



YOUTH GROUP SERIES ON STRESS

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STRESS

Lesson 1: Dealing with an Anxious Heart

Bible: Philippians 4:6-7

Description: Stressful things are a part of our lives, and we cannot make them go away. The stress of everyday life can often lead to having an anxious heart, which is something the Bible says we should not have. Thankfully, we are not alone in our fight against anxiousness. We have God on our side.

SUPPLIES

Foam or rubber balls that won't hurt if you throw them at someone.

A "shield" (a toy shield, a Rubbermaid lid, or anything that someone can use to block something)

Thirty books

Tape

OPENING GAME: All Stacked Up

Mark a "finish line" on the floor with tape. Split the group into two teams and have them line up opposite the finish line.

Have the first student from each team stand with their palms facing upwards, and stack two books on their hands. They have to make it to the finish line and back without dropping the books. Each time they come back, have someone add a book to their stack.

When their stack gets too heavy or wobbly, they can tag the next player to take one of their books. Then, the two students have to walk to the finish line together, and each one gets a new book added to their stack when they get back.

Every time someone's stack gets too heavy, they can tag the next player to take a book. All of the players on the team must walk and cross the finish line together. If anyone drops a book, all the players from that team who currently have books have to start over, carrying only one book each.

Continue this until one team is able to get fifteen books across the finish line and back.

TEACH

What are some things that make you feel stressed? Homework? Sports practice? Family? What else? (*Allow students to yell out some answers.*)

There are a lot of things in your day-to-day life that are stressful. Being a teenager is stressful - you've got school and friends and family and hobbies and homework...it's a lot to handle!

It's not that those things are *bad* things. You have to go to school, right? It's not a bad thing; it's where you learn! Friendships aren't a bad thing, and neither are hobbies or sports. Just because they aren't bad, though, doesn't mean that they won't cause life to be a little bit stressful.

Sometimes, the stress of life can be overwhelming. When that happens, it can lead to having an anxious heart. Lets look and see what the Bible says about that.

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. - Philippians 4:6-7

Well, we sure cleared that up really fast! What does the Bible say about being anxious? It says do not do it!

But you still have those stressful things in your life. How are you supposed to deal with those without being anxious?

By praying! The verse says to pray "**in every situation.**" That means even in the most stressful of times, you shouldn't be anxious. Instead of being anxious, you should pray. And not only should you just pray, but you should pray "**with thanksgiving.**"

Pick a volunteer from the audience and have them come up to the front with you.

Okay, tell me one bad thing that happened to you this week - something that made you feel stressed and maybe even anxious. (*Allow student to answer.*)

Now, tell me five things in your life right now that you're thankful for.

Which of these things would you say is more important - the thing that made you anxious or the things you are thankful for?

When you look at it that way, don't the stressful things in life seem to grow smaller and smaller? It's hard to stay anxious when you're too busy being thankful! That is why we are supposed to be thankful in all things.

The last part of that verse is my very favorite. It says that if you pray with thankfulness instead of being anxious, **"The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."**

When you look at everything in your life that you have to deal with - family and relationships and sickness and homework and working - you may not understand how in the world you are supposed to deal with all of that without becoming anxious. And that's okay - you don't have to understand! Why? Because the peace that you can have, *the peace of God*, transcends all understanding.
I need a volunteer to come up here.

Okay, so we are going to pretend that these balls I have represent the stressful things in your life. They can represent school, group projects, chores, work...whatever it is in life that you find stressful.

Throw a couple at the volunteer, but throw them softly and wait a few seconds in between throwing them.

They aren't necessarily bad things, but the more you have to deal with, the more stressful they can become.

Throw several of the balls, faster this time.

And if you're all alone in dealing with this, it can become really overwhelming.

Throw all of the balls at the volunteer, very quickly and harder than the first time.

Can I get another volunteer? *Give the second volunteer the "shield" and have them stand in front of the first volunteer.* Your job is to guard *volunteer's name*.

Start throwing the balls again, but this time, aim for the shield and let the second volunteer deflect the balls.

Now, just because there is someone guarding you, does that mean these things went away? No! They're still very much here. You could see them and hear them, and you

knew they were coming, but they didn't hit and attack you because you had someone guarding you.

That's what the peace of Jesus will do for you. The stressful things in life aren't going to go away, but He will guard your heart and mind and help keep you from becoming overwhelmed and anxious.

