

You might be shocked at how much negativity you’re allowing in through your eyes and ears. And all of this negative intake leads to worry, pressure, and stress.

Look at what Matthew says about how what you see affects you:

“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”

MATTHEW 6:22-23, ESV

He’s saying that what you see can cause light — or darkness — inside you. And this applies to what you hear, too.

So it's time to ask yourself: what are you looking at each day? What are you listening to? And most importantly, how are those things affecting your heart and mind? If we want to beat this "I," we'll need to be intentional about what we see and hear.

REFLECT With God

Take a few minutes to find a quiet space, and think about what you read and watched. How's your intake? Do you have any ideas on how you can improve it? Spend some time in prayer, and ask God to show you any areas where you might be struggling with your intake. You can read the prayer below out loud as a guide.

Dear Lord,

You for promising to provide all I'll ever need. I know my intake might be causing me some anxiety, and I know that's not what You want for me. Please show me any areas in my life where I'm allowing negative intake to hurt my mind and emotions. Help me to find and enjoy good sources that will build me up rather than tear me down.

In Jesus' name, amen.

BOTTOM LINE QUESTION

(come prepared to talk about this with your group)

As you think about your intake, which two or three sources stick out as most negative? How do those sources impact you? (Be specific — think about yourself, your job, your relationships, your future, etc.)

MEMORIZE THIS LINE OF SCRIPTURE

"...test me and know my anxious thoughts."

PSALM 139:23, NIV

Be grateful that God will test your thoughts and show you how they are controlling your feelings. Let Him help you clean up your thoughts!

BONUS SCRIPTURE

To see how *intake* matters, read Daniel 1. Daniel had the opportunity to eat the finest royal food, but he turned it down because he knew it wouldn't be good for him. Look at how his choice of intake affected him.



COMPLETE THIS SECTION WITH YOUR GROUP

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What's your favorite thing to "take in"? (e.g., movies, music, food, books, conversation, etc.) Why?
- How about your least favorite thing to "take in"? (e.g., cough syrup, negative feedback, the sound of nails on a chalkboard, etc.)
- On a scale of 1-10, with "1" being very little, and "10" being a lot, how much do your surroundings affect how you feel?

REVIEW With Your eGroup

Take some time to discuss results from the previous week. How do your group members want to feel about their anxieties once this study is over? Share some of your own feelings to help them open up.

SAY: "This week we're going to talk about the first 'I of Anxiety' — intake."



WATCH VIDEO: WHY AM I ANXIOUS? – PART 2

elevationchurch.org/curriculum/overcoming-anxiety-week-2-intake

HOW TO HAVE GOOD INTAKE — BE PROACTIVE

If we want to control our *intake*, we have to be **proactive**. We're taking something in most of the day, even when we don't realize it, so we need to be intentional about limiting bad sources of input and maximizing the good sources. (e.g., less CNN and negative social media, more Bible and positive music.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Bottom Line Question* – As you think about your intake, which two or three sources stick out as most negative? How do those sources impact you? (Be specific — think about yourself, your job, your relationships, your future, etc.)
2. What draws you to those bad sources? Why?
3. What sources of input leave you feeling good, energized, or refreshed? Do any of those "feed" you the same way as the bad sources you sometimes use?
4. Think about your average week. How can you be more proactive with those good sources of intake?

RESPOND With A Goal

- This week, write down a number from 1-10 at the end of each day to grade your anxiety. (1=very low, 10=very high)
- After you've written a number down, spend a few minutes to think about your intake throughout the day (keep an activity log if you need to).
- At the end of the week, look for patterns. Determine how your intake that day affected your anxiety. Make adjustments to your routine, and continue keeping track until the end of the study so you can see which sources of intake you need to cut down or eliminate, and which ones you need to increase.

End the meeting with a closing group prayer. You can use the one below as a guide.

Dear Lord,

We're grateful for the many good things You've put in our lives to fill us with joy and gratitude. Help us seek more of those good sources of intake over the coming weeks. Help us be proactive in cutting out bad things that leave us feeling empty and anxious, and guide us in making wise decisions about which sources of intake to keep.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Week 3: Imbalance



COMPLETE THIS SECTION ON YOUR OWN PRIOR TO GROUP

READY Your Mind



WATCH VIDEO: SHUTTING THE DOOR ON DISTRACTION

elevationchurch.org/curriculum/overcoming-anxiety-week-3-imbalance

What are your priorities in life? Are they in balance?

