

BIG IDEA

When you feel worried, Jesus can be trusted.

BIBLE

23; Matthew 6:28–35; Philippians 4:6–7

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | Mind the Stress

- Welcome back to our final week of *Not Okay!* We've been looking at how God cares for us in the middle of our moments of stress and anxiety. We've got another great week ahead, so let's get started.
- By this point in the series, I am sure y'all are pros at identifying your stress and anxiety, but let's put that to the test with another game.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, you'll need a buzzer or bell, a note card, and a whiteboard. To play, choose two to eight contestants and have the contestants pair up. Give them a brain teaser that is appropriate for your group. The player who knows the answer first rings the bell and says the answer. If correct, the losing player sits down. Then, move on to the next round. The last player standing wins. To lower the game's stakes, make sure everyone gets a prize. If you want to up them, give only one of them a prize.*
 - *Additional Challenge: Add difficulty to the mix by playing loud music, shouting distracting answers, spinning contestants in circles, and whatever else you choose. Increase the level of distraction with each round. Here are a few examples brain teasers to get you started:*
 - *Name the days of the week, BACKWARD*
 - *Name the days of the week in alphabetical order*
 - *Name the months of the year, backward*
 - *Birthday math, what's the sum of yours? mm+dd+yyyy=?*
 - *Name two objects for every letter in your first name.*
- It's normal to feel stress, but the issue comes when we experience long-term stress that never resolves or goes away. When that happens, we lose the ability to trust that things could return to a time before stress was the norm.

ACTIVITY | People Bingo: Stressed Out

- It is comforting to know we are not alone in our stress and other people are experiencing something similar to us. Whether it is stress about grades, relationships, family life, or the future, it's helpful to have people to relate to.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, print out the [bingo cards](#) included in week four of this series materials, something to write with, and a prize for the winner. To play, give each student a blank bingo card and have them fill in each square with something they worry about, stress about, or that gives them anxiety. Keep it relatively general, like "test scores" or "grades" and not "I'm worried that my iPhone trade-in will only be valued at \$3.70". Then have them go around the room and see if they can find someone else who worries about the same things. One person can only sign two squares per sheet. Have that person sign or initial the box — the first person to get five in a row wins a prize.*

- As I was going around discovering other people in a similar place, I was encouraged. Even after three weeks of talking about stress and anxiety, it helps to know I'm not alone and that some people are experiencing similar worries.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - **Which is scarier, a world where wild dinosaurs roamed the earth or where zombies were a constant threat?**
 - ★ **Have you ever had stress that has lasted for a long time? What was that like, and how did you make it through?**
 - **Is it helpful to have others know why you are feeling stressed? Why or why not?**

STORY | Stress Settler

- When our level of stress increases and stays that way, it can affect our health. We might feel tired all the time. We might have panic attacks. We might have trouble sleeping or grinding our teeth. Sustained long-term stress can be harmful to our bodies. Sometimes we need people in our lives who can help us to refocus.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Share a story about a time you were stressed about something inconsequential, and a friend helped you refocus and reconsider the bigger picture. Keep this story light and fun. You could also ask a student or volunteer to share.*
- Even though the thing I was focused on was generally small, the stress I felt was real. It was like a lens that affected every interaction I had. I needed a friend to help me reframe what I was experiencing and to help me focus on what I could do.
- Shoving positivity into this thing that, even though it was silly, gave me actual anxiety wouldn't have helped. Instead, I needed someone to tell me what I felt was real and walk alongside me while I was going through it. I needed someone to be with me in the middle of my worry and not tell me, "don't worry, be happy." I needed someone I could trust who could help walk me through it.

SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

SCRIPTURE | Matthew 6:28–35

- Worry and anxiety have been around for a while. Jesus talked about it in the middle of one of his most well-known sermons.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Matthew 6:28–35.*
- Jesus is talking to his disciples about their lives and what they might be concerned about. The worries he brings up are similar to our own – our concern for clothes or where our next meal may come from.
 - However, instead of worrying about these things, Jesus reminds us of how God cares for creation. Animals and plants receive their share daily and don't put in all the hours of work humans do.
 - Yet, because God loves and designed the world, God takes care of nature. So, instead, Jesus challenges his disciples to "seek" God's kingdom and the righteousness of God, and then they will see the things they are searching for.
- It's important to know that Jesus isn't bypassing the worries and stresses of his followers. He is leading them to be honest about their experiences and lives so they can begin to process them. This isn't a "get over it" kind of thing. Instead, Jesus sees their genuine fears and walks with them as they experience them.

STORY | Bypassed

- Sometimes we accidentally bypass what people feel because we're uncomfortable with the topic. We might not have much experience with the issue, so we try to move our friends along.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Share about a time when someone who meant well bypassed your feelings and emotions. Maybe they used spiritual language to minimize your experience. How did that make you feel? Was it helpful in any way? What did you learn from it? How could they have done that better? You could also invite a leader to share.*
- What this person did to me is not what Jesus suggested here. Jesus will spend a good chunk of his time in ministry sitting in the worries and anxieties that are present in the world every day. He's telling his disciples that there's much to worry about daily. To add today's worries and tomorrow's worries would be overwhelming.
- Jesus also isn't telling people never to worry. We know that the night before Jesus was crucified, he was so stressed and anxious about what might happen that he began to sweat blood. Jesus himself was worried.
 - Here, he's validating the feelings of his followers and letting them know that God will take care of them. He's looking at these people who have so much on their plate and trying to show them that someone cares and is working for their benefit.
 - He's saying, "Ease up. This may get hard, but I've got this." When we feel worried, Jesus is saying we can trust him.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - **What stood out to you about Jesus' teaching on anxiety and worry?**
 - ★ **Why might God choose to allow us to experience anxiety and worry?**

SCRIPTURE | Psalm 23

- There are only a few passages of Scripture more well known than the sermon of Jesus we have just been reading, but one of them is Psalm 23. This poem is often used to talk people through difficult times. In this passage, the poet recognizes the guiding presence of God, even through some dark and challenging times.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Psalm 23.*
- In the first verse, God is described as a shepherd. A shepherd is a person who guides, protects, and gathers sheep. They act in their best interest, have the heart to care for them, and do whatever can be done for their growth and health.

OBJECT LESSON | A Dinner With Enemies

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this object lesson, you will need a dinner table with plates, utensils, napkins, plates, and cups. Before you program, set your table, and as you are teaching, draw attention to the table.*
- The psalm says God prepares a table "in the presence of my enemies." That sounds stressful. I have a hard time going to dinner with my family at Thanksgiving, much less with people I know who want to harm me.
- The poem evokes an image of someone in danger, so we can also know how serious God is about looking out for us. We remember that we are safe, even when we can't tell what the end will look like. The psalm reminds us to trust God through all of it.
- You may not know what the future holds, but you do see the one who holds your future. Let your trust in God lead and allow you to release your worrying and anxiety over to your Shepherd. Let God hold your worry and take care of what is to come. **When you feel worried, Jesus can be trusted.**

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?***IMAGE | A Pat On The Back GIF of Your Choice**

- As Jesus told us in Matthew 6, there are so many worries today. A lot is happening in the world, and it's easy to be overwhelmed when we add all the major global events to our everyday life events.
- So, I'd like to offer you a simple tool to remind yourself that when you feel worried, Jesus can be trusted.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, show a GIF reaction on screen, [like one of these](#). Read this for more information on legally using copyrighted material for educational purposes! For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)*
- When you are stressed or anxious, remind yourself that Jesus can be trusted by giving yourself a good ole PAT. I know that may sound silly, but let's break it down . . .
 - **PAUSE:** Take a few moments to slow down and stop your actions. If you're feeling overwhelmed, it's not always a great idea to keep on going and power through your feelings. Pause for a minute and begin to recognize what you're feeling.
 - **ASK FOR HELP:** If you can already name your feeling, great! Ask for help for that specific thing using our "I" statements from the last week. "I feel . . . I need . . . Could you . . ." If you can't name it just yet, ask God to help you clarify and determine what is happening in you.
 - **TAKE ACTION:** When you know what you need to move forward, it's time to take action. Do something to invite God into your stress and continue helping manage your emotions. Do something to shake up the sensation you're feeling. Go for a walk, talk to a friend, or try the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding prayer from a few weeks ago.
- I think this should go without saying, but I want to reiterate it to be sure. If you are dealing with clinical issues around stress or anxiety, a simple silly thing like a P.A.T. may be a good tool in moments, but it is probably not going to fix everything magically. Trusting Jesus and talking to mental health professionals can be part of what it looks like to trust Jesus amid our worries.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - **Is it easier to ask for help when you feel stressed, or actively invite God into your stress?**
 - ★ **What keeps you from trusting Jesus when you feel worried? What is something you could do to address that this week?**