Let's look at another example of what Jesus can do for you and the stress in your life.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. - Matthew 11:28-30

Have you ever been so tired that you just couldn't imagine doing anything else? Do you remember how good it felt when you were finally able to just collapse into your bed after that? How refreshing it feels to just lay down in your own bed and go to sleep when you're so tired? That's what Jesus does for us.

See, it can be hard to find rest in this life. Not physical rest but emotional and spiritual rest. Rest for our souls.

Life is stressful. It's full of responsibilities that you have to take care of and choices that you have to make. And in the midst of all of that, our souls can get really, really tired and overwhelmed.

But Jesus is saying to come to Him, and we will find rest for our souls.

When you find yourself stressed and anxious, and you can't imagine being able to handle anything else, and you feel weary and burdened and you know you can't do it on your own, Jesus is there for you. He wants you to rest in Him and learn from Him. He wants to take your heavy burden and swap it out for His light one. He wants to give your soul rest.

Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up. - Proverbs 12:25

What are some examples of things that weigh you down and make you feel even more stressed?

What are some things that cheer you up? Hearing from a friend? Going out for ice cream? Watching your favorite movie?

This verse is plain and simple, and if it's something you can learn, it will make your life a lot easier: Anxiety weighs down the heart.

No one wants to go through life with a heavy heart. Life is hard enough as it is! Why spend every day feeling sad and weighed down?

In the game we played, you guys had to carry fifteen books across the finish line. That's a lot of heavy books! But you didn't have to do it on your own because you were able to work together and help each other.

Anxiousness is what happens when you try to carry the stress of life all alone. It weighs you down and leaves you feeling worried, anxious, and like you are carrying a very heavy burden.

Just like it would have been really hard - maybe even impossible - to stack fifteen books on your hands and carry them across the finish line all alone, it's way too hard to deal with the stress of life alone.

And just like it would have been silly for you to try to carry all of those books by yourself and ignore your teammates who could help you, it doesn't make any sense to try to carry the stress of life all by yourself when God is right there, waiting for you to come to Him.

The good news is that you don't have to go through life being weighed down, all alone. You can just say no to anxiety. Stressful things are going to happen; that's just a part of life. But you don't have to let that lead to having an anxious heart.

Through prayer and thankfulness and resting in God, you can say no to anxiety, and in turn say no to going through life with a heavy heart.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Would you say that you have an anxious heart? Why?
2. What are some things in your life that are stressful?
3. Do those things cause you to be anxious?
4. Do you think it is possible to deal with the stress of everyday life without being anxious?
5. Do you think that focusing on praying and being thankful will actually help you to not be anxious?
6. Have you ever felt like the peace that Jesus gives was guarding your heart and mind?
7. How does it make you feel to know that you can find rest for your soul in God?
8. Would you say that the things you are dealing with in your life right now are a heavy burden?
9. Do you believe that God wants you to have a lighter burden?
10. How are you going to work on not letting stress cause you to be anxious this week?

TEACH - CLOSE

This lesson on the subject of being anxious could have been started and finished in the time it took to read the first verse because it tells you exactly what to do: don't be anxious.

Thankfully, God doesn't just tell us not to not be anxious and leave it there. Instead, He gives us several ways to work through the issue of being anxious.

The verses we read tonight showed us that we aren't supposed to be anxious, but they also showed us that God is the one who will help us with that. We're not on our own down here.

He is waiting on us to come to Him so that He can give us peace and rest. He is waiting on us to come to Him so He can trade our heavy burden for His light one. He is waiting on us to pray so that He can offer His peace, which goes far beyond what we can even understand.

As you go through this week and this month and this year, you are going to face anxiety. With the stress you have to deal with, it's natural to become anxious. But the good news is that you're not alone in the fight against anxiousness. And when you feel like you are, just remember that you have God on your side. His peace is guarding you against anxiousness, just like a shield.

And when it comes to anxiousness, that is the best kind of protection you could have.

STRESS

Lesson 2: Handling Stress by Trusting God's Promises

Bible: John 14:27-28a

Description: Life can be full of stress, but the Bible is full of promises from God that will help us handle that stress. If you believe those promises, than the stressful things don't seem as significant, and you know exactly how to handle them.