Make a list of the six things that are most important to you.

Then, pick three of them — these are the three things you consider most critical.

Now that you know the three things that matter most to you, think about how you spend the hours of your day.

Is most of your time going to those three critical parts of your life? Or is a surprising number of your hours being spent on the three other parts? Or possibly even on parts you didn't include in the original six? If so, this "I" needs your attention.

Imbalance causes pressure — sometimes the things we care most about feel like a distraction when our priorities are mixed up. Later, when we finally turn our attention to something we treasure (like relationships, family, spiritual connection, physical health, etc.) we might find it's been crumbling away in our absence.

The problem is, we often mix up what's urgent with what's important. We put more importance on things that we think need our attention *now* than on things we know need our attention the *most*.

For example, if you have to hit a deadline by the end of this week at your job, you might be tempted to skip your morning Bible reading each day so you can get a 20-minute head start on your work at the office. And in some cases, this might be necessary. But people are good at turning one or two necessary decisions into a bad long-term habit.

Examine where your hours in the day are going. Could it be that you're stressed because too much of your time is spent on things that don't matter all that much to you?

REFLECT With God

Take a few minutes to find a quiet space, and think about what you read and watched. How's your balance? Do you have any ideas on how you can improve it? Spend some time in prayer, and ask God to show you any areas where you might be struggling with imbalance. You can read the prayer below out loud as a guide.

Dear Lord,

I'm grateful for the people and things You've placed in my life. I'm asking for Your help in teaching me what's most important — please help me see which things need my best effort and most of my time. If anything needs to be removed, or if there's something I really need to pay more attention to, please show me. Help me to prioritize my life well, so I can better fulfill Your purpose for me.

In Jesus' name, amen.

BOTTOM LINE QUESTION

(come prepared to talk about this with your group)

As you think about your balance, which areas strike you as having too much weight? How does having too much weight in those areas affect your health and attitude?

MEMORIZE THIS LINE OF SCRIPTURE

"See if there is any offensive way in me,"

PSALM 139:24, NIV

Offensive or offended feelings in us can cause anxiety, and God can help you see those feelings if you ask Him.

BONUS SCRIPTURE

To see how *imbalance* can cause stress, read Luke 10:38-42. Martha didn't prioritize Jesus, and it caused her to miss out on what was really important. Reflect on Jesus' words to Martha.



COMPLETE THIS SECTION WITH YOUR GROUP

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What's the first image that comes to your mind when you hear the word "imbalance"?
- Tell a funny story about a time when you or someone you know lost their balance.
- Which of these requires the best balance: the peanut butter and jelly on a sandwich, the condiments on a hotdog, or the amount of milk and cereal in your bowl?

REVIEW With Your eGroup

Take some time to discuss results from the previous week. How did you do in adjusting your intake? Did your group members write down a number from 1-10 at the end of each day to grade their anxiety? Did their numbers or general feeling of anxiety improve?

Tell your eGroup what you did to adjust your intake over the previous week, and let them talk about any changes they made and what they experienced as a result.

After catching up on the past week's topic, remind your group that we are talking about IMBALANCE this week.



WATCH VIDEO: WHY AM I ANXIOUS? – PART 3

elevationchurch.org/curriculum/overcoming-anxiety-week-3-imbalance

HOW TO BEAT IMBALANCE — DEVELOP PERSPECTIVE

If we want to fight *imbalance*, we need the right perspective. We need to recognize that some unimportant things have to go so that we have time and energy to say yes to the things that really matter — the things that have purpose in our lives.

Practically, this could look like turning down that extra work project so you have time to take your spouse out for a date or to visit your family. It also includes not paying attention to someone's negative opinion of you and instead letting God affirm who you are.

