

LET NOT YOUR HEARTS BE TROUBLED

A Catholic Study on Anxiety, Fear, and the Peace of Christ

"Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me."

John 14:1

Six Sessions of Ninety Minutes

Leader Guide with Discussion Questions, Reference Cards, and Participant Take-Homes

CATHOLIC ARMORY

Scripture quotations follow the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition.

USING THIS GUIDE

This is a six-session study for a parish group, on anxiety, fear, and the peace of Christ. It is built for a mixed group of ordinary adults: some who worry the normal amount, some who live with diagnosed anxiety, and some who love someone who does. It assumes ninety minutes per session and a leader willing to prepare.

The Shape of Each Session

- **Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide.** Read it fully before the session, ideally twice, earlier in the week. It gives you the background, the Voices of the Church, the Catechism connections, the goals, and the timing. The Thread Watch boxes are for your eyes only; the study runs on discoveries, and revealing them early defuses them.
- **Part 2: Discussion Guide.** The session itself: opening prayer, two Win questions to warm the room, the Build (numbered questions, each followed by a shaded Answer box: **share the Answer only after the group has genuinely discussed**), Live Discovery hunts done with open Bibles, Build-then-Press segments where hard objections are stated at full strength before being answered, Send questions, Live It This Week, a memory verse, and a closing prayer.
- **Part 3: Leader Reference Card.** Every passage used in the session, in order, with its purpose: keep it beside you as you lead.
- **Take-Homes.** One per session, distributed **as people leave**, never before: they recap what was found, and would spoil the discoveries if handed out early. Each one also carries the week's practices, the memory verse, the Catechism references, and the passage to read before the next session, so participants should keep them and use them during the week. Session 1's Take-Home carries the sealed-question ritual; keep the envelopes safe until Session 4. Session 3's asks the group to bring their envelopes back.

A Word Before You Begin

Two commitments run through all six sessions, and the group should hear both in week one. First, honesty: this study never pretends the danger is small; Scripture's answer to fear is presence, not minimization. Second, care: this study walks alongside professional help and never replaces it. Therapy and medication are legitimate goods, and the leader materials for Session 1 include a short panel on anxiety that is more than worry. Lead with warmth. For some in your group, the discovery that they can stop being ashamed of their anxiety will be the most important thing that happens all year.

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Participant Take-Homes for all six sessions are provided separately, as single sheets for distribution at the end of each session.

Session 1 · Let Not Your Hearts Be Troubled

John 14:1-7, 27

PART 1: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the Jesus who says "Let not your hearts be troubled" is himself described as *troubled*, with the same Greek word, three times in this very Gospel. Whatever the command means, it cannot mean "never feel distress," because the sinless One felt it. The study opens by taking the shame out of the room.

Catholic Touchstone. Christ is fully God and fully man. He did not observe human anxiety from a distance; he entered it. The Church therefore meets anxious people with presence and the sacraments, never with shame.

What You Need to Know

John 14 is spoken on Holy Thursday night. Judas has just gone out into the dark (13:30), Jesus has announced his betrayal and Peter's coming denial (13:21, 38), and the room is thick with dread. "Let not your hearts be troubled" is not advice from a calm philosopher in a quiet study. It is spoken by a man hours from arrest, to friends about to scatter.

The verb matters. "Troubled" translates the Greek *tarasso*: to stir up, agitate, shake (it is used of water stirred at Bethzatha in John 5:7). John uses this same verb of Jesus himself three times: at the tomb of Lazarus he was "deeply moved in spirit and troubled" (11:33), before his hour he says "Now is my soul troubled" (12:27), and at the announcement of betrayal he was "troubled in spirit" (13:21). The group will find these three texts themselves in the Live Discovery below; do not reveal them in advance.

So the command of 14:1 comes from someone who has been, in John's own telling, exactly where his disciples now are. It is a real command (the Greek is a prohibitive imperative), but it is not a command to feel nothing; it is a command about where a troubled heart is to stand, and it comes with a ground under it: "believe in God, believe also in me." Jesus does not say the storm is imaginary. He says where to stand in it: on him, on the Father's house with many rooms, on "I will come again and will take you to myself" (14:3).

Expect the room to carry real weight tonight. In any parish group of adults, several people live with anxiety, from ordinary worry to diagnosed anxiety disorders, and many carry a second wound on top of the first: the suspicion that their anxiety makes them a bad Christian. This study exists to bring Scripture and the Church to that exact spot. Session 1 does not resolve the question of anxiety and sin; it opens it, seals it in an envelope, and promises an answer from an unexpected place. Know also where this chapter is going: between tonight's verse and the one the study ends on, Jesus promises the Paraclete (14:15-26), the Spirit who will be with the disciples and in them. Session 6 reads 14:25-27 as one unit and lands the Spirit there. Do not open him tonight; simply know he is not missing from the chapter.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

"Let not your hearts be troubled" stands in a long line of divine speech to frightened people. Moses to Israel at the Jordan: "Be strong and of good courage, do not fear or be in dread of them: for it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you" (Deut 31:6, echoed to Joshua in Josh 1:9). The psalmist: "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" (Ps 27:1). Notice the pattern: the ground for courage is never "the danger is small." It is always "the LORD is with you." John 14 fulfills the pattern in person: the command not to be troubled rests on "believe also in me," because the One who goes with them is at table with them in the upper room.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine

"You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." Augustine's most famous sentence names the deepest layer of human unrest: beneath particular worries lies a heart built for God and not yet home. This does not reduce anxiety to a spiritual defect. It locates our restlessness inside a love story: restlessness is

what hearts made for God feel on the way to him.

Confessions, Book I, chapter 1 (Tier 1).

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Francis de Sales

Writing a practical manual for laypeople, de Sales gives a whole chapter to anxiety, teaching in substance that, sin alone excepted, anxiety is the greatest evil that can befall a soul, precisely because it unsettles the very powers we need for doing good. His counsel: do not fight anxiety with violence or self-condemnation, which only tightens the knot; bring it gently and repeatedly to God, and act calmly on the one thing in front of you. De Sales treats anxious disquiet as an affliction to be calmed, not as grounds for self-condemnation. Whether anything in this territory ever becomes sin is a question tonight deliberately leaves open.

Introduction to the Devout Life, Part IV, chapter 11 (Tier 2: summary. The chapter is titled Anxiety, Inquietude, or Sadness depending on the translation).

VOICE OF THE CHURCH Julian of Norwich

Living in an age marked by recurring plague and war, and receiving her revelations during a grave illness, Julian recorded the Lord's assurance: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." When the Catechism teaches that God brings good even out of evil, it gathers witnesses to that truth and cites Julian among them, quoting her assurance that all manner of thing shall be well. It is not a promise that nothing hard will happen; it is a promise about how the story ends, and who holds it.

Revelations of Divine Love, Long Text (the triple formula is usually cited at ch. 27); Julian is cited by the Catechism at CCC 313 (Tier 1 for the quoted line). Julian is venerated but not canonized, so she carries no "St." prefix here; this slot is a CCC-cited voice rather than a Father, Doctor, or canonized saint.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 30:** God never ceases to call us to seek him, so as to find life and happiness; this is the paragraph that quotes St. Augustine on the restless heart.
- **CCC 45:** "Man is made to live in communion with God in whom he finds happiness." That sentence belongs to 45, not to 30; keep the two paragraphs distinct if you quote them.
- **CCC 478:** Jesus "knew and loved us each and all during his life." Our application, said in our own voice: his Sacred Heart is therefore no stranger to any of us, fears included.
- **CCC 2288** (for the leader panel below): life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us, and reasonable care of them is part of the moral life. The paragraph does not name therapy or medication; that competent care includes them is the ordinary Catholic application of it, not its wording.

THREAD WATCH (leader only, never read aloud)

Three threads are planted tonight. (1) *The troubled Jesus:* Session 4 goes to Gethsemane, where Christ's own anguish returns, and Session 6 resolves the thread with John 14:27. Be precise for your own sake: *tarasso* is John's word, and its payoff text is John 12:27, where Jesus faces this very hour. The Synoptic garden accounts use different Greek (Mark 14:33 has *ekthambeisthai* and *ademonein*), so the thread runs to Gethsemane thematically, not lexically. Do not tell the group the same verb reappears in Mark; it does not. And when they find the three "troubled" texts tonight, do not mention Gethsemane at all. (2) *The sealed question:* "Is anxiety a sin?" is written and sealed tonight and opened in Session 4. Do not let the group debate it tonight; the whole design depends on the question staying open. (3) *The body:* watch for it quietly. In Session 3 God feeds and sleeps an exhausted prophet before speaking to him. Plant nothing tonight; just know it is coming.

WHEN ANXIETY IS MORE THAN WORRY (leader only)

This study is a Bible study, not therapy, and you are a leader, not a clinician. Both halves of that sentence are freeing. Some members live with clinical anxiety: panic attacks, an anxiety disorder, OCD, or trauma. Say this plainly whenever it helps: appropriate therapy and responsibly prescribed medication are legitimate goods, and using them is not a failure of faith. CCC 2288 teaches that life and health are precious gifts of which reasonable care must be taken; that such care includes competent medical and psychological help is the ordinary Catholic application of that teaching, not a phrase lifted from the paragraph. Grace builds on nature; it does not replace a prescription any more than prayer replaces a cast on a broken arm.

Watch for the distinctly Catholic pattern of *scrupulosity*: relentless doubt about sin, confession repeated for the same settled matters, terror of accidental sacrilege. A longstanding Catholic pastoral recommendation for scrupulous souls is stable guidance from one regular confessor, and obedience to that guidance. If you see the pattern, encourage that path privately and warmly; never diagnose from the front of the room.

If anyone ever indicates they are in danger of harming themselves, treat it as the emergency it is: stay with them, involve emergency services if the danger is immediate (in the United States, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline connects to trained help by call or text), and follow up. A study leader who takes fear seriously is often the first person an anxious Catholic has ever told.

Session Goals

1. Set a tone in which anxiety can be named without shame.
2. Discover the three "troubled Jesus" texts and let the group draw the conclusion: the command of John 14:1 cannot mean "never feel distress."
3. Establish the true ground of the command: "believe also in me," the with-us God of Deuteronomy 31 now present in person.
4. Write and seal the study's central question: "Is anxiety a sin?"

The 90 Minutes

- **0:00** Gather and opening prayer (5 min)
- **0:05** Win: two opening questions (12 min)
- **0:17** Build: John 14, the discovery, the press (48 min)
- **1:05** The sealed question ritual (10 min)
- **1:15** Send questions (8 min)
- **1:23** Live It This Week and memory verse (4 min)
- **1:27** Closing prayer (3 min).
- **Non-cuttable:** the *tarasso* hunt and the sealing ritual. Everything tonight rests on those two.
- **If you run long, cut in this order:** (1) W1, (2) the Thomas beat at question 4, (3) question 5, which Session 6 revisits in full.

PART 2: DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, on the night before you died you looked at frightened friends and spoke peace.

Look at us now. You know what each of us carried through the door tonight.

Open the Scriptures to us, and open us to you; and teach our hearts, troubled as they are, where to stand.

We ask this in your name, you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

Win

W1. When you were a child, what was something you were afraid of that seems small now? What helped, or what would have helped?

W2. Without any pressure to go deeper than you want: what does worry usually feel like for you, in your body or your thoughts? (Leaders: go first, and keep it honest.)

Build

Read John 14:1-7 aloud, slowly. Then set the scene from 13:21-38: Judas gone into the night, betrayal announced, Peter's denial foretold.

1. Before anything else: what is the emotional temperature of this room on Holy Thursday night? What reasons do the disciples have to be afraid?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Every reason. Jesus has just said one of them will betray him (13:21), that he is leaving and they cannot follow (13:33), and that Peter, their boldest, will deny him three times before morning (13:38). The lights are going out. "Let not your hearts be troubled" is spoken into a room already troubled, by a man walking toward arrest. That setting controls everything the sentence can mean.

2. Jesus gives the troubled heart something to do: "believe in God, believe also in me" (14:1). What is the logic? Why is *that* his answer to fear?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Because the antidote he offers is not information about the danger but a Person in the danger. Verses 2-3 ground it: there is a destination ("my Father's house"), a preparation ("I go to prepare a place for you"), and a reunion ("I will come again and will take you to myself"). Fear says: you are alone and the future is a void. Jesus answers both: you are not alone (believe in me), and the future is not a void (I have gone ahead of you into it).