SUPPLIES

Whiteboard and dry erase marker

Eraser for whiteboard

Two laundry baskets (the round kind that can easily be held on top of a student's head)

Ten balls

Tape

OPENING GAME: Shoot for the Basket!

Before the game begins, hide ten balls throughout the room.

Split the group into two teams. Select one student from each team to hold the laundry basket on their head forming a "goal" to shoot the ball in.

With tape, mark out where the student with the basket has to stand, and mark a "free-throw" line about ten feet away.

Tell the rest of the group that there are balls hidden throughout the room. Explain that when you say GO, they have to find them, and then toss them into the basket. They can't get any closer to the student holding the basket than the free-throw line.

The first team to find and make five balls into the basket wins!

TEACH

We can all agree that life can be stressful, right? No matter how good your life is, there are going to be some things in it that cause you to be a little bit, if not a lot, stressed.

But if you have a relationship with God, then there's good news!

The Bible is full of promises from Him that make handling stress a lot easier. Let's look at a few of them.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. You heard me say, "I am going away and I am coming back to you." – John 14:27-28a

Do me a favor and help me think of some of the things that cause us to be stressed. Go ahead and just yell some things out.

Write the things that the students yell out on the whiteboard. Add things until the whiteboard is pretty full.

Wow, if you look at all of these things, it's no wonder that we're stressed, right? These are a lot of stressful things to have to handle!

But as I'm looking at all of these things, I'm noticing something. Can anyone guess what all of these things have in common?

They all have one thing in common: they're all temporary.

You see, this verse promises us something, two things, really. First it promises us peace. And second, it promises us that Jesus is coming back for us.

And do you know what's going to happen to all of these stressful things when this life is over and we're living with Jesus?

Erase all of the things on the whiteboard.

They are all going to be gone. Just like that. All of the things you spent time worrying about, all of the things you stressed over, all of the things you let make you anxious...they're just going to be over. Done. Gone. And we'll be with Jesus!

When you think of it like that, doesn't it seem a little bit pointless to spend time stressing out over these things?

Now, I'm not saying you shouldn't care about these things. In fact, some of them are very important. I'm saying that in the grand scheme of things, if you really believe the promise that Jesus is coming back for you, then there's no need to be stressed over these. Why? Because you know how the story ends! It ends with you spending eternity with Jesus!

But the first part of that verse promises something, too. While we are living this life, we do have to deal with these things. But Jesus doesn't just leave us all alone to deal with stressful things on our own until He comes back! He promises us His peace.

Not just any old peace, either. But a real, out of this world kind of peace. Peace way greater than this world could ever give. Peace so great that there's no need to worry or to be afraid.

So who needs to be stressed when you've got that kind of peace? You definitely don't!

Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous be shaken. – Psalm 55:22

Another promise from God, another reason to not be stressed.

See, this verse doesn't say to trust in the Lord and all your cares will go away. It acknowledges the fact that you will have cares - things to be stressed over - but that you should give them over to the Lord and He will sustain you.

With all of the stress that life has to offer, it can be very easy to feel shaken. But remember the promise in this verse: cast your cares on the Lord, and He will not let you be shaken.

You have to do your part. You have to make the choice to trust God enough to give Him all of your cares, your worries, and your stress. And in turn, He will sustain you. He will take care of you. He will not let you be shaken.

At the beginning of the game we played tonight, the balls were hidden all over the room. You didn't know where they were, and you didn't know how hard they would be to find. At the end of the game, they were all stored in the basket. They hadn't disappeared, but they were contained in one place.

The things that we're stressed about in life are all over the place, and often we have no idea about how to handle them. But when we cast those things on the Lord, we don't feel so all over the place anymore. Instead, we know that all of those things are exactly where they should be: in God's hands.

If you truly believe that promise from Him, doesn't that make things seem easier? Of course there's going to be stress - you're only human, and stress is something that comes with life. But if you believe this promise, then you know exactly how you are supposed to deal with this stress: By giving it to God.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. – Romans 8:28

It's amazing how we can work ourselves into a frenzy so quickly when we're stressed, isn't it?

For example, let's say you're stressed about homework. You've got a lot of homework, and you don't know how in the world you're going to finish it all. So you start to worry that you won't finish it and that you'll get a bad grade. Then you start to worry that the bad grade is going to make you fail the whole class, which makes you worry you may not ever graduate high school.

Pretty soon, you've convinced yourself that you're going to be a high school dropout with no job, living on the streets and begging for food, all because you were a little overwhelmed about some homework.