This is one of the most important "I's" for us to take control of!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Bottom Line Question* – As you think about your balance, which areas strike you as having too much weight? How does having too much weight in those areas affect your health and attitude?
2. What draws you toward the areas that have too much weight? Why do you feel they need so much of your attention?
3. Which areas of your life don't have enough weight? How does falling short in those areas impact you?
4. What do you get out of the areas that you're giving too much attention to? Can you get what you need from another, more important area of your life? Talk it out with the group.

RESPOND With A Goal

- Refer back to the exercise when you listed the six most important parts of your life.
- Plan out how you can pull some time from the least important areas and put it into the more important areas. (For example, you might be able to pull half an hour a day from watching TV and put it into playing with your kids, reading Scripture, or cooking a healthy meal.)
- Once you've established a new balance, stick to it until the end of the study, then reexamine how you feel.

End the group with a prayer. You can use the one below as a guide.

Dear Lord,

We need Your help in putting our time into the areas that matter most, so that we are putting our best effort where it needs to be. Help us choose the right parts of our lives to focus on, and give us renewed strength and energy to pour into those areas.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Week 4: Integrity



COMPLETE THIS SECTION ON YOUR OWN PRIOR TO GROUP

READY Your Mind



WATCH VIDEO: JUST CALL ME JACOB

elevationchurch.org/curriculum/overcoming-anxiety-week-4-integrity

How many “you’s” are there?

For some of us, there could be half a dozen or more. Work you. Friend you. Alone you. Parent you. Spouse you. Church you. Group you.

Are there two (or more) people who know you, who would each describe you as a completely different person? Are you the same person around your coworkers as you are your family?

If the place we’re in and the people we’re with determine who we are, we can’t experience God’s peace. There is a peace that comes from living with *integrity*, knowing we are being the best version of ourselves — who we are in Christ — at all times.

Look at these examples of people who might be feeling anxious because of this “I”:

- A man who serves at church, but mistreats his coworkers
- A woman who is a good friend in person, but a gossip around others
- A man who is a good husband at home, but a flirt at work
- A woman who is attentive with her boss, but absent with her children

Who these people are would depend on who you ask.

The challenge is that it’s easy to slip into multiple versions of ourselves. We sometimes think of it as allowing “that side” of our personality to have some breathing room. But when it becomes an excuse to be a different person, we put pressure on ourselves. Things become much simpler — and much more peaceful — when we learn how to be the same person all the time.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

ROMANS 12:2, NIV

When we allow ourselves to wear masks based on who we think we need to be, we are conforming to the world. But it doesn't have to be this way.

So ask yourself: who are you? Are you the same person to everyone who knows you? Do you have integrity?

REFLECT With God

Take a few minutes to find a quiet space, and think about what you read and watched. Are you living with integrity? How can you improve? Spend some time in prayer, and ask God to show you any areas where you might be struggling with integrity. You can read the prayer below out loud as a guide.

Dear Lord, thank You for loving me exactly as I am. Help me see more clearly who I am to You, and help me to live every part of my life being true to who You say I am. Show me any areas where I am compromising my integrity, and guide me as I make adjustments toward living the way You want me to. In Jesus' name, amen.

BOTTOM LINE QUESTION

(come prepared to talk about this with your group)

Where in your life do you struggle with integrity? (e.g., complete honesty, gossip, acting differently around certain friends/environments, hidden behaviors, etc.)

MEMORIZE THIS LINE OF SCRIPTURE

"and lead me in the way everlasting."

PSALM 139:24, NIV

God can show you how He wants you to think and act. Ask Him to lead you in the way everlasting.

BONUS SCRIPTURE

For a look at how God views *integrity*, read 1 Samuel 16:1-13. Samuel is looking at the outward appearance of several brothers to try and find the next king, but God tells Samuel he should be looking at their hearts. How then should we live, knowing that God sees inside of us?



COMPLETE THIS SECTION WITH YOUR GROUP

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Is it easy or hard for other people to read your emotions?
- Talk about a time when you felt you had to pretend you liked something when you really didn't.
- What was the most far-fetched piece of gossip you ever heard about yourself?

REVIEW With Your eGroup

Take some time to discuss results from the previous week. How did you do in adjusting your balance? Tell your group about some changes you made and how it helped you. Ask them what shifts they made and how those changes are affecting them.