LIVE DISCOVERY

Say: "John uses the word translated *troubled* about someone else in this Gospel. Three times. Find them." Assign thirds of the room to hunt in John 11, John 12, and John 13. Give them a few minutes with their Bibles. (They are looking for 11:33, 12:27, and 13:21. Supply the Greek note once they have found the texts: it is the same verb, *tarasso*, as in 14:1.)

3. Read your three finds aloud. Who is the troubled one in each? Now put those next to "Let not your hearts be troubled." What does this do to the meaning of the command?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Jesus is the troubled one: at Lazarus's tomb, facing death itself (11:33); contemplating his hour (12:27, "Now is my soul troubled"); announcing his betrayal (13:21). The recurrence of the same verb in the same Gospel invites exactly this comparison. So John 14:1 cannot mean "feeling distress is forbidden," or the sinless Son broke his own command. Jesus is not commanding an emotion out of existence. He is telling shaken hearts where to put their weight while shaking: on him. This will matter enormously for the question you seal tonight; hold it.

BUILD, THEN PRESS "Believe harder"

Build it at full strength. Take the strong version, not the crude one. A well-catechized objector grants everything you just found: Christ's distress was real and sinless. But, he says, a command must be aimed at something a person can actually obey, and the obvious candidate is the will. So what Jesus forbids is consenting to distrust, letting fear govern our choices, refusing to lean on the Father, and the imperative still lands on the anxious Christian, one level down from the feelings. That is a serious reading, and the verse does pair the trouble with the believing.

Press, then answer from the text. Concede what is true in it: Scripture does address the will, and Session 4 takes that up directly. What the text will not carry is the cruder version most anxious people were actually handed, that troubled feelings prove defective faith. If that were so, the Jesus of 11:33, 12:27, and 13:21 had defective faith, which is absurd. In John, believing is not a feeling that replaces fear; it is an allegiance that holds *within* fear ("Now is my soul troubled... Father, glorify your name," 12:27-28). Faith and fear are not mutually exclusive states; faith is where you aim a frightened heart. Notice too that Jesus does not scold the disciples for their dread; he serves them, washes their feet, and promises the Spirit. That is the Church's model. Where consent and culpability enter stays sealed until Session 4.

4. Thomas interrupts: "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" (14:5). What do his words actually show: confusion, candor, fear, something else? And what do you make of the fact that John kept the question in the story?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The Gospel preserves, without embarrassment, a disciple saying "we do not know" to Jesus's face, and it earns one of the greatest sentences Jesus ever spoke: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6). Honest confusion, spoken to Jesus, becomes the occasion of revelation. That is a standing invitation for every anxious person in this room: bring him the question, not the performance.

DIG DEEPER

The pattern of Deuteronomy: again and again, when God commands "fear not," the reason given is not "the threat is small" but "the LORD your God goes with you." "Be strong and of good courage... it is the LORD your God who goes with you" (Deut 31:6). Have someone read it. Israel heard it at the Jordan facing giants; Joshua heard it facing Jericho; the disciples hear its fulfillment at a table, from Presence himself.

5. Jump ahead to tonight's last verse, John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." How does the world "give" peace? What might make his peace different?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The verse contrasts his giving with the world's without defining either, so offer this as one reading and let the group test it: the world's peace is largely circumstance management, the absence of conflict, problems solved, threats removed, and therefore always fragile, always waiting for the next disturbance. Jesus gives peace on the

very night his circumstances collapse, which at least means his peace is not made of circumstances. What it is made of, the study will spend six sessions discovering. Tonight it is enough to notice that he calls it "my peace," his own, and that he gives it on the eve of the garden. Where this study ends, that verse will be waiting.

The Sealed Question

Hand each person a slip and an envelope. Say: "Here is a question many Catholics carry privately and few say out loud: **Is anxiety a sin?** Write your honest answer, a sentence or two, and why. No names. Seal it. You will get it back, and we will open them together at Session 4, and the answer will come from a place you might not expect." Collect the sealed envelopes and keep them safe. Do not discuss the question tonight; if debate starts, smile and hold the line: "Seal it. Session 4."

Send

S1. Jesus spoke "let not your hearts be troubled" to people, out loud, in the room where they were eating. Who in your life might need to hear something like it from you this week, and what would saying it well look like?

S2. What is one worry you are willing to bring deliberately to prayer this week instead of carrying it alone?

Live It This Week

- **Each night, one sentence.** Before sleep, pray one honest sentence to Jesus about the day's heaviest thing. No polish. Thomas got "the way, the truth, and the life" for saying "we do not know."
- **Read the room where it was spoken.** Once this week, read John 13:21-14:7 in one sitting, slowly, remembering it is Holy Thursday night.
- **Memorize the memory verse** below; carry it into one anxious moment.

Memory verse: "Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me." (John 14:1)

Closing Prayer

Father, your Son spoke peace into a frightened room, and he speaks it still.

Guard everything named here tonight, spoken and unspoken. Let no one leave carrying shame.

Teach us this season to bring you our troubled hearts, and to find you already there.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PART 3: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

PASSAGE	WHERE IT IS USED
John 14:1-7	Main text: the command, its ground, Thomas's question, "I am the way"
John 13:21-38	Setting: betrayal announced, Judas departs, Peter's denial foretold
John 11:33	Live Discovery: Jesus "deeply moved in spirit and troubled" at Lazarus's tomb
John 12:27	Live Discovery: "Now is my soul troubled"
John 13:21	Live Discovery: Jesus "troubled in spirit" at the betrayal announcement
John 12:27-28	Steelman answer: trouble and trust held together
John 5:7	Leader background: <i>tarasso</i> used of stirred water
Deut 31:6	OT Roots and Dig Deeper: courage grounded in presence
Josh 1:9	OT Roots: the pattern repeated to Joshua
Ps 27:1	OT Roots: "whom shall I fear?"
John 14:27	Question 5: "Peace I leave with you" (returns in Session 6)

Session 2 • Consider the Lilies

Matthew 6:25-34

PART 1: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers what "do not be anxious" actually commands, and what it does not. Two keys: the word itself, *merimnao*, to be anxious or pulled by care, and the ground of the command, which is not "nothing bad will happen" but "your heavenly Father knows." Verse 34 shows Jesus is no naive optimist: each day really does have trouble.

Catholic Touchstone. Divine providence: God cares for his creatures concretely and personally, and Christ "invites us to filial trust in the providence of our heavenly Father" (CCC 322, citing this very passage). Trust in providence is not denial of difficulty; it is confidence in a Father inside difficulty.

What You Need to Know

This passage sits in the Sermon on the Mount, immediately after "You cannot serve God and mammon" (6:24) and "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (6:21). The anxiety Jesus addresses first is the anxiety of divided allegiance: a heart trying to secure its own future as if it had no Father. That context keeps the passage from becoming a generic wellness lecture; it is about who is actually holding your life.

The word translated "be anxious" is the Greek *merimnao*, which occurs six times across five verses here (25, 27, 28, 31, and twice in 34: "do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself"). Its standard sense is to be anxious, worried, unduly concerned. It is often linked to a root for dividing, and that is the picture this study will use, though the derivation is not certain and a word's sense comes from its use, not its parts: a self pulled apart, spread across a hundred imagined tomorrows. This exact word family will follow us through the study: Martha is "anxious and troubled about many things" (Luke 10:41), Paul writes "have no anxiety about anything" (Phil 4:6), and Peter says to cast "all your anxieties on him" (1 Pet 5:7). Scripture is having one long conversation about one recognizable experience, and tonight we learn its name.

Watch the structure of Jesus's argument. It is not "your fears are irrational." It is a chain of reasons resting on the Father's character: he feeds birds and you are worth more (v. 26); anxiety adds not one cubit (v. 27); he clothes grass that lasts a day (v. 28-30); "your heavenly Father knows that you need them all" (v. 32). The command "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (v. 33) does not deny needs; it reorders them under a Father who already knows them. And verse 34 is the tell that this is realism, not positivity: "do not be anxious about tomorrow... Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day." Jesus assumes trouble. He is teaching us to meet it one day at a time, with a Father, instead of all at once, alone.

Be pastorally careful with verse 27 ("which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life?"). For a person in an anxiety spiral, "worry accomplishes nothing" can land as one more accusation. Notice how Jesus deploys it: not as scolding, but as release. The weight was never yours to lift. That is the tone to keep all night.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Behind the birds and the daily bread stands the manna. In the wilderness God fed Israel "a day's portion every day," explicitly "that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law or not" (Ex 16:4); manna hoarded against tomorrow bred worms (16:20). Daily dependence was the curriculum. The psalms sing the same providence over all creatures: "These all look to you, to give them their food in due season" (Ps 104:27), and over anxious strivers: "he gives to his beloved sleep" (Ps 127:2). Jesus's "do not be anxious about tomorrow" is the manna lesson spoken by the Lord of the manna; the group will find Exodus 16 themselves tonight.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Chrysostom

Preaching through Matthew, Chrysostom teaches in substance a distinction this passage needs: Christ forbids

anxiety, not work. Labor continues; even the birds go out to gather what God provides. What is forbidden is the gnawing care that acts as if there were no Father, the worry that adds burden without adding bread.

Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew, on this passage (commonly Homilies 21-22, though the numbering varies by edition). Tier 2: summary of his teaching.

Our line, not his, if you want one for the room: diligence is a virtue; anxiety is diligence with the Father deleted.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thérèse of Lisieux

Thérèse's "little way" is the lived form of the trust this verse names: the Father knows. She teaches, in substance, that holiness for the little is not achieving security but surrendering into arms that already hold, and that her confidence rested not in her own strength but in God's merciful love. For the anxious, a Doctor of the Church says: you do not have to be great; you have to be held.

Story of a Soul (Tier 2: summary of her "little way," which draws on the Gospels broadly rather than on this verse in particular).

Our illustration, not hers: the trust of a small child who does not audit the household finances, because her father carries her.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Alphonsus Liguori

Alphonsus teaches in substance that peace is found in uniting our will to God's will in the present circumstance, favorable or adverse, and that the soul which accepts what God permits now is at rest.

Uniformity with God's Will (Tier 2: summary).

Applied to verse 34, in our words: today's trouble, today's grace, today's obedience, and tomorrow left in the hands that hold it, free of the tyranny of an imagined future.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 302-305:** providence, "the dispositions by which God guides his creation toward its perfection"; CCC 305 cites Matthew 6:31-33 by name and asks for *childlike abandonment* to the providence of our heavenly Father.
- **CCC 322:** "Christ invites us to *filial trust* in the providence of our heavenly Father," citing Matthew 6:26-34. (Each paragraph has its own diction; do not blend them.)
- **CCC 2830:** "give us this day our daily bread," the petition of childlike trust in the Father who feeds us. Pair it with **CCC 2834**, which is where the Catechism says plainly that trusting the Father is not idleness: pray as if everything depended on God, work as if everything depended on you.

THREAD WATCH (leader only, never read aloud)

Tonight the group learns the *merimna* / *merimnao* word family. Do not reveal where it resurfaces: Luke 10:41 appears tonight as a discovery, but Phil 4:6 and 1 Pet 5:7 belong to Session 5, where the word thread pays off ("Scripture has been talking about one thing all along"). If someone with Greek notices early, congratulate them privately and ask them to sit on it.

Sealed question discipline: tonight's steelman ("just stop worrying") walks close to the sealed question. Answer the steelman without ruling on sin. If asked directly whether anxiety is sinful, hold the line: "Session 4."

Session Goals

1. Name the experience precisely: *merimnao*, to be anxious, worried, pulled by care.
2. Trace Jesus's actual argument to its ground: the Father's knowledge and character, not the smallness of the danger.

3. Dismantle the "just stop worrying" reading and the "false comfort" reading at full strength.
4. Recover verse 34 as Christian realism: one day's trouble, one day's grace.

The 90 Minutes

- **0:00** Gather and opening prayer (5 min)
- **0:05** Win (12 min)
- **0:17** Build: the word, the argument, two discoveries, the double steelman (55 min)
- **1:12** Send (10 min)
- **1:22** Live It This Week and memory verse (5 min)
- **1:27** Closing prayer (3 min).
- **Non-cuttable:** both steelman chains and the Exodus 16 hunt.
- **If you run long, cut in this order:** (1) W1, (2) the Dig Deeper on Ps 127:2, (3) question 5, compressing it into the closing prayer.