PRAYERS | Breath Prayers

- In addition to P.A.T., there is another prayer practice that can open space to trust Jesus. Breath prayer is where we focus on one truth of God while inhaling and another while exhaling. Typically, these breath prayers are short passages or paraphrases from the scriptures that help us remember the ways God is with us in the midst of trials and difficulties.
 - So, we might breathe in slowly, hold it, as we pray, "Nothing can separate me." Then, as we breathe out, finish the prayer with "from the love of God," which comes from Romans 8.
 - Today, we're going to practice a breath prayer from Psalm 23. "I am not afraid for you are with me." When we inhale, we'll meditate on the phrase "I am not afraid." When we exhale, we say, "for you are with me."
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Lead the group through the breath prayer exercise, praying through the phrase five times.*

- Breath prayers are a simple tool we can use when we feel stress and anxiety. We can use our breath to help us remember that God is with us, closer to us than the air we breathe.
- One helpful thing about a breath prayer is that it looks like normal breathing. You can try them in class, walking, or before a test. There's no specific posture or behavior that you need. You just breathe and dwell on who God is and how God is here for you.

RESPONSE | Stressed Out Bingo Cards

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, you will need the bingo cards included [in week four](#) of this week's materials and something to write with. If you used the "People Bingo: Stressed Out" module from earlier, have students pull out their bingo cards. If not, pass out blank cards and have students list out some of their top worries from this past week. And then, after they are done, encourage them to spend time bringing those worries to God.*
- On your cards, you wrote down some of the simple worries you're wrestling with right now. Some of these might feel heavier than others.
- God doesn't want you to bypass or disregard the things that you're feeling. God wants you to bring the fullness of yourself into the light and be the full version of you that God created.
 - As we have talked today and you relook at some of these, has anything changed for you when you consider these worries?
 - Does anything shift in your heart when you remember that you don't need to carry these things alone? God is with you in the middle of all of them.
 - Spend some time talking to God about the concerns on your card.

DISCUSSION

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 - **Read Philippians 4:6–7. What do you read in this passage that you could start doing when you feel worried?**
 - **What one change in your life would help you trust Jesus when you feel worried?**

MUSIC | "Twenty-Three" (Aaron Strumpel)

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For the next time of prayer, play the song "Twenty-Three" (Aaron Strumpel), but make sure you have purchased any licenses required to do so. For more information, [read this!](#) [Here's a link](#) to preview the song for your personal use.*

PRAYER | PSALM 23:5–6

- You don't need to carry those burdens alone. God has given you a community of people to bear those anxieties with you.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Invite students to ask for help and prayer from trusted friends and volunteers for the things they feel anxious about on their bingo cards. End your prayer by reading the lines from Psalm 23:5–6 as a prayer for everyone who has asked for prayer.*
- Friends, throughout our time over the last four weeks, I hope that you have begun to see that **when you are not okay, Jesus offers hope**. Even when we share the good news of what God is doing in the world, and people push us away, you **know that when people reject you, Jesus never will**. When you stand up for what is right, knowing that it may cost you a great deal, **when it's not easy to do what's right, it's still worth it**. And even if everything begins to fall apart and you don't know what to do next, **when you feel worried, Jesus can be trusted**.