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## Week 1 – Anxiety Leader Guide

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All of us deal with some level of stress and worry. Some of us deal with a much more intense, debilitating level of anxiety. Whether you have an occasional issue or your anxiety is distressing enough to create the need for professional help, these practical steps can help you get off the mental merry-go-round and gain some freedom from anxiety.

### Jump Start

1. *Stop filling: monitor your media intake.* Theodore Roosevelt once said, “Comparison is the thief of joy.” How does having your thoughts consumed with the “highlight reel” of the lives of your friends and acquaintances set you up for negative comparisons? What’s one of the silliest things you have worried over after scrolling through your feed?
2. *Stop filling: practice thought-stopping.* **Read Philippians 4:6-7.** What is Paul telling us we can do to gain freedom from anxiety? How does expressing our gratitude to God shape the way we view our circumstances?
3. *Stop filling: put anxious thoughts on trial.* It’s not enough to tell someone “not to worry” or to “cheer up.” Feelings are intense and valid. But are they real? **Read Matthew 6:26 and 1 Peter 5:7.** How does this passage remind us about how much God must care for us? How can God’s designs in nature remind us that we are held and that we don’t need to strive to control every detail?
4. *Start stilling: engage in mindful activities and have a quiet time.* **Read Psalm 119:15, Isaiah 26:3 and Psalm 46:10.** How do you still your mind and press the “pause” button on the noise in your head? What is the result when you consciously do this?
5. Final Thought: **Read Galatians 6:2.** Scientists and researches confirm what God has long told us: focusing on and serving others combats anxiety and depression. How have you seen God use this promise in your own life or in the lives of others? Is there someone who could use some extra time with you, or would value a phone call to check up on them? What might your next step be in order for you to come alongside them and help carry their burdens?

## Deeper

This letter from Paul is not explicitly speaking of anxiety, but if we examine it closer we can see the same practical steps mentioned above. Read it through verse by verse and use it to develop a strategy to battle anxiety.

### **1 Thessalonians 5:14-24 (ESV)**

14 And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. 15 See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

- How does this passage say we should interact with each other?
- Why is it important to surround yourself with encouraging people?

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

- What would it look like to rejoice always?
- Why does God want us to pray without ceasing?
- How is it possible to give thanks in all circumstances?

19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil.

- What is the benefit of testing every thought?
- What should we do with our good thoughts?
- What should we do with our destructive thoughts?

23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

- How is God described in verse 23? Why is this important for us as we deal with anxiety?
- How is God described in verse 24? Why is this important for us as we deal with anxiety?