PART 2: DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

*Father, you feed the birds of the air and clothe the grass of the field, and you know what we need before we ask.
Quiet the noise of our imagined tomorrows. Give us tonight our portion for today:
light for this passage, honesty with each other, and confidence in you.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Win

W1. What is something you planned and worried over at length that turned out to be a complete non-event? What is something that blindsided you with no warning at all?

W2. Last week we prayed one honest sentence each night. No pressure for details: did anything shift, even slightly, in how the worry sat with you?

Build

Read Matthew 6:25-34 aloud. Then read verse 24 for the doorway: "You cannot serve God and mammon."

1. Jesus says "therefore do not be anxious" (v. 25), and the "therefore" points back at mammon (v. 24). Why would a teaching about anxiety begin with a teaching about masters?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Because anxiety about provision can show where security is actually being sought. (Say this carefully: involuntary symptoms are not evidence of divided loyalty, and some people in the room have a condition, not a loyalty problem.) If mammon is master, then my security rests entirely on what I can store, and worry becomes rational: everything depends on me. Jesus relocates security: you have a Father, so your life is not a solo project. The passage is not first about feelings; it is about who is actually holding your life, and the feelings follow the holding.

2. The word translated "be anxious" is *merimnao*, and it lands six times in these ten verses. It is often linked to a root for dividing, which gives us a useful picture: a self pulled to pieces, spread across imagined tomorrows. Where do you see that "pulled apart" quality in verses 25-34? Does the word match your experience of worry?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The whole passage pictures it: life, food, drink, body, clothing, stature, tomorrow, all clamoring at once (vv. 25-31, 34). Anxiety is rarely one thought; it is a crowd. Naming the word matters because Jesus is diagnosing something specific: not planning, not diligence, not caring about people, but the divided, gnawing mode where a person is scattered across futures they cannot reach. Scripture will use this same word family again later in the study; when you hear it, you will know it.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Say: "Jesus is teaching an old lesson about bread. Find it in Exodus 16, and come back with three things: the rule God gave about how much to gather, the reason God gives for the rule, and what happened when people kept some for tomorrow." Let them hunt. (They are looking for 16:4, a day's portion every day and the stated purpose of proving them, and 16:19-20, the hoarded manna breeding worms.) Then ask what "do not be anxious about tomorrow" has to do with manna.

3. What was God teaching Israel through one-day bread, and what happens to the lesson when Jesus repeats it on the mountain?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Exodus says it outright: daily portions were a proving, "that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law or not" (16:4). Daily dependence was the curriculum: trust rehearsed every single morning. Hoarding, the attempt to secure tomorrow apart from God, literally rotted (16:20). On the mountain, the Lord of the manna teaches the same rhythm to his disciples, and earlier in this very sermon he had already taught them to pray for it: "give us this day our daily bread" (6:11). Providence comes with a day's address on it.

BUILD, THEN PRESS "Just stop worrying"

Build it at full strength. "Do not be anxious" is an imperative, six times over in ten verses. Commands can be obeyed or disobeyed. The strong version of the objection is not "every anxious feeling is sin," which few would defend; it is this: the imperative must govern something in our power, so voluntarily nurturing distrust, refusing the duties in front of us, or feeding the spiral can be culpable, even if involuntary feelings and clinical symptoms are not. Some in the room have been handed the crude version, possibly in church. Build the serious one anyway; it is the one that survives.

Press, then answer from the text. Watch what Jesus builds the command on: not one syllable of "how dare you," but reasons designed to make trust possible: the birds, the lilies, "your heavenly Father knows" (v. 32). This is a physician putting a crutch under a weak limb, not a judge sentencing it. Verse 34 concedes real trouble is coming; verse 32 relocates the weight. And remember Session 1: the same Scriptures show the sinless Jesus *troubled*. So this much the passage settles: what is commanded is not the instant absence of a feeling. What it invites is a reamed heart: seek first the kingdom (v. 33), and let the Father carry what was never yours. What the imperative asks of the will, where consent, habit, and culpability enter, this session does not settle, and deliberately so: your answer is sealed in an envelope. Session 4.

BUILD, THEN PRESS "Birds starve"

Build it at full strength. Now the objection from the other side, and it deserves its full weight: "Look at the birds" is false comfort. Birds do starve. Christians lose jobs, harvests fail, and two millennia of believers have prayed verse 33 and still gone hungry. Providence, the skeptic says, is a bedtime story that survives only in comfortable rooms.

Press, then answer from the text. Jesus never promises the absence of hunger or trouble; verse 34 promises trouble by name. The Sermon on the Mount is spoken by a man heading to a cross, to followers many of whom would face persecution and, in ancient Christian tradition, martyrdom; he is not selling comfort. What he stakes is different: that you have a Father who knows (v. 32), that your needs are seen and never beneath his notice, and that a life ordered to the kingdom is inside his care (v. 33). Be exact here rather than comforting: the Father's care is not a guarantee that no disciple will ever go hungry or die of want. Christian teaching on providence has never promised that, and Christian history would refute it in a page. Providence ordinarily works through creation, through human solidarity, and through the Church, and God can permit deprivation without abandoning the person or losing the end he is bringing them to. Do not call starvation a disguised form of material provision. Note also that the Father's ordinary providence has hands: the Church that breaks bread together (Acts 2:44-46 is where this sermon's family ends up). Providence is not a mechanism that spares us the cross. It is a Father who accompanies us through it, which is precisely what the birds, who neither sow nor reap and are still fed, were meant to whisper.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Say: "One more find. Jesus once said this word, *anxious*, to one specific person, by name, in her own kitchen. Find her." Point them to Luke 10:38-42. Ask what "one thing is needful" adds to tonight.

4. Martha is "anxious and troubled about many things" while doing something genuinely good, welcoming and serving Jesus. What does his answer to her ("one thing is needful") teach that the birds and lilies have not yet said?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

That anxiety can colonize even our service of God. Martha's work was good; her scattered, resentful mode of doing it was the problem: "many things" against "one thing." Jesus does not condemn the serving; he re-centers the servant. The needful thing is his presence, the "good portion" Mary chose. Tonight's teaching is not only about money and food; it is about a divided self, and the cure is the same in a kitchen as on a mountain: seek first.

DIG DEEPER

Ps 127:2: "It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep." Have someone read it. The psalm does not condemn work (it assumes building and watching as real labor whose fruit still depends on the Lord); it punctures the illusion that outcomes are purchased by our self-torment. Sleep itself, every night, is a small act of trust: the world continues without our supervision.

5. "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (v. 33). Practically, in an ordinary week of your life, what does "seeking first" look like when a wave of worry arrives?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Let the group be concrete; there is no single script. The shape is a reordering: the worry is not suppressed but demoted, brought under a prior allegiance. Examples worth surfacing: praying before problem-solving; asking "what is today's actual obedience?" instead of rehearsing next month; tithing or generosity precisely when money fear is loudest (dethroning mammon, v. 24); keeping Sunday genuinely for God when work anxiety wants it. Verse 33's promise is not a transaction but an ordering: things hold their right size when the kingdom holds first place.

Send

S1. Which tomorrow are you most often living in? What would it mean, this week, to come back to today, where the manna is?

S2. Who around you is carrying visible "anxious toil"? What could you do this week that quietly lightens it?

Live It This Week

- **Manna rule.** Each morning, ask the Father for what *today* actually requires, by name, and deliberately leave tomorrow's items off the list until tomorrow.
- **Consider the lilies, literally.** Take ten unhurried minutes outdoors this week with verse 26 or 28. Look at actual birds, actual growing things. Let the sermon's visual aids do their work.
- **Keep the nightly sentence** from Session 1 going; you are building a habit.

Memory verse: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." (Matthew 6:33)

Closing Prayer

Father, you know what we need before we ask, and you are not ashamed of us when we forget it.

*Give us this day our daily bread, and the grace to leave tomorrow's bread in your hands.
Set your kingdom first in us, and give your beloved sleep.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

PART 3: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

PASSAGE	WHERE IT IS USED
Matt 6:25-34	Main text
Matt 6:24	Doorway: God and mammon; anxiety as divided allegiance
Matt 6:21	Leader background: treasure and heart
Ex 16:4, 19-20	Live Discovery: manna, a day's portion; hoarding breeds worms
Matt 6:11	Answer 3: daily bread petition
Luke 10:38-42	Live Discovery: Martha, anxious and troubled; one thing needful
Ps 127:2	Dig Deeper: bread of anxious toil; he gives to his beloved sleep
Ps 104:27	OT Roots: all creatures look to you
Acts 2:44-46	Steelman answer: providence with hands, the sharing Church
Phil 4:6; 1 Pet 5:7	Leader background and Thread Watch: where the <i>merimna</i> family returns (Session 5)

Session 3 · When the Cares of My Heart Are Many

Psalms 42-43; Psalm 94:19; Psalm 56:3; 1 Kings 19:1-13

PART 1: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that God's own prayer book gives anxious people words, that lament is faithful prayer and not faithless negativity, and that when God met his most burned-out prophet, his first gifts were food and sleep. The body is not an obstacle to the spiritual life; it is part of the person God is saving.

Catholic Touchstone. The Psalms are the Church's own prayer, prayed daily in the Liturgy of the Hours; and the human person is a unity of body and soul, so care of the body belongs to the life of faith.

What You Need to Know

Roughly a third of the Psalter is lament: prayers of distress, complaint, and fear, preserved by God's own inspiration as models of prayer. This fact alone dismantles a common assumption in the pews, that "real" Christians only ever give thanks and that voicing distress to God is irreverent. The Psalter says otherwise on nearly every other page. Lament is covenant speech: it complains *to* God, which is itself an act of faith, because you do not file grievances with someone you have given up on.

Psalms 42-43 are widely regarded as one poem: Psalm 43 carries no title of its own, the same refrain structures both, and some manuscripts transmit them together. Its speaker talks to his own soul: "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God" (42:5, 11; 43:5). This is Scripture modeling something anxious people know well: the inner conversation. The psalmist neither obeys his feelings nor denies them; he addresses them, and preaches hope to himself, three times, because once is not enough. Remember that refrain carefully and do not comment on it beyond tonight's scope; it has an appointment later in the study, and nothing may be said about that tonight.

Psalm 94:19 gives the session its title: "When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul." The Hebrew behind "cares" denotes anxious, disquieting thoughts, and lexical discussion links the word with branching; our image for it is a tangled thicket, which every anxious person recognizes: worry is rarely one thought, it is a thicket. And Psalm 56:3 gives the study its most portable prayer: "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you." Not "I am never afraid": *when*.

Then Elijah. Fresh from the triumph at Carmel, one threat from Jezebel sends him fleeing for his life into the wilderness, where he collapses under a broom tree and prays to die: "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life" (1 Kings 19:4). Note carefully how God begins: not with rebuke, not with a lecture, not with "where is your faith after Carmel?" Watch the order in 19:5-8: he sleeps; an angel touches him and says "Arise and eat"; he eats and drinks and lies down *again*; the angel comes a second time and again says "Arise and eat"; and only then does he travel forty days in the strength of that food. Sleep, food, more sleep, food again, then the road. Only after his bodily depletion has been met does God speak with him at Horeb, and even then, not in wind, earthquake, or fire, but in "a still small voice" (19:12), and then Elijah is re-commissioned with work to do and told he is not alone: seven thousand have not bowed to Baal (19:18). God's pedagogy with a depleted man: rest, food, gentle presence, purpose, and the correction of his belief that he is alone. Nothing in the Church's doctrine of creation or of the body-soul unity gives any basis for being embarrassed by that ordering.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight is mostly Old Testament, but watch its inner echo: Elijah at Horeb strongly recalls Moses at Sinai: the same mountain (Horeb, traditionally identified with Sinai; compare Ex 3:1 with Ex 19 and the Deuteronomic usage), forty days (19:8; Ex 24:18), a cave or cleft in the rock while the LORD passes by. The group will find Exodus 33:21-22 themselves tonight. The point of the echo: Elijah, despairing, is being taken back to the place where the covenant began, to relearn who God is, and how God actually spoke there: "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger" (Ex 34:6). The New Testament will complete the pattern: the vocabulary of the cast-down soul is taken

up on Christ's own lips in the Passion. Where and how is a later session's discovery, so say nothing further tonight. For your own accuracy: this is a verbal echo of the Greek psalter, not a quotation of Psalm 42-43 by Jesus.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine

Augustine, who preached through the entire Psalter, teaches in substance that the Psalms are the prayer of the whole Christ, head and members: Christ prays in us and we in him. When you pray a lament, you are not muttering alone in the dark; you are praying words the Church prays with you, words the Spirit inspired, words Christ himself has made his own.