It seems silly, right? But be honest with yourself - how often do you think things like that?

Or maybe the things you get worked up over are much more serious than homework. Maybe your parents are getting a divorce, and you're worried that you're going to have to pick one over the other. Then you start to worry that neither one of them will love you, and if your parents don't love you, then no one else ever will and you'll be alone for the rest of your life.

See? We take things that are stressful and just run with them in our minds making them more and more stressful the more we think about them. But that's why this promise from God is so amazing. It says that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him - that's you!

So whether you're causing yourself to worry over small stress like homework, or large stress like a divorce in the family, know this: God has a plan for you, and He will work in everything - even the stressful things - for your good.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When you feel stressed, are God's promises what you think about? Why or why not?
2. Do you think that knowing these promises should make you feel less stressed? Why?
3. Does knowing that you will spend forever with Jesus make the stressful things in your life seem like less of a big deal?
4. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus promised to leave His peace with you?
5. Do you really believe that God can work in everything for your good?
6. How would your life be different if you handed your stress over to God and trusted that He will sustain you?
7. Do you sometimes start to worry about stressful things so much that you make them into a much bigger deal than they are? How would that change if you trusted God more?
8. Do you talk to God about the things in life you're stressed about? If so, does it help?
9. How would a normal day in your life be different if you looked at everything that happened as if God were working for your good?
10. Why do you think it's hard to trust God with the things that cause us stress?

TEACH - CLOSE

There's no magic formula that can make stress go away. If you are a human that lives on this earth, stress is something you're just going to have to learn how to handle. Lucky for you, you have some amazing promises to help you handle that stress.

To close tonight, we're going to do something a little different.

Have the students all line up.

I want you guys to think of something that's been causing stress in your life. It can be big or small; it doesn't matter. If it's something you're stressed about, write it on the board.

Let the students write on the board, but have them stay in a line.

If you believe in God and His word, and you believe that His promises are true, then that should drastically change the way you handle the stress of life, right? Before we leave, why don't you take one more look at the promises of God that we talked about today:

1. He gives us peace so great that we should not be worried or afraid.
2. He's coming back for us.
3. He will take our cares and sustain us.
4. He will not let us be shaken.
5. He works in all things for our good.

Those five amazing promises are completely life changing, if you believe them. And those are all just from three verses!

Now, I want you to think about those promises and what they mean to your life. This time, instead of writing something else on the board, choose one thing to erase from the board. Choose something that, after hearing those promises, doesn't seem so stressful. Or choose something that you think you will be able to handle much better after hearing these promises.

Let the students erase words until the board is empty again. Then they can sit down.

The Bible is full of amazing promises from God. It's full of His loving words toward you.

The next time you're stressed, stop yourself from worrying and spiraling into a panicked frenzy. Instead, open up the Bible and take a look at all of those promises. Then, just imagine yourself erasing the stress, one promise at a time.

There is no better way to handle stress than to remind yourself of the amazing promises of God.

STRESS

Lesson 3: Priorities & Stress

Bible: Matthew 6:31-34

Description: Not having your priorities in the right order can lead to a very stressful life. Trying to figure out what your priorities should be can be stressful, but having the wrong priorities can be even more stressful. Thankfully, the Bible tells us a lot about what our priorities should be.

SUPPLIES

2 Large white t-shirts
Paint
Paintbrush
2 ropes
Tape

Before the game, tape the two ropes together, forming one long rope. Tape them tight enough that they will stay together, but not so tight that they can't be pulled apart when tugged on.

Ten stackable items, varying in size. Example: books, plates, etc. Anything flat that can be stacked on top of something else

A timer

OPENING GAME: Stackable

Divide the group into four teams. Lay out the stackable items in any random order, as long as the biggest item is not first and the smallest item is not last.

Tell the students that the objective of the game is to be able to stack all ten items in the order that they are in and carry them to the other side of the room. If they drop the stack, they have to start over.

Let the first team go and time them.

Once they've completed the task, rearrange the items again in any order, as long as it is not largest to smallest. Let the second team go and time how long it takes them. Repeat for the third team.

When you are laying out the items for the fourth team, lay them out from biggest to smallest, in the order they will stack the easiest. Their time will be the shortest.

