

Praying through Anxiety

Lesson 4: Workshop

Discussion:

We hope you enjoyed learning all about anxiety, prayer, and the brain! We also hope that you see how valuable it is to have a healthy relationship with God, and how important it is to read and speak his Word, apply his Word to our lives, pray, exercise, and even rest in our daily lives.

What has been the most valuable part of this class for you so far?

In this lesson, we are simply going to put into practice the two activities we learned to rest our minds, make region-to-region connections, and pray through anxiety using multiple areas of the brain. Through these two activities, we will not only move blood throughout our brain, but also activate and invite other regions of our brain to help us think differently about our struggles. Most importantly, we will see the power of Jesus at work in ways we may have never seen him work before.

Let's get started! Grab a journal or some paper, choose a problem, negative memory, situation, or anxious thought to pray about and share with the group.

In just a few words, write what you selected and put the journal away until later.

Spiritual Relaxation Exercises

Before we pray, let's fully relax our minds with the relaxation exercise below. You can lengthen each set as needed:

1. Close your eyes and begin breathing from your belly. With regular breaths, begin counting as you inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth so that the numbers that you count when inhaling equal the numbers you count when exhaling. Example: Inhale – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and Exhale – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Try to visualize each number in your mind. Repeat this breathing set 3 times.
2. Continue in the same breathing pattern but count backwards when you exhale. If you begin taking deeper breaths, increase your count. Example: Inhale – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and exhale – 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Try to visualize each number in your mind. Repeat this breathing set 3 times.
3. Select a spiritual word, like "Jesus" or "peace." If your breaths are longer, select a phrase like "Lord Jesus" or "love peace." Continue breathing regularly but spell the word(s) instead of counting when you inhale – J-E-S-U-S and exhale – J-E-S-U-S . Try to visualize each letter in your mind. Repeat this breathing set 3 times.

4. Continue in the same breathing pattern but spell the word or phrase backwards when you exhale. Take your time when you exhale, and try to visualize each letter in your mind. Example: Inhale – J-E-S-U-S and exhale – S-U-S-E-J. Repeat this breathing set 3 times.
5. Now, let your mind relax, and imagine that you are on a beach with the waves rolling onto the shore. As you inhale, let your mind travel a little way into the ocean to a large wave. As you exhale, imagine the wave moving slowly toward the shore. Don't let your mind race back to the shore. If needed, you can return to counting frontwards as you inhale, and your mind goes out into the ocean, and backwards as you exhale and the wave travels onto the shore. You may find that the length of your breaths has increased. Repeat this breathing set 3 times.
6. Repeat Step 5 but imagine the sounds of the waves as you breathe.
7. In your mind place yourself on a raft. As you inhale, imagine that you are swimming out into the ocean to the large wave. When you exhale, feel your body on the waves as your raft follows the rhythm of the waves to the shore. Listen to the sounds of the waves as you travel. Repeat this breathing set 3 times.
8. If comfortable, repeat Step 7 using your arms to gently swim out the large wave. Allow your body – your arms and torso – to experience the rhythm of the waves as you slowly return to shore. Repeat this breathing set 3 times.
9. Continue with Step 8, but now imagine Jesus standing at the edge of the shore. His arms are wide open to you and welcoming you onto the shore. He is smiling because he's happy that you are playing and relaxing in the ocean that he created for you! Repeat this breathing set 3 times.
10. When you arrive at the shore where Jesus is standing, take your arms that you were using to return to shore and wrap your arms around Jesus's shoulders as he lifts you to himself. He wraps his arms around you and holds you like his child, rocking you back and forth. Wrap your own arms back around your own shoulders and rock gently as Jesus rocks you in his arms. Let your head rest on his shoulder and feel the comfort and security of his love. Repeat this breathing set 3 times.
11. As you continue rocking in Jesus's arms with your own arms around your shoulders, speak this verse (or another verse that comforts you):
 - a. To those who receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gives the right to become children of God. Children born not in natural ways or by human decision or by husband's will but born of God. (John 1:12-13)

Repeat this verse 3 times.

Go to the next page.

Praying through Anxiety Exercises

Now, we are going to take time to work through your negative thought, problem, memory, or situation using the same prayer exercise from Lesson 3. Since you have fully relaxed your mind, you will skip the first step and move onto Step 2.