Expositions on the Psalms (Tier 2: summary of his teaching).

Ours to add: the anxious Christian who cannot find words has been handed a book of them.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Teresa of Ávila

Teresa, a doctor of the Church in the ways of prayer, told her busy sisters, in the line everyone remembers, that "the Lord walks among the pots and pans": God is to be found while the duties of obedience are being done, not only after them.

Book of the Foundations, ch. 5 (commonly cited 5.8). Tier 1 for the saying, in the familiar short English form; the fuller sentence adds that he helps us interiorly and exteriorly.

Our extension, not hers: if that is true of a kitchen, it is true of a body. Cooking, eating, sleeping, and the care of tired bodies are not interruptions of the spiritual life, which is exactly what Elijah's angel implies with "arise and eat."

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Pio of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio)

Pray, hope, and do not worry. That is the counsel remembered as Padre Pio's, from a friar who spent decades in spiritual direction and was intimately acquainted with suffering. In substance: prayer entrusts the matter to God; hope holds the future open in him; and worry is the one ingredient that adds nothing. Not a platitude, but triage.

A counsel long associated with him in the Church's memory (Tier 2: traditional attribution; no letter or critical locus is claimed here).

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 2582-2584:** Elijah as a model of prayer; at Horeb, like Moses, he "hides in a cleft of the rock until the mysterious presence of God has passed by."
- **CCC 2585-2589:** the Psalms, prayed by Christ and the Church, "the masterwork of prayer in the Old Testament"; they express prayer's every register, including distress.
- **CCC 364:** "The human body shares in the dignity of the image of God." The person is a body-soul unity; tending the body is not spiritually second-class.

THREAD WATCH (leader only, never read aloud)

The Psalm 42 refrain is loaded tonight. "Why are you cast down, O my soul" will return in Session 4 in a place that lands like thunder. Let the group get the refrain deep in their ears tonight (that is why the pre-reading was Psalms 42-43), but say nothing about where it reappears.

The body thread is now live. Elijah: bread and sleep before the whisper. It develops in Session 4 (Christ's bodily agony, an angel strengthening him) and cashes out in Sessions 5-6 (embodied practices, and finally the sacraments, where grace comes through matter). Keep it quiet; let the pattern accumulate.

Sealed question discipline: Elijah asking to die may prompt the general question of whether despairing feelings are sinful. That question, asked in general, holds until Session 4. **The deferral covers the doctrine only. It**

never covers a person.

IF SOMEONE SPEAKS ABOUT THEMSELVES TONIGHT (leader only)

Elijah prays to die, and in a room of ordinary adults that line sometimes opens a door. If anyone speaks about wanting to die, or about not wanting to be here, do not defer it to Session 4 and do not treat it as a doctrinal question. Say plainly and warmly, in your own words: feelings like this, and unwanted thoughts that arrive on their own, are not the sin of despair; God does not shame a person who is suffering; and you are glad they said it out loud.

Then take it seriously as what it is. Stay with the person after the session rather than letting them leave alone. Ask directly and calmly whether they are thinking of harming themselves. If there is any present intention or plan, treat it as an emergency: involve appropriate help immediately, contact emergency services if danger may be imminent, and stay with them until someone competent is with them. In the United States the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline connects to trained help by call or text.

Follow up in the days after, and encourage professional care as the good it is (Session 1 panel). A study leader is not a clinician, and does not need to be; you need to notice, stay, and connect.

Session Goals

1. Legitimize lament: a third of the Psalter, covenant speech, faith with its eyes open.
2. Give the group the inner-conversation refrain of Psalm 42-43 and the portable prayer of Psalm 56:3.
3. Walk through God's full response to Elijah from the text itself: sleep, food, a gentle voice, then mission and the correction of his belief that he is alone.
4. Establish that the body belongs to the life of faith (CCC 364), grounding this study's practical realism.

The 90 Minutes

- **0:00** Gather and opening prayer (5 min)
- **0:05** Win (12 min)
- **0:17** Build part one: the lament psalms (25 min)
- **0:42** Build part two: Elijah (30 min)
- **1:12** Send (10 min)
- **1:22** Live It This Week and memory verse (5 min)
- **1:27** Closing prayer (3 min).
- **Non-cuttable:** the lament reading of Psalm 42-43 with question 2 (it plants a refrain the study needs), and the Elijah half.
- **If you run long, cut in this order:** (1) W1, (2) the Dig Deeper, reading Ps 94:19 and 56:3 aloud yourself instead of discussing them, (3) Send S1.

PART 2: DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

*Lord, you are near to the brokenhearted, and you save the crushed in spirit.
You gave your people a book of prayers with room in it for fear, tears, and complaint.
Give us the honesty to pray them, the ears to hear your still small voice,
and the humility to receive your care in whatever form you send it, even bread and sleep.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Win

W1. When something is genuinely wrong, are you naturally a venter, a stuffer, or a fixer? What did your family of origin do with hard feelings?

W2. Have you ever felt that saying a dark thing out loud to God would be disrespectful, or dangerous? Where do you think that instinct comes from?

Build

Read Psalm 42 and Psalm 43 aloud as one poem (they share a refrain; many manuscripts join them). Assign one strong reader, unhurried.

1. List everything this psalmist is actually feeling and experiencing. Be exhaustive. Does anything on the list surprise you, coming from the Bible's own prayer book?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Thirst and absence ("When shall I come and behold the face of God?", 42:2); tears as food day and night (42:3); mockery ("Where is your God?", 42:3, 10); aching memory of better days (42:4); a cast-down, disquieted soul (42:5, 11; 43:5); the sense of being forgotten by God ("Why have you forgotten me?", 42:9); oppression and injustice (43:1-2). This is inspired Scripture: God preserved these words as a model of prayer. The surprise, for many, is that nothing here is edited for politeness. The Psalter assumes what this study has been saying: God wants the real person, not the performance.

2. Three times the psalmist says the same thing to his own soul: "Why are you cast down, O my soul... Hope in God; for I shall again praise him." What is he doing, and why might it take three repetitions?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He is neither obeying his feelings nor denying them; he is *addressing* them. He interrogates his soul (why?), then preaches to it (hope in God), then makes a promise about the future (I shall again praise him). It takes three rounds because that is how it actually goes; anxious feelings do not stand down after one memo. Scripture here models the inner conversation as a discipline: you can speak to your own soul instead of merely listening to it. Keep this refrain in your ears.

DIG DEEPER

Two pocket verses to carry out of the Psalter tonight. Ps 94:19: "When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul"; the Hebrew word for "cares" is glossed as anxious or disquieting thoughts, and lexicons connect it with branching; the thicket is our picture for it, and it is exactly how worry grows. And Ps 56:3, one short line that fits any moment: "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you." Not "I am never afraid." *When.* The Psalter's realism is total.

BUILD, THEN PRESS "Lament is faithless negativity"

Build it at full strength. A sincere and serious Christian objects, with Scripture in hand: covenant people are commanded to rejoice always, pray constantly, and give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thess 5:16-18), and told that the answer to anxiety is prayer and petition *with thanksgiving* (Phil 4:4-7). Israel's grumbling in the wilderness is judged, not praised. So, the objection runs, rehearsing complaint trains the heart in unbelief; the commanded alternative is trust voiced as thanksgiving. That is not a slogan, it is an argument, and wallowing does exist.

Press, then answer from the text. The decisive fact: God himself inspired a prayer book of which roughly a third is lament, gave it to Israel, and had it prayed and sung in her worship. Whatever lament is, God does not classify it as unbelief. Watch its grammar: every complaint is aimed *at God*, in covenant, usually by name; you do not file grievances with someone you have abandoned. The address is the faith. And nearly every lament turns ("Hope in God; for I shall again praise him"), not because the pain resolved, but because the God addressed is trustworthy. Lament and thanksgiving are not rivals; lament is thanksgiving's road through the valley. Suppressed pain, by contrast, tends to leak out sideways, at spouses, children, and drivers in traffic. The Psalter offers the honest alternative: bring it to the throne, out loud, and let the turning happen there.

Now read 1 Kings 19:1-18 aloud. Set it up first: Elijah has just come from the greatest public triumph of his life, fire from heaven on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). One threat from Queen Jezebel later, he is running for his life. Read the whole span; the last verses matter and the group should hear them rather than be told them.

3. Under the broom tree Elijah prays to die: "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life" (19:4). The great prophet, soon after the greatest victory of his life. What does the sequence (triumph, then collapse) tell you? And what is the very first thing God does about it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Collapse does not wait politely for failure; it often arrives right after our peak output, when the adrenaline drains and the body presents its bill. Elijah is depleted: afraid, exhausted, and finished ("It is enough"). And God's first response to a prophet praying for death is not a rebuke, not a lecture, not "where is your faith?" It is sleep, and then an angel, a touch, and "Arise and eat": a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water; then he lies down again; then the angel comes a second time and feeds him again, and only then does he travel (19:5-8). Note the order, because it is not the order we would have chosen: rest, food, more rest, food again, and not one word yet about his vocation. Before God addresses what Elijah is for, he attends to what Elijah is made of.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Say: "This mountain scene is a rerun. Another man stood on this same mountain while the LORD passed by, hidden in the rock. Find him." Point them to Exodus 33; let them locate verses 21-22 ("Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock... I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by"). Ask: why would God take his despairing prophet back to *this* mountain, of all places?

4. At Horeb the LORD is not in the wind, earthquake, or fire, but in "a still small voice" (19:12). Why this mountain, of all mountains? And after the whisper, what else does God give him? Look at 19:15-18 and name each thing.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Horeb is Sinai (Ex 3:1), the mountain of the covenant, where Moses too was hidden in the rock as the LORD passed by proclaiming his own name: "merciful and gracious, slow to anger" (Ex 34:6). God takes his burned-out prophet back to the beginning, to relearn who God is. Start with what the text states: the LORD is not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, and Elijah responds only to the low whisper. *One pastoral reading, offered as such:* he

has had quite enough of fire and spectacle, Carmel was fire and it did not heal him, and a whisper requires closeness. Invite other readings; the text gives the contrast and leaves the reason open. Then, in the verses you have just read, God gives him two more things: a mission (19:15-16) and the end of his isolation. Distinguish those last two carefully. The seven thousand who have not bowed (19:18) are not companions placed around him; they are a remnant, and their disclosure corrects his belief that he is the only one left. Elisha, whom he is sent to anoint (19:16) and who follows him (19:19-21), is an actual companion. *Our summary, not the text's own label:* taken together this looks like a pattern of care, bodily provision, renewed encounter, mission, and the correction of a lie he believed about being alone, with not one ounce of shame in it.

5. Where in your own life have you treated the body's needs (sleep, food, rest, help) as spiritually second-class? What does tonight do to that assumption?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Let people talk; the false spirituality of pushing through is widespread and often praised. The correction is doctrinal, not just practical: "the human body shares in the dignity of the image of God" (CCC 364); the person is one body-soul unity, so exhaustion is a whole-person event and care of the body is care of the person God made. Sometimes the most spiritual thing available is a meal and some sleep. In the narrative Elijah sleeps and the angel twice tells him to eat; the sandwich and the nap are our shorthand, but the ordering is the text's. This is not the whole answer to anxiety, but it is never absent from it.

Send

S1. Which psalm line from tonight do you most need in your own voice this month? Say it aloud once, now, if you are willing.

S2. Elijah thought he was the only one left, and he was off by seven thousand. Where might you be underestimating the companions God has already put around you, including this room?

Live It This Week

- **Pray one lament, out loud.** Once this week, alone, read Psalm 42-43 aloud as your own prayer, unedited. When you reach the refrain, address your own soul by it.
- **The pocket prayer.** Put Ps 56:3 where you will hit it in real moments (mirror, dashboard, lock screen): "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you."
- **One broom-tree mercy.** Choose one concrete bodily kindness this week as an act of faith, not indulgence: a full night's sleep, a real meal, a walk, asked-for help. Elijah's angel insists.