TEACH

In the game we just played, you guys tried carrying a stack of items four different ways. The last team was able to complete the challenge in the shortest amount of time. Now, how many of you think that their success was because of the order the items were in?

The challenge worked best when the bigger things were first on the stack and the smaller things were on top, right?

Well, it's like that in life, too. It's least stressful when the most important things are first. If the less important things are first, things can get messy and unbalanced, just like they did in that game.

Not having your priorities in the right order can be really, really stressful.

If you're confused about what your priorities should be, then you're in luck! The Bible has a lot to say about it. Let's take a look.

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 6:31-34

As humans, our most basic needs are food and water. It's how we survive! So if we're without them, it would definitely be cause for worry and stress, right?

This verse tells us not to worry, but it doesn't just say not to worry about superficial stuff or things out of our control. It says not to worry about the most basic of things! And if we shouldn't get stressed over the most basic of things in life, we certainly shouldn't get stressed over other things, right?

This verse also lays out what our priorities should be when it tells us to seek God first, before anything else.

The words “do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” can seem close to impossible. I mean, not worry about tomorrow? If we could figure out the secret to not worrying about tomorrow, we’d never be stressed! How are we supposed to do that?

It’s simple, really. If we really do seek God and His kingdom first, above all else, then we won’t have to worry about tomorrow. Why? Because when you seek God and His will first, you’re acknowledging that He is in control, so there’s no need to worry about tomorrow or the day after that or the week after that.

This is a great example of how having your priorities in order can greatly decrease the stress in your life - seeking God above anything else leads to not worrying. Can you imagine how much less stressful life would be if you didn’t worry? It would be amazing!

Let’s look at another way the Bible talks about what your priorities should be.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is - His good, pleasing and perfect will. – Romans 12:2

This world that we live in isn’t all good. And the pattern of this world - the “normal” way of doing things - is a sinful one. One that we don’t need to conform to.

See, it’s not normal to make it a priority to not conform to the world around you. But being a Christian isn’t about being normal; it’s about following Christ!

Conforming to the world around you and caving into a lifestyle of sin may be tempting, and may even seem fun at times but trust me, it’s not worth it. Nothing leads to stress faster than knowing you’re living a sinful life and being worried about the wrong things you’re doing.

Instead, you should make it a priority to not conform to the lifestyle of this world. See, you may think that’s not really necessary. Sure, you’ll avoid doing the “really bad” stuff, but you don’t need to actually spend time and energy focusing on not conforming to the world around you, right?

Let me show you what that’s like. I need a volunteer to help me out.

Give the volunteer the white shirt to put on over their clothes, and you put one over your clothes, too. Get out the paint and paintbrush.

Okay, we're going to pretend that this paint represents things in a sinful lifestyle that I'm living. Begin to paint on your own shirt.

Now, you're a Christian, but you don't think it's really important to focus on not conforming to this type of lifestyle. After all, you love Jesus, and you actually know this stuff is wrong, so as long as you don't do any of it, you'll be fine, right?

While you're talking, start to stand closer to the student. Swing your arms around, bump into them, etc.

But here's the thing—the more you're around me, the more you're around my lifestyle and actions, the good and the bad.

Make sure you've touched the student's shirt enough the some of the paint has gotten on them.

Regardless of what you're actually participating in, it's all around you, and it's going to influence you. Because what's on your shirt right now? Paint!

I don't understand! How did it get there? You didn't put it there! You didn't even hold a paintbrush!

But you also didn't make a decision to be sure to keep paint off your shirt.

Had you made the decision that you weren't going to get any paint on you, you could have done that! We still could have hung out and talked, but you could have stood a little further away from me. You could have been more aware, and when I got too close to you with the paint, took a step back.

It's the same way with conforming to the patterns of this world. You cannot escape sin - it's all around you. But you can make the decision not to conform to it. You can always be thinking about the way you should live, making sure to not let certain things become a part of your life.

If anyone else walked in right now and we asked them who they thought had been painting, they would think we had both been painting. They wouldn't be able to tell that you hadn't touched any paint or even held a paintbrush.

You aren't meant to conform to the patterns of this world. You are meant to be set apart.

When you think of having your priorities straight and how that can cause stress, this may not be something you think about. You probably think of good priorities as being something more along the lines of making sure your homework is done before you hang out with your friends. But let me explain this to you.

I need two volunteers.