After you've reviewed, remind your group that we are talking about INTEGRITY this week.



WATCH VIDEO: WHY AM I ANXIOUS? – PART 4

elevationchurch.org/curriculum/overcoming-anxiety-week-4-integrity

HOW TO HAVE INTEGRITY — STICK TO PRINCIPLES

If we want to live with *integrity*, we need to focus on having strong **principles**. When we spend time with God through prayer, study, church, and other sources, we understand more about who we are in Christ. And the more we understand that, the more aware we'll become of our integrity.

When we are committed to good **principles**, we'll be able to fight against temptations when they come — temptations like lying, lust, or gossip — and having that integrity will help us live with less anxiety.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Bottom Line Question* – Where in your life do you struggle with integrity? (e.g., complete honesty, gossip, acting differently around certain friends/environments, hidden behaviors, etc.)
2. Why is that area(s) challenging for you? What about it makes you want to do it?
3. What would it take for you to work on developing principles in that area? What are some strategies you can use?
4. How can you make yourself accountable to keeping your integrity in that area?
5. What can you do to gain a clearer understanding of who you are in Christ? How will knowing this help you live a life of integrity?

RESPOND With A Goal

- Identify the part of your life where you're currently the most challenged in living with integrity. (Even if it's a huge challenge or something that's so small it doesn't seem worth trying to fix.)
- Select one or two people in your group to be your "integrity partner." Tell them the area of your life you're focusing on, and come up with at least two principles you're going to stick to this week to improve in that area.
- It's okay if you have setbacks. But make sure you let your partner know if you do. Encourage each other to stick with it throughout the rest of the study. Try to develop a new pattern, and focus on keeping it. Record how that new pattern affects you.

Leaders, end your group with a closing prayer. You can use the one below as a guide.

Dear Lord,

We're grateful for the opportunity to live with integrity so others can see Christ in us. Show us the places in our lives where we can improve our integrity. Give us the wisdom to recognize how we can get better, and the perseverance and passion to live with strong principles.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Week 5: Intention



COMPLETE THIS SECTION ON YOUR OWN PRIOR TO GROUP

READY Your Mind



WATCH VIDEO: PRESSURE POINTS

elevationchurch.org/curriculum/overcoming-anxiety-week-5-intention

Do you focus more on yourself, or on what you can do to help others?

In other words, what are your *intentions* behind your actions?

Sometimes we think we're not inwardly focused, but we'll base our actions on what we think others want from us. We're managing our image.

If we instead focus on meeting God's expectations of us, then we also leave people's approval in God's hands. He'll deliver the support we need, and if someone doesn't like us because of what we're doing, we don't have to worry about it.

There are probably many people in your life that you want approval from — it could be from parents, children, friends, coworkers, bosses, mentors ... you may even be trying to get approval from people you hardly know through social media.

Seeking approval is a self-centered goal. It happens when we're more focused on how people see us instead of what we can do for others.

What would happen to your level of anxiety if you focused less on what people think of you, and more on how you can help others?

Take a look at your intention. What drives you? Is it the desire to be seen as great by others, or to do something great for others?

REFLECT With God

Take a few minutes to find a quiet space, and think about what you read and watched. What's your intention? What or who are you living for? Spend some time in prayer, and ask God to help you with your intention. You can read the prayer below out loud as a guide.

Dear Lord,

Thank You for who You've called me to be, and for the opportunities to serve others. Please help me keep sight of which of those is most important. Help me turn to You for affirmation and approval, and show me how I can help those around me. Free me from the desire to do or be what I think others want, and give me the wisdom to focus on what I can do for others.

In Jesus' name, amen.

BOTTOM LINE QUESTION

(come prepared to talk about this with your group)

What drives you the most in your daily life? (e.g., being a good friend, helping others, building a successful career, achieving personal goals, planning for your future, etc.)

MEMORIZE THESE LINES OF SCRIPTURE

"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, NIV

These lines form a simple yet powerful prayer. Learn it, so that if you're ever feeling anxious and you're not sure why, you'll be prepared to ask God to search you and show you what to do.