Memory verse: "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you." (Psalm 56:3)

Closing Prayer

*Father of mercies, you met your servant Elijah with bread, with sleep, and with a still small voice.
Meet each of us where we are actually depleted. Teach us to pray the prayers you wrote,
to speak hope to our own souls, and to receive your care without shame.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

PART 3: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

PASSAGE	WHERE IT IS USED
Ps 42-43	Main text: lament, the refrain to the soul
Ps 94:19	Dig Deeper and session title: many cares, your consolations
Ps 56:3	Dig Deeper and memory verse: when I am afraid
Ps 34:18	Opening prayer: near to the brokenhearted
1 Kings 19:1-18	Main text: broom tree, sleep and food, still small voice, mission, remnant
1 Kings 18	Setting: Carmel, shortly before the collapse
1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21	Answer 4: the mission, and Elisha as actual companion
Ex 33:21-22	Live Discovery: Moses hidden in the rock as the LORD passes
Ex 34:6	Answer 4: the name proclaimed: merciful and gracious
Ex 3:1; Ex 19; Ex 24:18	Leader background: Horeb traditionally identified with Sinai; forty days
1 Thess 5:16-18; Phil 4:4-7	Steelman: rejoice always, thanksgiving as the commanded alternative

Session 4 · My Soul Is Very Sorrowful

Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46; Hebrews 4:15-16; 5:7-9

PART 1: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers Christ's own anguish in Gethsemane, hears the Psalm 42 refrain from Session 3 return in his mouth, and opens the sealed envelopes. The answer to "Is anxiety a sin?" comes from the garden: the sinless One experienced crushing distress, so the felt experience of anxiety is not itself sin; and what can be done *with* fear, Jesus shows: bring it to the Father, honestly, with an "Abba" and a "yet."

Catholic Touchstone. Christ is true God and true man, with a true human soul, true human emotions, and a true human will that freely aligned with the Father's ("not what I will, but what you will"). His agony is doctrine before it is comfort, and comfort because it is doctrine.

What You Need to Know

This is the study's summit, and its most delicate night. Some people will hear the sealed answer as permission they have needed for years; a few may resist it, having been taught firmly that worry is always sin. Prepare to be unhurried, precise, and gentle.

The text first. Mark's Gethsemane is stark: Jesus "began to be greatly distressed and troubled" (14:33), and says "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (14:34). The Greek behind "very sorrowful" is *perilypos*, deeply grieved, exceedingly sorrowful; the form of the word suggests sorrow all around, and that is a fair mnemonic though not a dictionary definition. Mark's "greatly distressed" (*ekthambeisthai*) conveys intense distress or alarm. This is among the strongest emotional language the Gospels apply to Jesus. He does not hide it from his friends ("remain here, and watch"), he falls to the ground, and he prays the most honest prayer in Scripture: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will" (14:36). Every clause matters tonight: the intimacy (*Abba*), the honesty (remove this), and the anchored will (yet).

The session's central discovery: in the Greek Old Testament that the early Church read, the refrain of Psalm 42-43, "Why are you cast down, O my soul," uses this same word, *perilypos*: "Why are you *perilypos*, O my soul?" Mark records Jesus, in his darkest hour, speaking the vocabulary of that lament. Be exact about the claim: this is a strong verbal echo of the Greek psalter, not a quotation Mark identifies as one, and the Gospels nowhere record Jesus reciting Psalm 42-43. What can be said, and it is plenty, is that the language of the cast-down soul is on his lips in the garden. When the group finds this, last week's session detonates into this one: the prayer book of the anxious is the prayer book of Christ.

Luke adds two details, and one honest note. The details: an angel from heaven strengthening him (22:43), and agony so deep that "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (22:44). Keep Luke's simile intact when you speak: the verse says his sweat *became like* great drops of blood, and the tradition has long understood it as bloody sweat, but the sentence itself is a comparison and should not be flattened into a bare physical claim. The note: some ancient manuscripts lack verses 43-44 (your RSV2CE footnotes this); the Church's Bibles and liturgy include them, and it is honest to know the footnote exists. Do not lead with the textual point; have it ready if a sharp reader asks. The angel matters theologically. Luke does not say the angel is the Father's answer to the cup prayer, nor how the strengthening came, so read it as interpretation and offer it as such: the sequence can be read as strength given inside the trial rather than exemption from it, which is the Elijah pattern from Session 3 in a deeper register.

Hebrews gives the apostolic commentary: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears" (5:7), "he learned obedience through what he suffered" (5:8), and therefore "we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (4:15). Hold those last three words: *yet without sinning*. Within one sustained treatment of

Christ's priesthood, Hebrews records both his loud cries and tears (5:7) and his sinlessness (4:15). That juxtaposition is the sealed answer, waiting in the text.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Gethsemane gathers the study's Old Testament threads. The vocabulary of the Psalm 42 refrain returns on Christ's lips (the Live Discovery). The cup he asks to pass is the prophets' cup of wrath and judgment (Is 51:17; Jer 25:15), which he freely takes so that we receive a different cup (this study will not chase that thread tonight; it belongs to the Eucharist and there is not room, but know it for questions). And an angel with strength for the body recalls Elijah's angel with bread: God's pattern of help inside the trial rather than exemption from it, now traced to its source.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas asks directly whether there was true sorrow and true fear in Christ, and answers yes to both. Christ assumed a complete human nature, so he truly experienced the passions of the soul, sorrow and fear included, though in him they were perfectly ordered and never overthrew reason or will. These movements of the soul belong to real humanity; they are not themselves sins.

Summa Theologiae III, q. 15, a. 6 (sorrow in Christ) and a. 7 (fear in Christ). Tier 2: summary in our words, not his.

The step from there to tonight's question is ours, and it belongs in the sealed answer, not in the Summa's mouth: if the sinless One truly felt them, then feeling them cannot of itself be sin.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Henry Newman

Newman preaches, in substance, that Christ's interior anguish was not lessened by his divinity but borne with total awareness. He took up mental suffering deliberately, refusing every anesthetic of distraction or denial, and let the full weight of it come, above all the weight of the world's sin, which he apprehended as no one else could.

From his discourse on the mental sufferings of our Lord in his Passion, in Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations (Tier 2: summary; discourse numbering varies by edition, so none is claimed here).

Our application, not his emphasis: if he refused every anesthetic, then the garden is not a crack in his composure, and the Son of God is not a stranger to dread.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Maximus the Confessor

Maximus is the Church's great teacher on exactly this verse. Against those who would give Christ only one will, he insists that in Gethsemane we hear a true human will, with its natural shrinking from death, freely conforming itself to the Father: "not what I will, but what you will." The human "no" of Eden is answered by a human "yes," spoken at the point where saying yes cost the most. He suffered for this teaching, and the Church defined it after him.

His writings on the two wills of Christ, especially the Gethsemane prayer (Tier 2: summary of his teaching, which the Church received at the Third Council of Constantinople in 680-681).

A modern voice worth having in your pocket, though not one of tonight's three: Pope Benedict XVI reads the Gethsemane chapter of Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week the same way, as the healing of our refusal inside Christ's costly consent.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 612:** the agony at Gethsemane. The paragraph quotes the "let this cup pass from me" form, speaks of the horror death represented for his human nature, and teaches that by accepting in his *human will* that the Father's will be done, he accepts his death as redemptive. (Do not put "accepts it freely" in quotation marks; that phrase is not 612's.)

- **CCC 2600:** Luke emphasizes that Jesus prays before the decisive moments of his mission, including the Passion. For the further claim that Christ takes our prayer into his own, cite **CCC 2606** rather than stretching 2600.
- **CCC 1767-1768:** the passions are in themselves neither good nor evil; they are morally qualified insofar as they engage reason and will, and passions "are morally good when they contribute to a good action." This is the framework the sealed answer needs, and it is the one most anxious Catholics have never been given.
- **CCC 1735:** imputability and responsibility for an act "can be diminished or even nullified" by fear and other psychological factors; essential precision for the sealed answer.

THREAD WATCH (leader only, never read aloud)

Payoffs tonight: the troubled-Jesus thread from Session 1 and the Psalm 42 refrain from Session 3 (the *perilypos* discovery). Land both, and keep the lexical claim clean: the verb *tarasso* is paid off by **John 12:27**, where Jesus says "Now is my soul troubled" facing this very hour. Mark 14:33 uses different Greek (*ekthambeisthai*, *ademonein*) and is the Synoptic summit of anguish language, related in substance, not the same word. If a leader who checked Session 1 goes looking for *tarasso* in Mark 14, they will not find it, and now they know why.

The body thread develops: an angel strengthens Christ (Luke 22:43) as an angel fed Elijah. Name the echo when it surfaces; do not yet reveal where the thread ends (grace through matter, the sacraments, Session 6).

The sealed envelopes open tonight. Run the ritual exactly as scripted below. The order matters: text first, discovery second, envelopes third, answer last. Do not let the answer arrive before the garden has done its work.

Session Goals

1. Let the group sit inside Christ's real anguish without rushing to resolution.
2. Land the *perilypos* discovery: the lament psalms return in Jesus's own mouth.
3. Open the sealed envelopes and answer the question with doctrinal precision and pastoral gentleness.
4. Teach the Gethsemane prayer as the anxious person's pattern: Abba, honesty, yet.

The 90 Minutes

- **0:00** Gather and opening prayer (5 min)
- **0:05** Win (10 min)
- **0:15** Build part one: Mark 14, the discovery (30 min)
- **0:45** The unsealing: envelopes and the answer (20 min)
- **1:05** Build part two: Hebrews, the steelman (15 min)
- **1:20** Send (5 min)
- **1:25** Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer (5 min).
- **Non-cuttable, and protect them ruthlessly:** the Live Discovery, the unsealing, and the silence around it. This is the night the study exists for.
- **If you run long, cut in this order:** (1) compress the Win to W1 alone, (2) shorten Send S1 sharing, (3) read the Dig Deeper aloud without discussion. Do not buy time from the unsealing.

PART 2: DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, on the night you were betrayed you went out to the garden, and you took your fear with you. Bring us with you tonight. Let us watch with you one hour. Teach us to pray as you prayed: with your Abba, with your honesty, and with your yes. You who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

Win

W1. Where were you when you last felt truly out of your depth? Who, if anyone, did you let see it?

W2. Growing up, what did you absorb about whether strong people show fear?

Build

Read Mark 14:32-42 aloud, slowly, with silence after verse 36. Do not rush this reading; it is the summit of the study.

1. Mark says Jesus "began to be greatly distressed and troubled" and Jesus himself says "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (14:33-34). Stay with the plain sense: what is actually happening to Jesus in this garden? Resist the urge to soften it.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Among the strongest emotional language the Gospels apply to him. "Greatly distressed" (*ekthambeisthai*) conveys intense distress or alarm; "very sorrowful" (*perilypos*) is deeply grieved, sorrow all around; "even to death" means the anguish itself feels lethal. He falls to the ground (14:35). Stay inside Mark for now; Luke gets opened later tonight. Whatever we were taught about composure, the Gospels were not embarrassed to show us this: true God and true man, in true anguish, hours before the cross. He also does not hide it: he brings three friends and tells them exactly how bad it is (14:33-34). No performance, no bravado.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Say: "Listen to his sentence again: *My soul is very sorrowful*. You prayed something extremely close to that, out loud, last week. Find it, and tell me what you notice." Let them hunt back to Psalm 42-43 and its refrain ("Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?"), and let them say what the resemblance is before you add anything. Then supply the leader note: in the Greek Old Testament the early Church read, that refrain uses the very word Mark records, *perilypos*. Then ask question 2.

2. So the vocabulary of the lament psalms is on his lips in the garden. What does that mean for last week's session, and for everyone who has ever prayed those psalms in fear?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

It means the prayer book of the anxious is the prayer book of Christ. The Word made flesh, needing words in the dark, reached for the same *perilypos*-soul vocabulary that the Church prayed in her Greek psalter. (Precisely: he does not recite the refrain, "Why are you cast down"; he speaks a first-person declaration in its language. The echo is what carries the weight, and it carries plenty.) So St. Augustine's teaching from last week lands with full force: on his reading of the Psalms, when you pray a lament, Christ prays with you, and the garden shows why that is more than a figure of speech. Every anxious Christian who has ever muttered "why are you cast down, O my soul" has been praying in very good company.

