

# Wellbeing Through Faith

## Intro

Welcome to Wellbeing Through Faith. Over the next six sessions we are going to look together at what the Bible says about our mental and emotional wellbeing, and learn some practical psychological tools that we can use to help us grow our wellbeing.

## Scripture

Romans 12:2

“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.”

## Aims of the Group

- To gain practical tools that will help us build our daily life on biblical truths.
- To help us to see God, ourselves and our own life in a healthy perspective.
- To help reprogram our minds into positive ways of thinking and overcome negative attitudes and behaviours.

## Ground rules:

We will listen to and respect each other. We don’t always have to agree but we will always value each other.

We won’t share peoples’ personal information with others outside the group. The only exception is if the group leader feels action needs to be taken to keep someone safe.

During the group sessions you may find yourself experiencing strong thoughts and emotions. If you need any further support after the session please let the facilitator know.

There is no pressure to share in the group discussions and please share only what you feel comfortable with sharing. If you have experienced something traumatic or deeply distressing, the group discussions may not be the best place to talk about it, however the facilitator can arrange for further support for you outside of the group.

## Other ground rules you might want to set as a group.

What other ground rules do you want to set as a group?

Mobile phones? Time-keeping? Contact between each other outside of the group?

# Fear and Anxiety

In this session we are going to learn a bit more about how fear and anxiety affect us, and what we can do to reduce that effect.

## Scripture

Psalm 55:22

“Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you. He will never let the righteous be shaken.”

## What is Fear?

Fear can be described as:

“An unpleasant emotion or thought that you have when you are frightened or worried by something dangerous, painful or bad that is happening or might happen”<sup>1</sup>

It is a familiar emotion which we all experience when we are faced with a scary or threatening situation.

## What is Anxiety?

Anxiety can be described as:

“An uncomfortable feeling of nervousness or worry about something that is happening or might happen in the future”<sup>2</sup>

Everyone has feelings of anxiety when faced with threatening life situations. If you are about to do an exam or a presentation, it would be very normal to feel anxious during this time.

For some people, controlling worries or the anxiety they feel is difficult, and they experience different symptoms during this time, including many physical symptoms. The physical symptoms are caused by a physiological reaction which is called the fight, flight or freeze response.<sup>3</sup>

## The Fight, Flight or Freeze Response

The fight, flight or freeze response plays an important role in how we deal with stress.

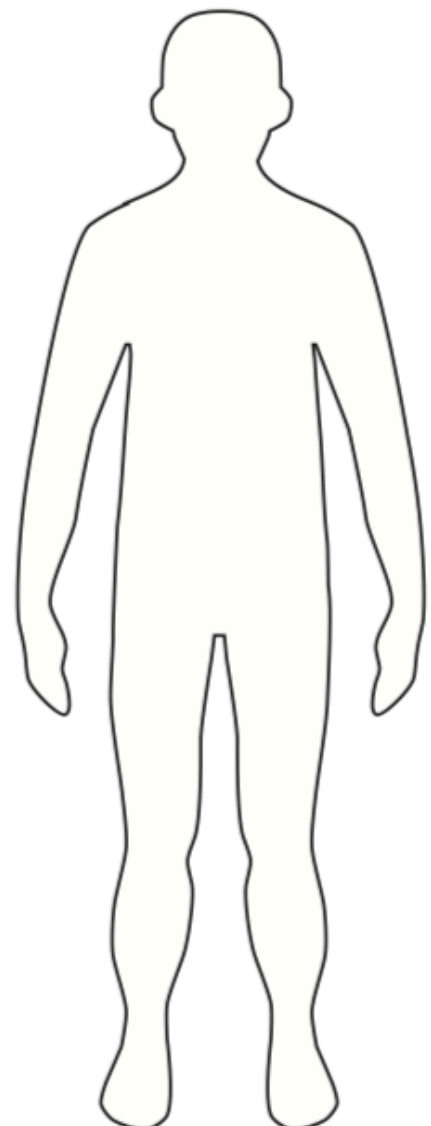
When we are faced with a life-threatening or scary situation, our body releases hormones to prepare us to stay and deal with the threat, ie fight, or run away<sup>4</sup>. For example, we may feel the need to run away from a wasp, or grab a newspaper to squash an insect or spider, or sometimes we simply freeze and are unable to do anything, such as getting stage fright before giving a big speech in public.

It can be upsetting when we experience the fight, flight or freeze response, as lots of chemicals are running round our body making us feel all sorts of different things. When we understand that it is a normal reaction, and is our body's way of trying to keep us safe, it can be really helpful.

### Activity

How do you know you are feeling anxious? What do you physically feel in your body? Draw on the body map where you are affected - and how it feels in your body. Once you've completed, you can compare with others in the group.

Has there been a particular situation where you have felt like this?



## Physical responses to Anxiety

How our bodies react to anxiety can be different for each person - however there are some common responses you may have put on your body map above.

- Muscle tension - your muscles prepare to fight or run by going tense
- Heart rate - your heart might start pounding, in order to get the blood flowing to your muscles so they are ready to fight or run.
- Breathing - your breathing rates increases so that lots of oxygen is available to your body.
- Sweating - your body is trying to stay cool so it doesn't overheat.
- Needing the toilet - your muscles around your bladder relax!<sup>5</sup>

All of these physical reactions are normal and natural. It is your body doing what it should do to prepare to either fight or run away in a dangerous situation. However, these physical responses can become a problem when they are exaggerated, misplaced or prolonged, and can also have an impact on our mind.