BONUS SCRIPTURE

For a look at how God blesses people with good intention, read the book of Ruth (it's only four chapters). Ruth stayed with her mother-in-law to take care of her — even though there was no reason she had to do that. How might this story be different if she had been focused on trying to get re-married as soon as possible, or otherwise focused on herself?



COMPLETE THIS SECTION WITH YOUR GROUP

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What's something you've done with good intentions that didn't turn out well?
- Do you think "it's the thought that counts" when you're giving a gift?
- Are you good about following through on your intentions? Or do you often think about doing something, then change your mind or forget?

REVIEW With Your eGroup

Take some time to discuss results from the previous week. How did you do in focusing on integrity? What are some adjustments you made? How did it feel to focus on living with integrity?

After catching up on the previous week, remind your group that this week we are talking about INTENTION.



WATCH VIDEO: WHY AM I ANXIOUS? – PART 5

elevationchurch.org/curriculum/overcoming-anxiety-week-5-intention

HOW TO STRENGTHEN INTENTION — BE **PERCEPTIVE**

If we want to live with good *intention*, we need to be **perceptive**. It's about looking for ways to bless others instead of focusing on how people see us.

Let's say a coworker has seemed rude recently. You can either assume he/she doesn't like you, and you can try to be more "likeable," or you can pay attention to what's going on around that person. Is her child sick? Is she struggling to meet deadlines? Try to understand what's going on behind the curtain, and do what you can to help.

When your goal is being **perceptive** so you can help people, you'll free yourself from trying to live up to the person you think others want you to be.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Bottom Line Question* – What drives you the most in your daily life? (e.g., being a good parent/spouse/friend, helping others, building a successful career, achieving personal goals, planning for your future, etc.) Why?
2. Is that a healthy drive? What about it is potentially good/bad?
3. Have you ever done a good thing for the wrong reason? (e.g., give a homeless person money to appear generous to your friends.) Talk about it. Is our action or intention more important?
4. Think about where you can improve your intention. How can being more perceptive about helping others grow you in this area?

RESPOND With A Goal

- Remind the group about the area where they can most improve their intention.
- This week, focus on being perceptive, and identify ways that you can help someone else. Find at least two things you can do to support others.
- Take note of how you feel after helping those people out. Even if they didn't shower you with gratitude, how did HELPING them make you feel? After this week, make it a goal to find at least one thing you can do each day for the rest of the study to serve someone else.

End your group meeting with a prayer. You can use the one below as a guide.

Dear Lord,

Thank You for the opportunity to help others, and to live in a way that benefits the people around us. Help us to be more like Christ and live with good intentions. Help us be perceptive to how we can support and uplift others, and we pray they would feel Your love through us.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Week 6: Imagination



COMPLETE THIS SECTION ON YOUR OWN PRIOR TO GROUP

READY Your Mind



WATCH VIDEO: HOLD THAT THOUGHT

elevationchurch.org/curriculum/overcoming-anxiety-week-6-imagination

Picture this: you're driving somewhere. It's an obligation, not a vacation, and it's going to take hours to get there. You're alone in the car, and your radio's broken.

Where do your thoughts go? What's your *imagination* doing while your mind wanders?

For many of us, we'll discover that a lot of our "free thinking" might involve worrying about our present or future, or wishing something in our past had happened differently. Some of us might even have imaginary arguments with other people!

It may not seem dangerous, but spending time stewing over bad thoughts can have a serious impact on our emotions, because we can't separate what we *think* from how we *feel*.

This is why Paul told the Philippians to think about good things; he understood the power our thoughts have — the power of this "I."

It takes practice to manage our imaginations well, but it's worth it. And it's one of the most important steps in keeping a positive, Christ-centered mindset — a mindset where anxiety can't take root.

REFLECT With God

Take a few minutes to find a quiet space, and think about what you read and watched. How's your imagination? Are there ways you can improve it? Spend some time in prayer, and ask God to show you how your imagination might be working against you. You can read the prayer below out loud as a guide.

Dear Lord,

Thank You for my imagination, and how it helps me in many areas of my life. I need Your help in keeping my imagination from causing me worry and stress. Help me keep my mind full of good thoughts, and centered on the blessings You've given me and the promises You will fulfill. Teach me how to use my imagination to bring me peace and contentment.