Hand each volunteer one end of the rope that's been taped together in the middle. Have them stand close enough to each other that there is a lot of slack in the rope.

There's no doubt about it; being a Christian is difficult. We're supposed to be in this world but not of it. We're not supposed to conform to the patterns of this world, yet we still have to live here.

That's why having clear priorities is so important. Because when you don't - when you think that you can just coast along and everything will be fine - this is what happens.

Ask the students to both take a step back, lessening the slack of the rope, but not pulling it tight yet.

On one hand, (*point to one end of the rope*) you know what's right and wrong. You know what you should and shouldn't do. And hey, maybe you even make sure you don't do the things you know are wrong.

But on the other hand (*point to the other end of the rope*) you haven't exactly made it a priority to not conform to the world around you.

Have students step back until there is no slack in the rope at all.

Without clear priorities, you're pulled each way. If you don't decide to make sure certain things don't influence you, then they're going to influence you.

Being pulled in two different directions? That's extremely stressful.

Have the students pull on their ends of the rope until the rope snaps in the middle.

How can you expect to not be stressed when you're being pulled two different directions? Eventually, you snap.

Can you see how having the right priorities is essential to fighting stress?

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself." - Matthew 22:37-39

Lastly, let's talk about the most important priority of all.

While there are a lot of things in life that will probably always be a little unclear, this is not one of them. In this verse, Jesus laid out exactly what our main priority should be. He even helped by adding what the second one should be!

Your number one priority in life should be to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. And once you get that in place, your number two priority should be to love others.

Your heart, soul, and mind...that's all of you! It's everything you have! Your very top priority should be to love God with everything you have.

Let me just tell you this...if you can truly make this your top priority, the rest of your priorities will fall into place, and your life will have much less stress.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When you think about the stress in your life, how much of it do you think comes from not having the right priorities in the right order?
2. Is worry something that causes a lot of stress in your life?
3. Do you think that seeking God first, above everything else, would decrease stress?
4. What do you think it means to not conform to the patterns of this world?
5. When you think about your priorities, is not conforming to the world one of them? Do you think it should be?
6. Do you agree that if you don't make clear decisions about the lifestyle you have that you will be pulled in different directions and that it will cause a lot of stress?
7. Do you think it's helpful that Jesus laid out exactly what your number one priority should be?
8. Is loving God with everything you have your number one priority right now? If not, is that something that you want to change?
9. How do you think that loving God above all would make you less stressed?
10. Do you think God cares about the things that stress you out? Do you think that maybe that is why He told you these things, things like not worrying and not conforming to the world and loving Him above all else, so that your life could be better and less stressful?

TEACH - CLOSE

Today, we covered a topic that you maybe hadn't thought of before. I mean, sure, you know that not having your priorities straight can lead to stress. But maybe you were thinking of responsibilities like homework and chores as priorities, not the things we discussed in this lesson.

I hope that now you see how important it is to consider these things.

Like I said, if you make loving God with everything you have your top priority, I guarantee the amount of stress you have in your life will go down. Why? Well, for starters, it helps you make a lot of decisions without even thinking about it.

Because if you love God with everything you have, you're going to want to follow His word the best that you can.

So those verses that we talked about - about not worrying, about seeking God first, and about not conforming to the patterns of this world - well, those are no-brainers! Because you want to do everything you can for the one you love more than anything else, right?

If you have a lot of stress in your life, look at your priorities and ask yourself these questions:

- Am I loving God with everything that I have?
- Am I loving those around me?
- Am I purposefully not conforming to the world around me?
- Am I worrying about what may happen instead of trusting in God to take care of me?

A lot of the unnecessary stress in your life could be taken away by dealing with those four questions.

Jesus loves you guys so much, and He doesn't want you to live a life full of stress. He loves you so much that He actually told you exactly what your priorities should be in the Bible. Why not try listening to them?

STRESS

Lesson 4: Combatting Stress - Confidence or Fear?

Bible: Romans 8:31

Description: When there is stress in our life, we get to choose how to deal with it. We can either deal with it with fear and worrying or with confidence. The confidence we can have in God, knowing He is on our side and will take care of us, is the best way to face stress head-on.

SUPPLIES

A box of froot loops or some type of circular cereal

A large bowl

Ten Oreos

Ten chocolate chip cookies

A flat plate

Two “dart” guns that shoot foam darts (you can find these at the dollar store)

A bunch of coins

OPENING GAME: Run or Hide

Before the game begins, scatter all the coins on one side of the room. Have students line up on the opposite side of the room.