3. Take the prayer of 14:36 apart clause by clause: "Abba, Father"; "all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me"; "yet not what I will, but what you will." What is each clause doing? What would the prayer lose if any one of them were missing?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"Abba, Father": intimacy first; the prayer happens inside a relationship, not before a tribunal. "Remove this cup": total honesty; Jesus actually asks for the hard thing to be taken away, which means asking for relief is not unbelief. "Yet not what I will, but what you will": the anchored will; the request is real and the surrender is real, in the same breath. Drop the first clause and prayer becomes negotiation with a stranger. Drop the second and it becomes performance, the polished prayer that hides the person. Drop the third and it becomes a demand. All three together are the pattern this study has been building toward: the anxious heart's complete prayer.

The Unsealing

*Hand back the sealed envelopes. Say something like: "Three weeks ago you wrote your answer to a question: **Is anxiety a sin?** You have just watched the sinless Son of God greatly distressed and troubled, sorrowful unto death, his sweat like great drops of blood. Open your envelope. Read what you wrote. Then let's talk." Give real silence, then invite anyone willing to share what they wrote and whether the garden changes it. Only after the group has talked, share the answer below. Take your time; for some people in the room this is the most important twenty minutes of the study.*

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Held next to Gethsemane, the answer comes in three precise pieces. **First: the feeling is not the sin.** Jesus experienced overwhelming distress, and Scripture says of him "in every respect... tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (Heb 4:15). The Church teaches that Christ took a complete human nature with true human passions, true sorrow and true fear (Aquinas, ST III q. 15, aa. 6-7), and she teaches generally that the passions are in themselves neither morally good nor morally evil; they take their moral quality from how reason and will engage them (CCC 1767-1768). So the involuntary felt experience of anxiety, the dread, the body's alarm, the thoughts that arrive unbidden, is not itself sin. The feeling, as feeling, never was the sin. **Second: much of it is not fully voluntary**, and the Church weighs that: responsibility for an act "can be diminished or even nullified" by fear and other psychological factors (CCC 1735). A panic attack is not a moral act; a temperament is not a verdict; an illness is not a vice. **Third: freedom enters in what we do with fear**, and here the garden shows the way rather than wagging a finger. Fear can be carried away from God, into despair of him or into refusing what we know to be his will, or it can be carried to him, with an Abba, an honest request, and a yet. Where sin exists in this territory it lives in what the will consents to and cultivates, not in the weather of the heart, and even there the culpability may be partial. So to the question you sealed: the trembling itself, no. And the One who trembled in the garden truly knows human fear, and knows and has compassion on yours.

Pastoral note for the leader, not read aloud: someone may push the third point, asking whether their own worry has been sinful. Do not adjudicate individual souls from the front of the room; that is what confessors are for, and scrupulous consciences especially need a regular confessor, not a group verdict (Session 1 panel). The public teaching stays public: feeling, no; involuntary, weighed; the will's direction, that is between each person, their confessor, and God, and God is merciful.

BUILD, THEN PRESS "But Scripture commands it"

Build it at full strength. Before anyone leaves with the answer, put the strongest objection to it in the room, because it is the reason many of them believed the opposite in the first place. Scripture does not merely describe anxiety; it forbids it, in the imperative, repeatedly: "do not be anxious" six times in Matthew 6:25-34, "have no anxiety about anything" (Phil 4:6), "do not be anxious" again in Luke 12:22. Commands imply the power to obey.

If anxiety were morally neutral weather, why would the Lord command against it at all?

Press, then answer from the text. Notice first what the same Scriptures do: they show the sinless Son of God in exactly this distress, and Hebrews calls him tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sinning. So the imperatives cannot be aimed at the involuntary passion he himself bore. What they are aimed at is what he shows us in the very next breath: the direction of a frightened heart. "Yet not what I will, but what you will" is the obedience the commands ask for, and it is offered from inside the fear, not after it has gone. That is why Matthew grounds his command not on "nothing bad will happen" but on "your heavenly Father knows," and why Paul's command comes with practices attached, which is next week. The command is real, and it is a command about where to put your weight, not about what your body is allowed to feel.

BUILD, THEN PRESS "If he is God, the fear was theater"

Build it at full strength. A thoughtful skeptic, or a thoughtful believer, objects: "Jesus knew the ending. He predicted his resurrection three times. A man who knows Sunday is coming cannot really dread Friday; the agony reads as performance, staged for our benefit. And if it was real, how is he God?" Let the group feel the dilemma's edge: it seems the agony must be either fake or unfitting.

Press, then answer from the text and the Church. The dilemma dissolves once you take the Incarnation at full strength. The Church confesses one Person in two complete natures: Christ has a true human soul, true human emotions, and a true human will, which the Church solemnly affirmed at the Third Council of Constantinople in 680-681 against those who would delete it. Knowing an outcome does not anesthetize a human nature; a patient told the surgery will succeed still dreads the surgery, and no one calls the dread theater. Hebrews says he "learned obedience through what he suffered" (5:7-8): the anguish was the arena of a real human obedience, not a pageant. And St. Maximus's reading goes deeper: precisely there, in real dread, a true human will freely said "not what I will, but what you will," and our ancient "no" began to be healed inside his costly "yes." Fake fear could heal nothing. It was real, and that is the good news.

4. Read Hebrews 4:15-16. Because we have a high priest who has been where we are, the writer draws a conclusion beginning "Let us then with confidence draw near." Why is confidence the conclusion, of all things?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Because the throne we approach is occupied by someone who sympathizes from experience: "in every respect... tempted as we are." The anxious person's deepest fear about God is often that he is a disappointed inspector. Hebrews replaces that picture: the throne is "the throne of grace," and the one seated there has wept, dreaded, and sweat as it were great drops of blood. You are not explaining fear to someone who has never known it from inside. So: confidence, "that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Help in time of need is Gethsemane's angel (Luke 22:43), still on duty.

DIG DEEPER

Luke 22:43: "And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him." The Father's answer to "remove this cup" was not removal; it was strength inside the trial, delivered to a human body in a garden, exactly the Elijah pattern (bread and an angel under the broom tree). Note honestly: your RSV2CE footnotes that some ancient manuscripts lack verses 43-44; the Church receives them as Scripture. Luke names no material means here, so hold the parallel loosely: Elijah was given bread, and Christ is given strength, and in both the help comes inside the trial rather than instead of it. *Our thread, not Luke's claim:* watch where this pattern of help delivered to a body is finally heading. Two sessions remain.

Send

S1. What did you write in your envelope, and what would you write now? (Share only what you wish.)

S2. Who do you know who is carrying the second wound, the belief that their anxiety makes God disappointed in them? What could you say to them this week, now that you have been to the garden?

Live It This Week

- **Pray the Gethsemane pattern nightly:** one prayer with all three clauses. Abba (address him intimately), honesty (name the actual thing and ask for what you actually want), yet (hand it over: "yet not what I will").
- **Watch one hour.** Once this week, if at all possible, take a real hour, or a real half hour, of quiet before the Lord, ideally before the tabernacle or the Blessed Sacrament: "could you not watch one hour?" Bring nothing to fix. Just watch with him.
- **Retire the shame that was never yours.** If what you wrote condemned you simply for feeling fear, or for symptoms that arrive unbidden, write beside it: *the feeling itself is not a sin*, and tear that condemnation up. If your envelope names something else, something you know you have chosen, keep it and bring it to confession, which is exactly where it belongs and where mercy is waiting.

Memory verse: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will." (Mark 14:36)

Closing Prayer

*Father, in the garden your Son was sorrowful unto death, and he did not sin;
he asked for the cup to pass, and he gave you his will.*

*Take from us tonight every ounce of shame we have carried for our fear,
and teach us his prayer: Abba, the truth, and your will be done.*

Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

PART 3: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

PASSAGE	WHERE IT IS USED
Mark 14:32-42	Main text: the agony, the prayer, the sleeping friends
Ps 42:5, 11; 43:5	Live Discovery: the refrain returning in Christ's mouth (<i>perilypos</i>)
Luke 22:39-46	Second text: the angel, the sweat like blood (with RSV2CE footnote noted)
Heb 4:15-16	Question 4 and the sealed answer: tempted as we are, yet without sinning; the throne of grace
Heb 5:7-9	Steelman answer: loud cries and tears; learned obedience through suffering
John 12:27	Thread payoff (from Session 1): "Now is my soul troubled"
Is 51:17; Jer 25:15	Leader background only: the cup of the prophets
Matt 6:25-34; Phil 4:6; Luke 12:22	Build, then press: the imperatives objection to the sealed answer
CCC 612; 2600; 2606; 1767-1768; 1735	Catechism Connection and sealed answer precision

Session 5 • Have No Anxiety About Anything

Philippians 4:4-9; 1 Peter 5:6-11

PART 1: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the apostles do not merely say "do not be anxious"; they hand over concrete practices: prayer with thanksgiving, casting the weight, the guarded heart, governed attention. Two discoveries land: the *merimna* / *merimnao* word family from Session 2 reappears in both texts, showing that Scripture has been holding one long conversation; and behind Peter's "cast all your anxieties on him" stands a psalm the group can find.

Catholic Touchstone. Grace builds on nature and works through means: prayer, thanksgiving, the mind's diet, the community, and, as this study keeps noticing, the body. The spiritual life has practices the way love has habits.

What You Need to Know

Context gives both texts their teeth. Paul writes Philippians from imprisonment (Phil 1:13; cf. 1:7, 14), possibly facing death (1:20-23), and it is from there that he writes "Rejoice in the Lord always" and "have no anxiety about anything." This is not advice from a hammock. Peter writes to churches undergoing real suffering and hostility, "your brotherhood throughout the world" enduring "the same experience of suffering," with a prowling lion in the verse just before (1 Pet 5:8-9). Whether that suffering was organized official persecution is historically debated; that it was real is not. Neither apostle is promising an easy world; both are handing over survival equipment for a hard one.

The Greek seals the connection to Session 2. Paul's "have no anxiety" is *meden merimnate*: the same verb Jesus used on the mountain, where it lands six times across five verses (five of them charges to his hearers), and the same word spoken to Martha. Peter's "all your anxieties" is the noun of the same family (*merimna*). Say the continuity carefully: shared vocabulary and a shared theme show that the apostles teach in continuity with their Master about a specific, recognizable state, and now supply its practices. It does not by itself prove literary dependence, and it does not need to. When the group discovers this, the study's architecture becomes visible: mountain, kitchen, prison, and persecuted church, one conversation.

Walk Philippians 4:6-7 slowly in your preparation. "In everything": no worry too small or too shameful to bring. "By prayer and supplication": general communion and specific asking, both. "With thanksgiving": the surprising ingredient, gratitude practiced *while the problem still stands*, which trains the heart to see the Giver inside the trouble. "Let your requests be made known to God": actual, named requests, the honesty clause of Gethsemane. (Saying them out loud is our practice, not Paul's requirement, and many people find it changes everything.) Then the promise, and note its exact shape: not "and God will fix the circumstance," but "the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds." The verb "keep" (*phroureo*) is military: a garrison, sentries posted. Peace here is not the resolution of the situation; it is protection of the person within the situation. That distinction is the whole session, and the steelman lives or dies on it.

Verse 8 then governs attention: "whatever is true, whatever is honorable... think about these things." Anxiety runs on rehearsed catastrophe; Paul prescribes a deliberate diet for the mind. This is not positive thinking (verse 8 begins with *true*); it is chosen focus on solid realities. Verse 9 adds imitation and ends with presence: "the God of peace will be with you." First the peace of God guards you (v. 7); then the God of peace accompanies you (v. 9). The gift and the Giver.