In Jesus' name, amen.

BOTTOM LINE QUESTION

(come prepared to talk about this with your group)

**What's one way your imagination causes you to be stressed or worried?
Why do you have those thoughts?**

BONUS SCRIPTURE

Read Luke 1:5-24 for a reason why we should be careful with our *imagination*. Zechariah was told he and his wife would have a child, but his imagination wouldn't allow him to believe it. How might his experience have been different if he hadn't listened to his imagination?



COMPLETE THIS SECTION WITH YOUR GROUP

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- If there was a fire in your house, and you could only save three things (not people), what three things would you save and why?
- What's something that brings out your creative imagination? (e.g., ambient music, looking at paintings, reading science fiction, etc.)
- What do you imagine your life would be like if you were a celebrity? What would you be famous for? How would you spend your time?

REVIEW With Your eGroup

Take some time to discuss results from the previous week. How did you do in improving your intention? Who did you help out? How did it shift your perspective, looking for ways you can genuinely help others instead of managing how others see you?

Remind your group that we are talking about IMAGINATION this week.



WATCH VIDEO: WHY AM I ANXIOUS? – PART 6

elevationchurch.org/curriculum/overcoming-anxiety-week-6-imagination

HOW TO GUIDE IMAGINATION — BE POSITIVE

If we want to control our *imagination*, we must be **positive**. We can't waste time and energy wondering what could go wrong or being sad or angry about what did go wrong. Instead, think about God's goodness and how He is working on your behalf.

When your imagination starts to turn in a bad direction, pray. Don't just worry out loud to God — thank Him for all the good things He's done, and for all the good He will do. Tell Him you trust Him to handle all your needs. Then think about how He's going to do exactly that. This battle is worth focusing on!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Bottom Line Question* – What's one way your imagination causes you to be stressed or worried? Why do you have those thoughts?
2. Our mind is the place the enemy most often attacks. Why do you think this is?
3. When do you most often struggle with your imagination? (e.g., while going to sleep, while driving to/from work, while getting ready for the day, etc.) What can you do to prepare yourself to resist bad thoughts at those times?
4. What's something you enjoy thinking about? How can you use that to help you during difficult times?

RESPOND With A Goal

- Find a rubber band that you can fit around your wrist.
- For the next week, wear that rubber band every day. (If you can't because of your job or some other reason, be creative and find something to replace it for this exercise.) Each time you catch your imagination running away with bad thoughts, switch the rubber band to your other wrist.
- Let that inconvenience — that wasted time of moving the rubber band to your other wrist — remind you of the time and energy you're wasting on bad thoughts.
- Set aside at least five minutes each day to have dedicated "good thought" time. Picture your day or future going as well as you can imagine.
- Take note of how you feel after a week of guiding your imagination toward good thoughts. Keep this up for at least a few weeks.

End your group meeting with a closing prayer. You can use the one below as a guide.

Dear Lord,

We're grateful for the many good things that come from our imaginations. Teach us to make even better use of this tool by recognizing and turning away from bad thoughts when they come, and by taking time to have good thoughts about Your plans for our lives and how You are working for our good.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Bonus Week 1: Indecision



COMPLETE THIS SECTION ON YOUR OWN PRIOR TO GROUP

READY Your Mind



WATCH VIDEO: DON'T BLOW IT!

elevationchurch.org/curriculum/overcoming-anxiety-bonus-week-1-indecision

Are you good at making decisions?

Here's a better question: Do you make decisions quickly, without extra time spent worrying about your choice? Or are you so slow to make a decision that you create opportunities for doubt?

At its heart, *indecision* is really procrastination. We spend so much time thinking instead of acting that we allow pressure to build.

- Small decisions become stressful
- Big decisions become harmful
- We lose time, energy, and even sleep

Think about the most recent decisions you made, and how much time you spent on them. Was the time you spent thinking/worrying worth it? Did the time you spend even impact the decision you ended up with?

Proverbs 14:23 makes an important point: "All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty." In other words, no matter how good our intentions might be, thinking or talking too much about an action without *doing* that action can be a bad thing.

Consider how much of your anxiety is coming from indecision. Think about the decisions you typically make in your average week — what can you do to improve that process? How can you shorten the time you're spending in this area?