1. **Quiet your mind:** Take a minute just to calm your breathing. Breathe in through your nose for 5 counts or more and exhale with the same number of counts. Repeat this for 10 sets. If you are feeling very anxious, then do the relaxation exercise from Lesson 2.
2. **Speak and write the situation:** Write about an anxious thought or situation you experienced this week. Try to visualize your situation and recall the details – what you saw, heard, or experienced. In your journal, write the physical details that you remember. Now, imagine that the Lord is sitting on his throne or even in a chair in your room. He wants to hear every detail of your story. He wants to hear what happened to you and help you. Share these details with the Lord in prayer.

NOTE: If you feel too anxious to write, then just create short points of details that you remember. If you are having too many thoughts, then create a mind map of the story. Include simple words to express who was involved, where it happened, when it happened, what happened, any words or phrases that have stayed in your mind, and details you remember. From those details, add more details until every thought is out of your head. Then, try to organize your thoughts into a list of what happened first, second, third, etc. From there, try to write your story in complete sentences. If this is also too difficult, then begin with drawing your thoughts and label your drawing with words from your story. Then move to mapping and writing your story until it is clearly written on paper.

3. **Name your feelings:** Make a list of negative feelings that you have about your situation. Try to explain *why* you have each feeling. Share your feelings and thoughts with the Lord in prayer. Here are a few negative feelings to consider:

angry	disgusted	annoyed	unloving
sad	irresponsible	distracted	hateful
guilty	bored	disappointed	unforgiving
ashamed	anxious	overwhelmed	disapproving
afraid	embarrassed	confused	bitter
hurt	disturbed	hopeless	tired

4. **Speak the truth:**
 - a. Consider the **physical truths** about your situation. Look for the good. What is right and good about your situation? Are the motives pure but the actions are wrong? If you are overwhelmed, are there limitations in your schedule or emotional ability to handle the situation? Look at your list of feelings. Are your feelings true and accurate, or are there other truths you need to consider? Write what you discover and share these truths with the Lord in prayer.

- b. Consider the **spiritual truths** about your situation. What is true about God, yourself in Christ, the other person, the situation according to God's Word, the Lord's promises to you and to the other person? Find scriptures to help you with those truths. You can use a Bible concordance, refer to the *100 Promises from God's Word* and *100 Identity Truths in Christ* handouts, or simply ask the Lord to reveal his truths as you open his Word. Write those truths and other scriptures that help you. Share these truths with the Lord in prayer.
5. **Be thankful:** In a meaningful way, find something to be genuinely thankful for in this situation. Write what comes to your mind, and take a minute to be deeply thankful to the Lord in prayer.
6. **Silence the lies:** Look again at your description of your situation and your list of feelings. Are there any lies you are believing? If yes, write them down. Then write the physical and spiritual truths that you need to remember and share them with the Lord in prayer.
7. **Pray against the spiritual enemy:** Identify any ways that the spiritual enemy is working in your situation. Express this in writing and to the Lord in prayer. Pray against the spiritual enemy and against root sins, not against a person involved in the situation. Write how you see the spiritual enemy and sin at work. Pray against the enemy and against sin in prayer to the Lord.
8. **Pray blessing:** Write and pray a genuine blessing over the people involved, including yourself, and ask the Lord to forgive them and yourself as well.
9. **Think forward:** Tell the Lord what you deeply desire to happen in this situation. Express your hope for the future! Try to visualize that hope and describe it! Share your hope with the Lord in prayer.
10. **Go beyond:** Imagine a miracle over the situation, and pray for that miracle. Be bold! Try to visualize this miracle happening. Describe it in writing and share your miracle with the Lord in prayer.

From this activity, what did you experience?

Is there anything you feel you need to do in response to what you experienced? (i.e. have a conversation with someone to resolve the problem, apologize to someone, make a change, say "Yes" or "No" to a person, simply have peace over a situation or memory, etc.)

How can you incorporate these activities into your regular life?

This Week:

Write in your journal:

1. Keep reading God's Word and write verses on cards that encourage you! Read them often as part of your times with the Lord.
2. Continue practicing the relaxation and prayer exercise as a part of your regular times with the Lord. Keep your prayers in a journal or in a place where you can refer to them as needed.