Choose two students to handle the dart guns. Have them stand on either side of the group.

Explain that this game is like dodgeball but with foam darts instead of balls. The students must avoid getting hit with the darts. If they get hit, they are out.

Each coin is worth 5 points. The students must run and grab a coin, bringing it back to the other side for it to count.

The winner is either the first person to 20 points OR the last one standing.

TEACH

Have you ever felt so stressed that you just felt frozen with fear? Let me give you an example that probably everyone can relate to.

Let's say it's the first day of school, and your teacher is going over what the year is going to look like. She tells you about a big report that's going to be due at the end of the year, and that it counts for a big portion of your grade. It seems so simple - you have months and months to complete it, and you know it will only take you a week or two, tops.

So you kind of push it out of your mind - you have all semester to do it! You think of starting it a couple of times, but you have more important things to do so you push it off just a little longer. As long as you finish it by the end of the school year, you'll be fine!

Well, we all know how this ends up, don't we?

Suddenly, it's the night before the last day of school, and you haven't even *started* the big project.

If you've ever been in this position, then you know the kind of "frozen fear" I'm talking about. Really, you need to spend every second of the next twelve hours working on this project to try and finish in time. But it's so overwhelming and stressful, and you're so afraid you won't finish it, that you just sit there in fear - you can't even bring yourself to start it.

Now, that's a pretty good reason to be stressed. It's also a good reason to have your priorities in the right order, like we talked about. But think about it - how often does that same type of fear happen in your life over other stressful things?

You're stressed about what other people think of you, so you let fear over their opinion control the way you dress or act. You're stressed about having friends and if people will like you or not, so you let fear keep you from being yourself.

There are way too many times in our lives where we react to stress with fear.

Let me ask you a question; have you read anything in the Bible lately? If you have, has anything you've read pointed to letting fear control you?

Of course not! In fact, the Bible is full of reasons to *not* be afraid!

In the game we played, you had two options. You could have faced the fear of getting shot and kicked out of the game by trying to get enough coins to win, or you could have faced the fear by hiding from it, trying to just stay in the game long enough for everyone else to get out first.

See, when there is stress in your life, you can react one of two ways. You can react with fear or you can react with confidence. Why don't we look at some verses and see which one they point to.

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? - Romans 8:31

Seriously...how amazing is this? God is **for** us! And since He's for us, who can be against us?

With God on your side, what do you have to be afraid of? Nothing! Because nothing is bigger than God. Nothing is more powerful than God. And there is nothing that God can't handle.

Think of the things in your life that make you feel stressed. Is any one of those things bigger than God? Is there anything at all that you're stressed about that you think God cannot handle? No! So why be afraid?

If there's anything at all that should make you feel confident, it's knowing that God is on your side.

No matter what this world throws at you, no matter how stressful or nerve-wracking it may be, you can look it straight in the face with the confidence that God is on your side. How cool is that? It's pretty amazing!

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? –Matthew 6:26-27

So not only can you have the confidence of knowing that God is on your side, you can also be confident that He will take care of you.

Imagine this: imagine if, whenever anything stressful happened, you stopped and thought, "I'm not going to be afraid and worry about this because I know that God thinks I'm valuable and He is going to take care of me." Can you imagine how different life would be?

Here's the thing...that's already true. God *does* think you're valuable, and He *is* going to take care of you. So the only difference is whether or not you choose to act like that when things get stressful.

This verse also tells you that worrying isn't going to change anything - it cannot add so much as a single hour to your life. So it's whether you want to waste time being afraid and worrying or believing that God thinks you are valuable and He will care for you.

I need two volunteers!

Pour out the cereal on the ground and place the empty box on the other side of the room. Tell the first volunteer it's their job to gather all of cereal and put it back in the box using just their hands. Give the second volunteer the bowl, but have them just stand there quietly.

Okay, go ahead and get started. That's a lot of cereal; it may take you awhile.

So, let's pretend that all of those little froot loops are the things that stress us out in life. Just like *volunteer's name* is having to scramble to pick them all up by hand, it can be super difficult to try to handle it alone.

Wait until the volunteer takes at least two trips to the box of cereal, then point out the volunteer holding the bowl.