REFLECT With God

Take a few minutes to find a quiet space, and think about what you read and watched. Where might indecision be adding stress to your life? Spend some time in prayer, and ask God to show you how you can be more confident and decisive. You can read the prayer below out loud as a guide.

Dear Lord,

Thank You for the resources and options You've placed in my life, and thank You for the ability to make my own decisions. Show me how to be more confident and decisive. Help me to make decisions promptly in a way that honors You, and in a way that helps me to experience freedom rather than pressure.

In Jesus' name, amen.

BOTTOM LINE QUESTION

(come prepared to talk about this with your group)

What kinds of decisions are the most difficult for you to make? Why do you think this is?

BONUS SCRIPTURE

For a look at the dangers of *indecision*, read Numbers 14. Moses attempted to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land, but they were so indecisive that they ended up wandering through the wilderness for 40 years. How is indecision sometimes worse than even making a bad decision?



COMPLETE THIS SECTION WITH YOUR GROUP

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What's the longest you've ever taken to make a decision?
- Do you make decisions based more on what you think or how you feel? In other words, do you decide with your head or with your heart?
- Do you consider yourself a procrastinator? What's something that's easy for you to put off doing?

REVIEW With Your eGroup

Take some time to discuss results from the previous week. How did you do in improving your imagination? Did you set aside time for positive thinking? How did that impact you?

After your group has caught up on the previous week, remind them that we are talking about INDECISION this week.



WATCH VIDEO: WHY AM I ANXIOUS? – PART 7

elevationchurch.org/curriculum/overcoming-anxiety-bonus-week-1-indecision

HOW TO BEAT INDECISION — BE PRACTICAL

If we want to beat *indecision*, we have to be **practical**. We need to make decisions with confidence, knowing that not making a decision can cause unnecessary stress. It's healthier to accept that we might make a wrong decision, knowing that even if we do, God will help us.

Being practical applies to big AND small decisions. If you're thinking about moving, it's good to consider how that might impact your life. But it's harmful to spend weeks or months playing out all the ways it could go wrong.

On the flip side, some of us spend half an hour trying to figure out which restaurant we want to eat at. We give time and energy to something that ultimately won't have an impact on us.

It's time to set some **practical** boundaries on our decision-making process.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Bottom Line Question* – What kinds of decisions are the most difficult for you to make? Why do you think this is?
2. Think about a difficult decision you had to make recently. Tell your group about the thought process you went through. Where could you have improved that process? Where did you waste time and energy?
3. Now think of a decision you made that went well, but had potential to go badly. Tell the group what could have happened if you had made the wrong decision. What are some ways God could have stepped in to help you?
4. Talk about someone you know who always seems to make good decisions. What qualities do they have? How can you develop those qualities?
5. What kinds of decisions do you make easily that others seem to struggle with? Why are those decisions easier for you? How can you apply some of your strengths in this area to the kinds of decisions that are challenging for you?

GROUP EXERCISE

Divide your group into pairs of people who struggle with decisions in different areas. Take 10-15 minutes to provide perspective to one another about how they can improve in the areas where they don't feel confident making decisions.

RESPOND With A Goal

- Identify three decisions you will make (or can make) in the coming week.
- Set specific deadlines for when you'll have those decisions made. Don't think of this as adding pressure, but rather setting a limit on the amount of stress you'll allow yourself to have.
- If you miss a deadline, have an option in place to deal with it (e.g., flip a coin, let a friend decide for you, write down a few options then close your eyes and point to one, etc.).

End your group meeting with a prayer. You can use the one below as a guide.

Dear Lord,

We're grateful for having so many options in our lives that we sometimes face challenges in making the right choice. We ask that You would build our confidence and help us be decisive. Give us the wisdom to see the right choices and assurance that, even if we make a bad choice, You will be there to get us back on track.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Bonus Week 2: Isolation



COMPLETE THIS SECTION ON YOUR OWN PRIOR TO GROUP

READY Your Mind



WATCH VIDEO: CHAIN REACTIONS

elevationchurch.org/curriculum/overcoming-anxiety-bonus-week-2-isolation

Who's in your corner?