In 1 Peter, do not miss the grammar of 5:6-7: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God... casting all your anxieties on him." In the Greek, "casting" is a participle attached to the command to humble yourselves, so the casting is presented as a concrete way the humbling happens (the RSV2CE prints two imperatives, so this is leader knowledge, not something the group can see in their Bibles). That is a gentle revolution: handing your anxieties to God is not weakness or spiritual failure; it is the very act of humility Scripture commands. The mirror image needs care. When we knowingly insist that everything finally depends on us, pride can be in it. But that is a description of a spiritual temptation, not a diagnosis of every person who cannot put a worry down: anxiety, hypervigilance,

scrupulosity, and plain responsible effort are not pride, and recurring anxiety after prayer is not evidence that someone is proud, faithless, or unwilling to surrender. And the ground given is startlingly tender: "for he cares about you." Then realism resumes: be sober, be watchful, the devil prowls, resist him firm in your faith, and the God of all grace will "restore, establish, and strengthen you", after "you have suffered a little while" (5:8-10). Suffering is in the promise itself; so is restoration.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Peter's sentence has a psalm inside it, and the group will find it: "Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you" (Ps 55:22). Psalm 55 is a lament of a frightened, betrayed man ("Fear and trembling come upon me," 55:5, betrayed by a familiar friend, 55:12-14), which makes it the perfect ancestor: the casting verse was forged in exactly the kind of night this study is about. Paul's "with thanksgiving" likewise has deep roots, though state them precisely: the thank offering (Lev 7:11-15) ordinarily followed deliverance, and the usual sequence is distress, cry, rescue, thanksgiving. What Israel could do was *vow* the thanksgiving while still in the trouble, and some psalms of trust do thank God with the danger unresolved. So gratitude offered before the outcome is not Paul's invention; it is Israel's faith, and he stands in continuity with it. The apostles are not innovating; they are handing on Israel's tested equipment, now anchored in Christ ("in Christ Jesus," Phil 4:7).

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Ignatius of Loyola

Ignatius's counsel for the soul in desolation is bracingly practical. In time of desolation, make no change: hold to the resolutions you made when you could see clearly. Do not idle either: increase prayer, meditation, and examination. And hold on in patience, for consolation returns.

Spiritual Exercises, Rules for the Discernment of Spirits, First Week: Rule 5 (make no change in desolation), Rule 6 (in desolation, intensify prayer and examination), Rule 8 (patience; consolation will return). Tier 2: summary in our words.

Our bridge, not his vocabulary: Ignatius writes about desolation rather than anxiety, but the rule transfers cleanly, and it is worth taping to the wall. The fog is not the hour to redraw the map. Pray more, decide later.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH Bl. Solanus Casey

Thank God ahead of time. The Capuchin doorkeeper of Detroit, who listened to decades of human worry, urged people to thank God for his help before the outcome arrived. This is Philippians 4:6 in five words: prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving*, gratitude offered while the problem still stands, as an act of confidence in the One already at work.

The counsel he is universally remembered for (Tier 2: no primary locus is claimed here; note also that he is a Blessed, not yet canonized).

VOICE OF THE CHURCH The Church's Liturgy: the Embolism of the Mass

In the Roman Rite, immediately after the Our Father, the Church prays: "Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that... we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ." The Latin asks that we be *ab omni perturbatione securi*, secure from every disturbance. Distress and disturbance are not quite our word anxiety, and the prayer looks toward the blessed hope rather than toward our nerves. But the Church has asked to be kept safe from all distress, at every altar, for centuries. When you next hear the embolism, you are hearing her pray very near this study's theme.

Roman Missal, Order of Mass, the prayer after the Our Father (Tier 1 for the quoted text). This slot is the voice of the praying Church rather than a Father, Doctor, or canonized saint, and is used here deliberately.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 2633:** prayer of petition, in which "every need can become the object of petition"; in Christ we may ask the Father for everything we need.
- **CCC 2637-2638:** thanksgiving, where the Catechism teaches that, as in the prayer of petition, every event and need can become an offering of thanksgiving. This, not 2633, is the paragraph behind "with thanksgiving."
- **CCC 2734:** filial trust is tested, and proves itself, in tribulation; the difficulty when prayer seems unheard, faced honestly. (Gist rather than quotation: the paragraph's own punctuation differs.)
- **CCC 2830 with 2834:** the Father who gives us life gives the nourishment life requires, and trusting him is not idleness; 2834 is where the Catechism puts prayer and work together.

THREAD WATCH (leader only, never read aloud)

The merimna word family pays off tonight. When the group discovers that Phil 4:6 and 1 Pet 5:7 carry the Session 2 word, connect the whole chain aloud: the mountain (Matt 6), the kitchen (Luke 10), the prison (Phil 4), the persecuted church (1 Pet 5). One conversation. This is a payoff; enjoy it.

The body thread develops quietly: the practices tonight are embodied (spoken requests, written casting, chosen attention, sober watchfulness). Next session it resolves into the sacraments; say nothing of that yet.

One session remains. Tonight's Take-Home tells the group to sit with John 14:27 before Session 6; the study is returning to the room where it began.

Session Goals

1. Set both texts in their real contexts: a prison and a persecution.
2. Land both discoveries: the merimna chain, and Psalm 55 behind Peter's casting.
3. Teach the four practices concretely: petition with thanksgiving, casting, the garrisoned heart, governed attention.
4. Face the "vending machine" objection at full strength and answer it from the texts' own promises.

The 90 Minutes

- **0:00** Gather and opening prayer (5 min)
- **0:05** Win (10 min)
- **0:15** Build: Philippians (30 min)
- **0:45** Build: 1 Peter and the steelman (30 min)
- **1:15** Send (8 min)
- **1:23** Live It This Week and memory verse (4 min)
- **1:27** Closing prayer (3 min).
- **Non-cuttable:** the merimna payoff, the Psalm 55 hunt, and the steelman.
- **If you run long, cut in this order:** (1) W1, (2) the Dig Deeper on the casting verb, (3) question 4, folding verse 8 into question 3.

PART 2: DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

*Father, your apostles wrote of peace from a prison cell and from churches under fire.
Teach us what they knew. Receive tonight every request we actually carry,
and let your peace, which passes all understanding, stand guard over our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

Win

W1. When you face something heavy, what is your honest first move: research it, call someone, distract yourself, pray, spiral? No wrong answers; just the truth.

W2. Last week we prayed the Gethsemane pattern: Abba, honesty, yet. Did any clause come easier than the others? Which was hardest?

Build

Read Philippians 4:4-9 aloud. Then read Phil 1:12-14 and let the room absorb where this letter is written from.

1. "Rejoice in the Lord always... have no anxiety about anything," written by a man in chains who may be executed (1:20). How does the return address change how you hear the commands?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

It moves them from the greeting-card shelf to the survival-manual shelf. Paul is not describing a mood his circumstances produced; his circumstances argue for the opposite mood. Look at what is anchored where: the rejoicing is "in the Lord" (4:4) and the promised guarding is "in Christ Jesus" (4:7). The whole paragraph is located in Christ rather than in the situation, which is why prison cannot confiscate it. Whatever he is about to prescribe, he is visibly running on it himself. Note also "The Lord is at hand" (4:5) standing right before "have no anxiety." The phrase can mean he is near, or that his coming is near, and probably evokes both; either way anxiety is placed under the horizon of the Lord himself. Presence has been the ground all study long.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Say: "The phrase *have no anxiety* should ring a bell. We met this exact word in week two, on a mountain, and in a kitchen. Check the texts." Let them put Phil 4:6 next to Matt 6:25-34 and Luke 10:41. Supply the leader note: it is the same Greek family, *merimnao* / *merimna*, which lands six times across five verses in Matthew 6, and it appears once more in tonight's second reading; tell them to listen for it when 1 Peter is read.

2. Same word family: Jesus on the mountain, Jesus to Martha, Paul from prison, and (as we will hear) Peter to suffering churches. What continuities do you see between what Jesus says about anxiety and what the apostles say? What is added?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

It means the divided, scattered self is a known condition with a known name and an apostolic treatment plan, not a modern discovery and not your private defect. Jesus named it and grounded trust in the Father's knowledge; the apostles teach in continuity with him and add the practices their churches learned under fire. You are holding a tradition, not a tip. And it means these texts were written for people whose troubles were at least as real as yours: prisons, persecutions, prowling lions.

3. Take 4:6-7 phrase by phrase: "in everything"; "by prayer and supplication"; "with thanksgiving"; "let your requests be made known"; then the promise. What is each phrase adding? And look closely: what exactly does the promise promise, and what does it not?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"In everything": no worry too small, too irrational, or too embarrassing to bring; the anxious mind's specialty is disqualifying its own concerns. "Prayer and supplication": communion and concrete asking, both. "With thanksgiving": the strange ingredient, gratitude offered while the problem still stands, which trains the eye to see the Giver at work inside the unresolved. "Let your requests be made known": actual named requests, the Gethsemane honesty clause. Then the promise, and its shape is everything: not "and God will fix it," but "the peace of God... will keep your hearts and your minds." "Keep" (*phroureo*) is a military word: a garrison, sentries on the wall. The promise is protection of the person, not resolution of the circumstance; peace that "passes understanding" because it does not depend on the situation making sense yet. Whether that is a disappointment or a far better promise is exactly where the steelman will take us.

4. Verse 8 turns to the mind's diet: "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just... think about these things." Why would governed attention belong in a passage about anxiety? And how is this different from "just think positive"?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Because anxiety largely runs on attention: the rehearsed catastrophe, replayed. Paul does not say suppress thoughts; he says feed on better ones, deliberately, and the list begins with *true*, which is precisely not positive thinking. Positive thinking curates pleasant fictions; verse 8 directs the mind to solid realities: what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious. For a Catholic, that list has an address: Christ, the sacraments, the saints, real goods in your real life. Practically it means noticing what your mind eats (news, feeds, imagined arguments) and setting a table on purpose. One caution for the leader: for a person with scrupulosity or obsessive patterns, "governed attention" and examination of conscience can become the loop itself, endlessly checking. If you see that, do not prescribe more self-examination; point gently toward one regular confessor and competent care (Session 1 panel). Verse 9 then ends the paragraph with the point of it all: "the God of peace will be with you." First his peace guards you (v. 7); then he himself accompanies you (v. 9).

Read 1 Peter 5:6-11 aloud. Remind the room: written to churches under real persecution (5:9).

LIVE DISCOVERY

Say: "Peter's line, *cast all your anxieties on him*, is not original to Peter. He is drawing on his people's prayer book. Find the source." Point them to Psalm 55 and let them hunt (55:22: "Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you"; Peter echoes the image and the vocabulary rather than quoting the sentence). Then have someone read Ps 55:4-5 and 55:12-14 aloud, and ask what kind of distress the psalm depicts.

5. Peter's casting verse comes from a psalm of a terrified, betrayed man ("Fear and trembling come upon me," Ps 55:5). Now one thing your English cannot show you, so I will hand it to you: in Greek, "casting" is not a second command but a participle attached to "humble yourselves." What relationship does that suggest between humbling yourself and casting your anxieties on God? And what does the psalm add?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The psalm teaches that the casting verse was forged in the fire: this is equipment tested in betrayal and dread, not a fair-weather slogan; and it comes from the lament tradition the study has already made ours. The grammar suggests something gently revolutionary: casting your anxieties on God is presented as a concrete way the

commanded humility actually happens. Handing him the weight is not spiritual weakness; it is obedience. The mirror image needs care, and say it carefully in the room: when we knowingly insist that everything finally depends on us, pride can be in it, but recurring anxiety after prayer is not proof that a person is proud, faithless, or unwilling to surrender, and some in this room are carrying a condition rather than a competence problem. And the ground Peter gives is the tenderest clause in tonight's texts: "for he cares about you." Not "for you should cope better." He cares. About you.

BUILD, THEN PRESS "I prayed, and the panic stayed"

Build it at full strength. Someone in every honest room can say it: "I did this. In everything, with thanksgiving, I made my requests known, for years. The anxiety stayed. Philippians reads like a vending machine, prayer in, peace out, and my experience says the machine is broken. Either the promise fails, or something is wrong with me." Let it stand at full weight; do not rush past it. This is the realest objection in the study.

Press, then answer from the texts themselves. First, reread what was promised: peace that *guards*, not circumstances that resolve, and peace that "passes understanding," which means it can coexist with an unresolved, still-frightening situation; the sentries hold the wall while the siege continues. Second, suffering is inside Peter's promise rather than evidence against it: the God of all grace will "restore, establish, and strengthen" you after you "have suffered a little while" (5:10). Read that as what it is, God's certain final restoration, not a schedule for anyone's symptoms; it is not a prediction of when your panic will stop. Third, these are practices, not transactions: "in everything" describes a life, a formation, the slow retraining of a heart, and formation is measured in seasons, not sessions. Fourth, the peace is finally a Person's nearness ("The Lord is at hand"; "the God of peace will be with you"), and his presence does not always register as a felt calm, as the saints of the dark night testify. And fifth, remember the whole counsel of this study: grace works through means, and the means include the Church, the sacraments, and legitimate medicine and therapy (Session 1); praying Philippians 4 and seeing a doctor are not rival strategies but one obedience. So do not tell a suffering person that an imperceptible peace must already be operating in them; the texts do not authorize that, and they will hear it as being told their experience is wrong. Say the true thing instead, and say it plainly: Christians pray these prayers faithfully and still live with serious anxiety, Philippians is not a mechanism, and if the panic stayed, the promise did not fail and neither did you.