## How do Fear and Anxiety affect the mind?

Anxiety often leads us to avoid situations in order to not have to experience the physical responses and anxious thoughts and feelings. However, avoiding situations can, over time, mean that we miss out on social contact and can reduce our quality of life.

When we avoid anxiety-provoking situations, we often become more anxious over time because we never learn to manage our anxiety.

## How does Anxiety affect the mind?

Do you recognise any of these affects of anxiety in your mind?

- Feeling tense and unable to relax
- Have a sense of dread, fearing the worst
- Feeling like other people can see you are anxious and are watching you.
- Worrying that you can't stop worrying.
- Ruminating - thinking about a situation over and over again in your mind.
- Feeling disconnected from your mind, body or the world around you.

## What does the Bible say about Anxiety?

Throughout the bible God tells us to come to him when we are anxious and he gives us the comfort that he can help us in all our troubles.

Psalm 55:22

“Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you. He will never let the righteous be shaken.”

1 Peter 5:6-7

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety onto him because he cares for you.”

## Discussion

In the Bible we are encouraged to acknowledge our difficulties and instead of trying to face them in our own strength, to come to God in prayer asking for his help and trusting that He will deliver us.

How do we cast our cares onto the Lord?

How does humbling ourselves before God, help us cast our cares onto him?

What else can we do to reduce our anxiety? Maybe discuss together and then compare your thoughts with the list below.

## What can we do to Reduce our Anxiety?

- Listening to relaxing music
- Distracting ourselves with activities we enjoy
- Talking to a friend we can trust or seeking pastoral care
- Exercising regularly can help reduce anxiety.
- Ensure you get enough sleep- this can give you the energy to deal with your anxiety.
- Diet- eat regularly and keep blood sugar stable.
- Set aside a specific time to focus on your worries. You can try problem-solving or pray about them.
- Write down your worries and put them in a particular place i.e. a notebook.

## Deep Breathing and Relaxation

Another way to reduce anxiety is to practise deep breathing, mindfulness or relaxation.

Deep breathing can help to lower stress in our body. It is how we breathe when we are already relaxed. When we breathe deeply it helps our and our body and our brain to calm down and relax.

## Mindfulness

Mindfulness is widely used as a psychological treatment for stress and anxiety. It can be defined as:

“Paying attention to the present moment without evaluation or judgement.”<sup>6</sup>

It involves focusing on the present and settling the mind from racing thoughts. In Luke 12, Jesus encourages us to not worry about the future, but pay attention to the things around us in the present, learning from nature how to trust in God for our day to day needs.

Luke 12:22-26

“Then Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?’

## Activity

We are going to try this now: breathing, relaxing and trying to bring our mind away from all the cares and worries of life, and simply focusing on the presence of Jesus with us in this moment. Get comfy, close your eyes, and allow the facilitator to read this gently over you

## Christian Mindfulness Script

As we begin to relax, close your eyes, settle into a comfortable position and let any tension slip away.

Now meditate on this verse as you move further into relaxation.

Phillipians 4:6-7

“Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God. And the peace of God that transcends all understanding will guard your heart and minds in Christ Jesus”

Draw near to God, allow His peace to wash over you. Be still.

Now notice your breathing. Breathe slowly, deeply, and calmly, allowing the air to move slowly in and slowly out.

Breathing in....out

In.....out

Keep breathing slowly and calmly. As you focus on God, let your worries drift further away.

(Pause)

Allow God's love to reach you. He knows you intimately and completely. He sees and knows everything about you. He delights in you. The Lord is with you always. He is near. Rest in His presence and in His protection. Be still and know that he is God.

(Pause)

Continue to relax, dwelling in God's presence, surrounded by his peace, the peace that goes beyond our understanding. The peace that guards our hearts and minds. He is peace. Let that peace wash over you.

(Pause)

Continue to rest in God's presence. Know his love for you. God is love. His perfect love casts out fear. You can cast all of your worries onto him. He cares for you and he can set you free.

Keep thinking about your breathing and continue to breathe slowly, letting your whole body relax as you focus on God and his love, his peace, his goodness and protection.

He is close to the broken-hearted. Let him dwell closely with you.

(Pause)

Think about God's goodness and his promises for you. Come to him with a grateful heart, thanking him for his love, trusting him with your future, acknowledging him in everything and having faith that he can be your guide. Give him your worries, your doubts, your fears.

As we come towards the end of this session, meditate on this verse:

Isaiah 41:10

“So do not fear, for I am with you, do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

As you go back into the day, know that he is with you and that he loves you.

Now when you are ready, open your eyes and slowly start moving and stretching, ready to come back to the group, feeling relaxed and calm in God’s presence.

## Discussion and Close

Some people find this easy, others a bit more tricky - how did it feel to relax and gently try to lead your mind away from worries to focussing on God’s presence with you?

## Next Session

In the next session we are going to look at gratitude. This week why don’t you try these three things:

- Notice when you are feeling anxious. How does it feel? Maybe come back to the body map.
- Try to notice when things are going well or perhaps when things you were worrying about didn’t go as badly as you thought they might.
- Why don’t you try incorporating Christian mindfulness into your day? You could record yourself reading the script on your phone and then play it back to yourself - or simply choose five minutes a day to sit and relax, and gently bring your mind to focus on God’s presence with you and see if that helps your mind let go of some of the worries.

## References

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6. Gilbert, P. *The Compassionate Mind*. Croydon; Constable; 2013

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