It looks like you're having a really hard time getting all of that with your hands. Why don't you ask *second volunteer's name* to help you with this bowl?

Have the two students gather all the cereal into the bowl, then put it back in the box.

See how much easier it was to complete that task when you used the bowl? They were standing there the whole time; all you had to do was ask for their help.

That's exactly how it is with God. He's there no matter what. And He wants to take care of you. But if you never acknowledge that He's there and you just go on trying to do things on your own, it's just like *volunteer's name* trying to carry all of the cereal with only their hands when there was a giant bowl they could use right behind them.

It just doesn't make any sense to try and do it alone!

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. -1John 4:18

Get out the plate and cookies.

So for the sake of this example, we're going to pretend that these Oreos represent fear, that the chocolate chip cookies represent the perfect love of Jesus, and that this plate represents your life.

Put all the Oreos and the plate—don't stack them, just put as many as will fit.

On our own, life can be pretty fearful. There's so much to be stressed about that sometimes the only way we know how to react is with fear.

That's where the perfect love of Jesus comes in.

Hold up the chocolate chip cookies.

Now at this point, your life is totally full of fear. We can't stack these, because there's just no more room. So what happens?

Start putting the chocolate chip cookies onto the plate, pushing the Oreos off in the process.

See, there's no room for both perfect love and fear. You can't have them stacked on top of each other, because they don't mix well together.

Continue putting the cookies on the plate until all of the Oreos have fallen off and the plate is full of chocolate chip cookies.

Here's the good news: perfect love - the love that can only come from Jesus - pushes fear right out of there.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When you're stressed, do you react more with fear or with confidence?
2. Do you think that you sometimes take all that Jesus did for you for granted?
3. Why do you think it's so easy to take such big things for granted?
4. Do you think that Jesus wants you to react to stress with fear or with confidence?
5. Do the verses we read just now make you feel more confident? Why?
6. Is there anything you're stressed about that is bigger than God? Are there things that you *act* like are bigger than Him?
7. Does knowing God will take care of you make you feel less stressed about life?
8. What are some ways you can work on being less afraid and more confident?
9. Do you really believe God is for you, on your side? If so, how should that change the way you react to stress?
10. The verse we read says "perfect love drives out fear." Do you think that if you let Him, the perfect love of Jesus can help you to not be afraid of stressful things?

TEACH - CLOSE

At the end of the day, we have the perfect love of God. No matter the stress that may be in our lives, that perfect love is still there. No matter what. And if you are living in fear due to stress or any other reason, then you're not taking advantage of that perfect love.

For some reason, it is so easy for us to take this for granted. For example, how many of you believe that Jesus died for you so that your sins could be forgiven and you could experience the perfect love of God?

Okay, now how many of you remember that on a daily basis? How many of you actually think about the fact that Jesus died for you every single day?

It's a really big deal, right? I mean, come on! This is Jesus we're talking about! And He died for you, saving your life in the process. It's such a big deal, you would think that we would be so thankful it would be all we ever thought about.

But it's not, is it?

It's something we've grown used to. We hear things like "forgiveness" and "perfect love" and we don't stop to think about what they truly mean because we have taken things like that for granted.

Let's imagine something for a second.

Let's say you move to a new town and start a new school. You don't know anyone there, and you're stressed about making friends. In fact, you're so stressed, you can't even sleep the night before your first day. You lie awake all night, worrying about what others will think of you.

You're so afraid that no one will like you that you wear something you normally wouldn't because you think they will like it more. And you decide to act in ways you normally wouldn't so maybe people will want to be your friend. The day goes by, and you aren't yourself at all!

Let's just imagine what Jesus thinks about that.

Does He care about you and all of your problems? Yes! Absolutely! From the biggest thing to the smallest thing, He cares.

However, do you think that if He could knock on your door and come in to talk to you that He would give you advice on how to make everyone like you? Or that He would say something more along the lines of, "Why are you so afraid? I died for you and forgave your sins! I'm looking out for you! I'm on your side! There's no reason to be stressed and fearful over something like this!"

Based on what the Bible says, I think it would be more along the lines of the second.

So why not act that way? If Jesus physically showed up while you were stressed about something and said all of those things to you, would you still be afraid when He left? Or would you feel more confident and not as worried about what you were stressed about?

The thing is, He DOES tell you these things! They are all right there in the Bible, right there in the verses we read tonight.

You just have to choose to believe them.