

STUDY GUIDE
GROUPS / INDIVIDUALS

FIVE SESSIONS

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anxious

for

NOTHING

FINDING CALM *in a* CHAOTIC WORLD



Session One



REJOICE IN THE
LORD ALWAYS

We can't run the world, but we can entrust it to God. Peace is within reach, not for lack of problems, but for the presence of a sovereign Lord. Rather than rehearse the chaos of the world, we can choose to rejoice in the Lord's sovereignty.

MAX LUCADO

OPENING REFLECTION

When I (Jenna) was growing up, my dad had school drop-off duty. And without fail, every morning as he slowed the car to a stop and we hurriedly unbuckled our seat belts, grabbed our backpacks, and threw open the doors, he would give the same exhortation: “Girls, have a good day. Laugh a lot. Learn a lot. And don’t forget who gave it to ya.”

I never thought much about the phrase growing up. My sisters and I would just robotically say it with him and then quickly yell, “Okay, Dad!” before slamming the car doors shut.

Laugh, learn, remember.

As a young girl I naturally did just that. Laughing came easily. Learning was fun. Remembering God as the giver of my day? It wasn’t always on my mind, but I never doubted God was with me and cared for me.

But then I started to grow up. And with growing up came more responsibility. And with more responsibility came anxiety. It wasn’t long before homework hours lengthened, friends hurt me, and I hurt them. Pretty soon I was taking my SATs, learning how to interview for jobs, paying bills. Marriage brought deep joy, but also deep struggles. Cancer invaded the family, and my heroes in life passed away. Babies were born—yet another level of worry.

The older I got, the less I naturally lived my dad’s exhortation to laugh, learn, and remember. The serious struggles of life

squelched laughter. The joy of learning turned into pressure to achieve. And remembering God? The anxieties of life pushed out thoughts of him.

That's why it's hard for me to accept Paul's words in Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always." *Always?* How are we supposed to do that with the pain and anxiety of life?

In this session, we will see that rejoicing in the Lord does not mean we are in a constant state of excitement. We don't have to carry a guitar around and sing worship songs all day. It's not about plastering on a fake smile as we walk through a dark time. No, rejoicing in the Lord *always* is about a deep remembering.

Remembering that the Lord is here, *always*.

Remembering that the Lord is in control, *always*.

Remembering that the Lord is not only the giver of your day but also the ordainer of every minute inside of it, *always*.

Remembering that amidst the pressures, pain, and anxiety in life, he is sovereign, *always*.

As we remember, I have an inkling we may discover the carefree child we used to be. Laughing a lot more. Learning a lot more. And not forgetting who is with us through it all.

TALK ABOUT IT

Welcome to the first session of *Anxious for Nothing*. If you or any of your fellow group members do not know one another, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Next, to get things started, discuss one of the following questions:

- What interested you about this study? What do you hope to learn, and how do you hope to change because of it?

or

- Describe someone in your life who embodies what it means to “rejoice in the Lord always.” What does this person do or say to exude a heart with this attitude toward God?

HEARING THE WORD

Read Philippians 4:4–8 aloud as a group. This will be the theme passage for the next five sessions, so try to look at these words with new eyes and an open heart. Then read it again silently, circling or underlining words that stand out to you.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 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.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Turn to the person next to you and take turns sharing your answers to the following questions:

What was one thing that stood out to you from the passage?

Why do these words stand out to you, and what fresh insight do they bring?

What does “rejoicing in the Lord” mean? In your life, have you found it difficult or natural to rejoice in the Lord? Why?

VIDEO TEACHING NOTES

Play the video segment for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

Anxiety is not so much the onslaught of a storm as the continual threat that one is coming. It’s a big heap of “what ifs.”

The word *anxiety* actually comes from a Latin root that means “to choke” or “to squeeze.” Its strong grip interrupts your sleep, chokes your energy, and harms your overall well-being.

Anxiety is a close cousin to fear, but the two are not twins. Fear *sees* a threat, while anxiety *imagines* one.

We have been taught the Christian life is one of peace. When we don't have peace, we assume the problem is within us, which leads us to feel guilty. But while the *presence* of anxiety is unavoidable, the *prison* of anxiety is optional.

When Paul writes to “be anxious for nothing,” he is referring to an ongoing state. His words could be translated, “Don't let anything in life leave you *perpetually* in angst and breathless.”

Paul's prescription for anxiety is a call to “rejoice in the Lord.” This is not a call to a *feeling* but to a *decision*.

The sovereignty of God refers to his perfect governing over all things. God works in and through every detail of his creation to accomplish his divine purpose. We have the astounding privilege to be a part of this perfect plan.

To rejoice in the Lord, we must have a deep belief in his sovereignty over our lives. The more we believe in *his* control, the more we relinquish *our* control.

BIBLE STUDY AND GROUP DISCUSSION

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. Before everyone shares in the large group, turn to one or two people next to you and finish this sentence: “After watching the video, one question I now have is . . .”