When life throws stuff at you that's hard to deal with, who are the people that will walk through it with you? If you can't think of very many people, you might be living in *isolation*.

Stress and anxiety are multiplied when we try to handle them alone.

There are two kinds of weight we carry in our lives. Some weights are responsibilities that we usually choose, like jobs, relationships or children. But there are also weights we don't want or choose, like illness, family crisis, addiction, etc.

Anxiety — like other weights we don't want — often needs some helping hands. There's strength in letting others help you with those weights, and in making yourself available to help people with their own burdens.

The enemy wants to fight us one-on-one because we weren't designed to be alone. When we're isolated, everything we're facing becomes much harder to bear.

Listen and learn about the things people are dealing with, and help out however you can — even if it's just to listen patiently. And when you need the same kind of support, don't be too afraid or proud to let them in.

If you haven't invested in building a group of people you trust that will walk alongside you, then it's time to get started. Where can you begin fighting against isolation?

REFLECT With God

Take a few minutes to find a quiet space, and think about what you read and watched. Are you isolated in one or more areas of your life? Spend some time in prayer, and ask God to show you how you can build a strong support system. You can read the prayer below out loud as a guide.

Dear Lord,

Thank You for giving me weight to carry that helps me grow stronger. I know it's not Your intention for me to carry it alone, though. Please help me make good connections with other people so I can build a community of friends — people who I can support and who will also support me. Please show us how we can strengthen one another, and guide us in providing helping hands where we each need it.

In Jesus' name, amen.

BOTTOM LINE QUESTION

(come prepared to talk about this with your group)

What's the area of your life where you most need support? (This can be practical, emotional, or spiritual.)

BONUS SCRIPTURE

For a look at how important it is to avoid isolation, read Acts 16:16-40. How would this story have been different if Paul and Silas had been traveling alone, and had been jailed by themselves?



COMPLETE THIS SECTION WITH YOUR GROUP

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Would you rather be by yourself for a week, or with the same group of people?
- What's your favorite thing to do when you have some time by yourself?
- Who in your life could you spend the most time with without getting tired of them?

REVIEW With Your eGroup

Take some time to discuss results from the previous week. Were you more decisive? What decisions did you make? How did making decisions quickly impact your anxiety?

After the group has caught up on the previous week, remind them that we are talking about ISOLATION this week.



WATCH VIDEO: WHY AM I ANXIOUS? – PART 8

elevationchurch.org/curriculum/overcoming-anxiety-bonus-week-2-isolation

HOW TO AVOID ISOLATION — BUILD PARTNERSHIPS

If we want to avoid *isolation*, we've got to build **partnerships**. We need people in our lives who know we will support them, and who we can count on when we need support.

This can't be transactional — like only helping someone if they've helped us in the past. It requires a loving mindset, and being committed to helping someone even if we don't feel like it.

This could mean someone calls us to come sit with them at the hospital after we've had a terrible day at work, but it's not only *having* support that ends the feeling of isolation — *being* that support for others is important too.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Bottom Line Question* – What's the area of your life where you most need support? (This can be practical, emotional, or spiritual.)
2. In what areas of your life do you tend to let yourself become isolated? Why?
3. How is isolation different from having alone time? Discuss how to recognize the differences, and how they can be healthy/unhealthy.
4. How does isolation affect the other "I's of Anxiety"? Discuss how it relates to each one. (Intake, Imbalance, Integrity, Intention, Imagination, Indecision)
5. Why do you think God created us to need other people?

GROUP EXERCISE

Divide your group into pairs. Have each person share (in detail) the biggest burden they're carrying. Ask those pairs to support each other for at least two weeks after the study has ended.

RESPOND With A Goal

- Think about the area of your life where you're most isolated (at work, at home, at church, emotionally, spiritually, etc.)
- Develop some ways you can invite others into that part of your life.
- Make a plan to have at least two other people regularly involved in that part of your life within the next month.

End your group meeting with a prayer. You can use the one below as a guide.

Dear Lord,

We're so grateful You've brought us to this group so we can see how important it is to not be isolated. Help us build a community of friends so we can have the support we need, and show us where we can be that person of support for others.

In Jesus' name, amen.