2. Stress-related ailments cost the United States billions of dollars every year. Why do you think the nation leading much of the world in infrastructure, education, democracy, and more is also leading the world in anxiety? Why would Americans suffer from anxiety more than people of lesser developed countries?

3. Scripture includes many verses that can bring comfort and peace to the worried heart. Read Psalm 56:3; Matthew 6:25–34; and 1 Peter 5:6–8. What prescription does each passage give for anxiety?

4. How does the world teach us to cope with anxiety? How does the world's solution for anxiety differ from God's solution?

5. Eugene Peterson says, “[The fact] that God followers don't get preferential treatment in life always comes as a surprise.”² Have you ever expected special treatment from God? If so, how did it affect your relationship with him when you experienced hard times?

6. Read 2 Corinthians 11:23–28 aloud. What trials did Paul face?

Now read 2 Corinthians 12:1–10, where Paul talks about a constant trial God would not take away. What is God's response to Paul's prayer in verse 9?

How does God display his strength when we are feeling weak or anxious?

7. The first prescription Paul gives for anxiety is this: "Rejoice in the Lord always." Hundreds of years before Paul wrote his letter, the prophet Habakkuk wrote similar words. Read Habakkuk 3:17–19. How does Habakkuk describe God in these verses?

What names does Habakkuk use for God?

Why does Habakkuk say he can rejoice in God though the fig trees wither and crops fail?

8. If you want to rejoice in God regardless of your circumstances, it is crucial that you learn to trust in his sovereignty. What prevents you from trusting in the sovereignty of God?

How does trusting in God's sovereignty affect the way you perceive life's trials?

GROUP ACTIVITY

For this activity, each participant will need a sheet of paper, a pen, and an envelope.

In today's session, Max described the difference between fear and anxiety. Fear sees a threat, while anxiety imagines one. Fear screams, "Get out!" Anxiety ponders, "What if?" Take a minute to write down three "what ifs" that are causing you anxiety—three worries that are weighing you down. Once you are finished, fold up the piece of paper and tuck it away in the envelope. Write your

name on the outside of the envelope and give it to your group leader. At the end of this study, the group leader will pass out the individual envelopes so you can reevaluate the list and see how God has brought supernatural peace to these anxious places in your heart.

CLOSING PRAYER

Wrap up this time by talking to the Father. Your group may want to begin the prayer time by reading aloud Isaiah 45:9–12, a powerful passage about the sovereignty of God:

Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker,
those who are nothing but potsherds
among the potsherds on the ground.

Does the clay say to the potter,

“What are you making?”

Does your work say,

“The potter has no hands?”

Woe to the one who says to a father,

“What have you begotten?”

or to a mother,

“What have you brought to birth?”

This is what the LORD says—

the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker:

Concerning things to come,

do you question me about my children,

or give me orders about the work of my hands?

It is I who made the earth

and created mankind on it.

My own hands stretched out the heavens;
I marshaled their starry hosts.

Now take some time to pray for one another. Split up into groups of two or three or circle up and pray for the person next to you. Here are a few suggestions of ways to pray for one another:

- Ask the Lord to give you a deeper trust in his sovereignty so you can rejoice in him no matter what circumstances come your way.
- Use the passage you just read in Isaiah 45:9–12 and declare its promises and/or truth over the person you are praying for. (Insert the person's name into the verse, or simply ask that the truth of this verse would be true in his or her life.)
- Ask the Lord to overwhelm the anxious thoughts you each wrote down earlier with the supernatural peace he promises in Philippians 4:7.

BETWEEN-SESSIONS PERSONAL STUDY

Session One

Reflect on the content you've covered this week in *Anxious for Nothing* by engaging in any or all of the following C.A.L.M. personal study guide activities. Each personal study consists of four reflection activities to help you implement what you just learned in the video while applying Paul's words in Philippians 4:4–8:

- C *Celebrate God's Goodness* (Philippians 4:4): This will be a time to rejoice in the Lord, praising him for his goodness and for the new insight he is giving you through this study. Celebrating what God is teaching you and meditating on who God is will help shift your gaze from the problems on earth to your hope in heaven.
- A *Ask God for Help* (Philippians 4:6): During this reflection time, you will ask God to help you not only understand what he is teaching you through the lesson but also to supernaturally transform your heart to live out this truth in your daily life.
- L *Leave Your Concerns with God* (Philippians 4:7): This reflection activity will challenge you to leave your worries in the hands of God and pick up the specific worry

weapons you are learning in each video session. That way, when worries threaten to return, you can fight them.

M *Meditate on Good Things* (Philippians 4:8): At the end of Paul's prescription against anxiety, he urges his readers to meditate on things that are of God. In this activity, you will meditate on Philippians 4:4–8 and memorize a portion of it. In this way you will take the first step to replace anxious thoughts with the truth of God's Word.

The time you invest will be well spent, so let God use it to draw you closer to him. At your next meeting, share with your group any key points or insights that stood out to you as you spent this time with the Lord.

CELEBRATE GOD'S GOODNESS

During the teaching session this week, you learned why it is important to always rejoice in the Lord. Put the lesson into practice today by reading Psalm 145:8–20, a passage that celebrates the goodness of God. If you are in a setting that lends itself to doing so, read the verses aloud. This is not only a time of reflection but also a time of worship!

The LORD is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.
The LORD is good to all;
he has compassion on all he has made.
All your works praise you, LORD;
your faithful people extol you.
They tell of the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your might,

so that all people may know of your mighty acts
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.
Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures through all generations.

The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises
and faithful in all he does.
The LORD upholds all who fall
and lifts up all who are bowed down.
The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food at the proper time.
You open your hand
and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

The LORD is righteous in all his ways
and faithful in all he does.
The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.
He fulfills the desires of those who fear him;
he hears their cry and saves them.
The LORD watches over all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.

Look back at the passage and underline all the character attributes of God. Which one of these attributes do you have the hardest time trusting?

Why do you think you have a harder time trusting this particular characteristic of God's heart?

What description of God in this passage brings you the most comfort today? Why does it bring you comfort in this season of your life?

Pray

Take some time to thank God for the specific character trait you just wrote about. You might pray words to this effect:

Thank you, God, for your _____. Help me not only to remember your goodness on a daily basis but also to trust in it. May the goodness of you bring out your goodness in me. Amen.

Don't drown in the bilge of your own condemnation. There is a reason the windshield is bigger than the rearview mirror. Your future matters more than your past. God's grace is greater than your sin. What you did was not good. But your God is good. And he will forgive you. He is ready to write a new chapter in your life. Say with Paul, "Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God is calling us" (Philippians 3:13–14 TLB).

—*Anxious for Nothing*, page 45

ASK GOD FOR HELP

What prevents you from rejoicing in the Lord always? Take a minute to examine your heart and write down your thoughts.

Read Luke 1:26–55. What fears or anxious thoughts could have flooded Mary's mind when she received the angel's message?

Instead of stewing in anxiety, how did Mary respond in verse 38?

How did Mary's posture of servanthood enable her to rejoice in the Lord?

When we see ourselves as God's servants instead of God's advisors, we are in a better position to trust in his sovereignty. Through Mary's story, we can infer that one of the biggest hindrances to rejoicing in the Lord is a failure to submit to his authority over our lives. Mary can freely rejoice because she humbly submits, and her rejoicing overflows into a song of worship (verses 46–55). Look at the song again. In verse 48, why does Mary say her spirit rejoices in the Lord?

Pray

Ask the Lord to specifically help you rejoice in him the way Mary rejoiced in him. Ask him to help you submit to his sovereignty. And finally, ask the Lord to help you deeply believe in Mary's words found in verse 48—that he is mindful of you. He sees your worries and is with you through it all. What a beautiful reason to rejoice!

You can't run the world, but you can entrust it to God. This is the message behind Paul's admonition to "rejoice in the Lord." Peace is within reach, not for lack of problems, but because of the presence of a sovereign Lord. Rather than rehearse the chaos of the world, rejoice in the Lord's sovereignty, as Paul did. "The things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ" (Philippians 1:12–13 NKJV).

—*Anxious for Nothing*, page 24

LEAVE YOUR CONCERNS WITH GOD

What specific concerns are clouding your thoughts these days? Write them on the "Worries" column below. This is a time to get what's on the inside on the outside, to let God's light shine on the darkness that's weighing on your heart.

Worries

Worship

In this session, we have been discussing a powerful tool to fight anxiety: *rejoicing in the Lord*. When we do this, it changes our perspective, shrinks the anxiety, and magnifies God's glory. Under the "Worship" column, next to each worry you wrote, write a reason you have to rejoice in the Lord. (You may want to refer to the Psalm 45 passage used in the first activity.)

Take Action!

Take this activity a step further by encouraging a friend with what you are learning. Text, call, and/or email a friend in your group or any friend on your mind. Ask the friend to share a worry you can pray for, and then assure them of God's goodness, perhaps using a verse you have read during this study or just a simple reminder that God is sovereign over their life. Rejoicing in the Lord is even more meaningful when shared!

We have a choice. We can wear our hurt or wear our hope. We can outfit ourselves in our misfortune, or we can clothe ourselves in God's providence. We can cave in to the pandemonium of life, or we can lean into the perfect plan of God. And we can believe this promise: "In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

—*Anxious for Nothing*, page 59

MEDITATE ON GOOD THINGS

Study Philippians 4:4 (ESV)—“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice”—until you can recite it from memory. Don’t forget to memorize the verse reference as well. In case you need some help, here are a few memorization techniques:

- Write down the verse multiple times.
- Say the verse aloud multiple times.
- Break up the verse into smaller parts and memorize one section at a time.
- Write down the verse on note cards and place them where you will see them often—your bathroom mirror, your refrigerator, your computer, your car.

After you memorize the Scripture, ask the Lord to bring it to mind any time an anxious thought surfaces.

RECOMMENDED READING

Want to learn more about what it means to rejoice in the Lord? Review chapters 2–4 in *Anxious for Nothing* and use the space below to write any key points or questions you want to bring to the next group meeting. To prepare for the next session, read chapter 5.