DIG DEEPER

The word "casting" (*epiripto*) in 1 Pet 5:7 appears one other time in the New Testament: Luke 19:35, the disciples "throwing their garments on the colt" for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem. The verb simply means to throw or cast upon, and that other use is the picture: a garment thrown over an animal that will now carry it. *Our illustration:* not gingerly setting the weight down, but throwing it onto someone who will bear it. Some find it helps to make the casting literal: write the worry on paper, and physically hand it over in prayer; the body teaches the soul.

Send

S1. Which of the four practices (requests with thanksgiving, casting, the garrisoned heart, governed attention) does your actual week most need? What would it look like on Tuesday?

S2. "He cares about you." Do you believe that sentence about yourself, not about people in general? What would change if you did?

Live It This Week

- **The evening cast.** Each evening: write the day's heaviest worry in one line, pray it to God by name with one thanksgiving alongside it, and physically set the paper aside. Peter's verb is a throw, not a nudge (our phrase for it, but the verb really does mean to cast upon).

- **Thank God ahead of time** (Bl. Solanus): for one specific pending matter, thank God daily for his help before you see the outcome.
- **In desolation, no new decisions** (St. Ignatius): if a spiral hits this week, postpone any big decision inside it; pray more, decide later.
- **At Mass this Sunday**, listen for the embolism after the Our Father: "...free from sin and safe from all distress." Pray it deliberately, as yours.

Memory verse: "Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you." (1 Peter 5:7)

Closing Prayer

*God of all grace, who called us to your eternal glory in Christ:
receive the requests we have named and the ones we could not.
Let your peace stand guard over our hearts and minds,
and after we have suffered a little while, restore, establish, and strengthen us.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

PART 3: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

PASSAGE	WHERE IT IS USED
Phil 4:4-9	Main text: rejoice, have no anxiety, the practices, the promise
Phil 1:12-14, 20-23	Setting: written in imprisonment, possibly facing death
Matt 6:25-34; Luke 10:41	Live Discovery: the merimna chain from Session 2
1 Pet 5:6-11	Main text: humility, casting, the lion, the promise of restoration
Ps 55:22	Live Discovery: the psalm Peter echoes in the casting verse
Ps 55:4-5, 12-14	The distress the psalm depicts: fear, trembling, betrayal by a familiar friend
Luke 19:35	Dig Deeper: epiripto, the whole-arm throw
Lev 7:11-15	OT Roots: the thank offering and its ordinary sequence
CCC 2633; 2637-2638; 2734; 2830; 2834	Catechism Connection

Session 6 • Peace I Leave with You

John 14:25-27; John 20:19-21; Romans 8:31-39; 1 John 4:18; 2 Timothy 1:7

PART 1: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The study returns to the room where it began, and finally reads the sentence before the famous one: the peace of 14:27 is the last clause of the Paraclete promise. The group discovers that the promise of John 14:27 was kept: the risen Christ's first word to his frightened disciples behind shut doors is "Peace be with you", and that the Church has put both sentences into the Mass, where the group has been hearing them all their lives. Two "hard verses for anxious people" (1 John 4:18; 2 Timothy 1:7) are faced at full strength and given back as gifts. The study ends in commissioning: "as the Father has sent me, even so I send you", peace received becomes peace carried.

Catholic Touchstone. Christ's peace is his presence, given now above all through the sacraments, where grace comes through matter: the body thread of this whole study finds its destination at the altar, in the confessional, and in the anointing.

What You Need to Know

One thing to repair before you teach this session. The study is named from John 14 and ends on John 14:27, and it has not yet read what stands between them: the promise of the Paraclete (14:15-26), the Spirit whom the Father will send in Jesus' name, who will be with the disciples and in them, and who will teach them everything. Tonight the opening reading is 14:25-27 as a single unit, because that is what it is: "These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit... Peace I leave with you." The peace is the last clause of the Spirit's promise. That is also why the sacramental landing later tonight is not a change of subject; the Spirit given then is the Spirit at work in the sacraments now.

Begin where Session 1 ended: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (14:27). Notice it is a bequest ("I leave") and a gift ("I give"), spoken by a man making his last will hours before death; and what he wills to them is "my peace," his own, the peace he then carried through Gethsemane, trial, and cross. The world gives peace by arranging circumstances; his peace has just been demonstrated inside collapsing circumstances for five sessions. Now the group is ready to hear the verse with educated ears.

The session's central discovery is John 20:19-21, and it should be found, not announced. Easter evening: doors shut "for fear," disciples who fled and denied, and the risen Jesus standing among them saying, first word, "Peace be with you." He shows his wounds (the peace is not amnesia; the wounds are in it), says it again, and turns it into a sending: "as the Father has sent me, even so I send you." The promise of 14:27 is kept in person, to frightened disciples who had failed and abandoned him, and it immediately becomes mission. That is the arc of this final session: peace received, peace carried.

Then the Mass. In the Roman Rite, after the Our Father and its embolism (which the group prayed deliberately this past week: "safe from all distress"), the priest prays: "Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles: Peace I leave you, my peace I give you..." That is the Missal's rendering of John 14:27; note for yourself that it differs slightly from the RSV2CE the group is reading ("Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you"), so say the Rite of Peace prays John 14:27 in the Church's liturgical wording rather than calling it verbatim. Then the priest greets the assembly with Christ's peace, and when the sign of peace is exchanged, the faithful offer it to one another before Communion. Many in your group have heard these words all their lives without noticing. Reveal by asking, not telling (see the Build); the recognition landing in real time is the point. This also completes the body thread: the pattern of grace given through creaturely means (Elijah's bread, the angel in the garden, last week's embodied practices) was heading here all along, to the sacraments, where Christ's peace comes through sensible signs: bread and wine, water, oil, and the words of absolution. Name the thread's whole arc tonight; the group has earned it.

Romans 8:31-39 is the study's summit of assurance, best read aloud and slowly: "If God is for us, who is against us?... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Paul's list (tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword) is not hypothetical, and his own resume in 2 Cor 11 (beatings, imprisonments, shipwrecks, hunger, cold, exposure) makes it credible, though it is not an item-for-item catalogue of what he had already suffered. Note too that verse 36 quotes Psalm 44:22. The logic of 8:32 is the study's deepest ground: the Father who "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all" has already given the costliest thing, and so will not withhold what he wills for our salvation and final glory. Be precise about what that does and does not promise. It is not a guarantee of health, safety, or any particular temporal good; verse 35 lists the things that will in fact come. It is a guarantee about the one thing anxiety most fears. Anxiety's ultimate whisper is separation, abandonment, aloneness; Romans 8 answers the whisper at its root: "neither death, nor life... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Finally, prepare carefully for the two hard verses; this segment is a pastoral gift disguised as apologetics. Anxious Christians are routinely wounded by 1 John 4:18 ("perfect love casts out fear... he who fears is not perfected in love": "my fear proves I lack love") and by 2 Timothy 1:7 ("God did not give us a spirit of timidity": "my anxiety is a *spirit*, maybe demonic, and real Christians would have cast it out"). Both readings collapse under the texts themselves. John's subject is *teleia agape*, love brought to completion, a trajectory ("perfected", 4:12, 17, 18); and the fear in view is fear of punishment on the day of judgment (4:17-18), the cringe before a condemning God, exactly the fear the whole letter dismantles with "God is love." John is not grading anxious temperaments; he is promising that as love matures, the terror of God-as-condemner dies. Growth, not verdict. And Paul's word to Timothy is *deilia*, cowardice, and the context is a minister urged to "rekindle the gift," not to be ashamed of the gospel, and to share in suffering for it (1:6-8). It is a word about shrinking back from witness, not a diagnosis of a nervous system, and Catholic teaching does not identify an anxiety disorder as a demonic spirit or, of itself, as a moral failure. Handled at full strength, these two verses stop being ammunition against the anxious and become promises for them.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Behind "let them not be afraid" stands the tenderest fear-not in the prophets: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you" (Is 43:1-2). Note what grounds it: not "the waters are shallow" but "you are mine" and "I will be with you", ownership and presence, the study's constant ground. And *shalom* itself: biblical peace is not the absence of disturbance but wholeness, right relation, well-being, which is why the risen Christ can give it while still wearing wounds. The priestly blessing Israel heard for centuries ends where this study ends: "the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace" (Num 6:26).

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Teresa of Ávila

In the rendering Catholic devotion has carried for centuries: let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you; all things are passing; God never changes; patience obtains all things; whoever has God lacks nothing, God alone suffices. It is Session 2 (all things passing, the Father constant) and Session 6 (presence as sufficiency) in a few lines, and it fits on a card in a wallet.

The lines traditionally kept as hers, associated with a note or bookmark found in her prayer book (Tier 2: the attribution is traditional, and no translator is named for this English rendering).

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Paul II

"Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ." So the new pope spoke to the whole world, a man formed under two totalitarian regimes. ("Be not afraid!" is the popular refrain by which the pontificate is remembered rather than the homily's own opening words.) It became a recurring theme of his pontificate, and he grounded it exactly where this study has: not in the mildness of the times, which were not mild, but in the presence and lordship of the Redeemer. Fear closes doors; Christ, welcomed, opens them.

Homily at the inauguration of his pontificate, 22 October 1978 (Tier 1).

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Charles de Foucauld

In the familiar English form: Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will... I am ready for all, I accept all... into your hands I commend my soul. The hermit of the Sahara drew his surrender out of Christ's own final words (Luke 23:46). It is the Gethsemane pattern from Session 4 carried to its end: the "yet" of the garden, made a whole way of life, and given to the Church as a prayer the anxious can grow into for years.

The Prayer of Abandonment as commonly printed, arranged from his writings (Tier 2: a later arrangement of his meditation, not a prayer he published in this form; no translator is named).

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1832:** peace is among the fruits of the Holy Spirit, "perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory": peace as the Spirit's work in us, not our willpower.
- **CCC 1468:** the Sacrament of Penance restores those who receive it worthily to God's grace and can bring "peace and serenity of conscience with strong spiritual consolation." Say it carefully: Confession reconciles those conscious of sin and may bring peace of conscience; it is not a treatment for every anxious feeling, and for a scrupulous person repeated confession of settled matters can feed the loop rather than quiet it (Session 1 panel).
- **CCC 1453:** fear of punishment is not simply an error to be dismantled. Such fear can be a beginning: imperfect contrition is a gift of God that can start a conversion, even though charity seeks the more perfect motive.
- **CCC 1520:** the Anointing of the Sick gives "strengthening, peace, and courage to overcome the difficulties" of serious illness: peace and courage, by name, through oil and prayer.

THREAD WATCH (leader only, never read aloud)

Every thread lands tonight; say them aloud at the marked moment. (1) *Tarasso*: "Let not your hearts be troubled" (14:1, Session 1) is answered by the risen "Peace be with you" (20:19); the troubled Jesus of 11:33, 12:27, and 13:21 has carried trouble through death and out the other side. (Lexically the thread runs through John alone; the Synoptic garden uses other Greek.) (2) *The Psalm 42 refrain* (42:5, 11; 43:5) and *Gethsemane*: the peace he gives is the peace he won there; "my peace" has a price tag. (3) *Merimna*: the divided self of Sessions 2 and 5 is gathered into "one thing is needful" (Luke 10:42), and the needful One is present in the sacraments. Say that line aloud in Answer 3; it is the thread's last inch. (4) *The body*: bread under a broom tree, an angel in a garden, written casting, and now the sacraments, where grace comes through sensible signs: Baptism's water, the Eucharist, Confession, Anointing's oil. The study's architecture should be visible to everyone by the end of the night.

Session Goals

1. Read John 14:25-27 as one unit, so the Paraclete promise and the gift of peace are heard together, and discover the promise kept in John 20:19-21.
2. Reveal the Mass connection (embolism and Rite of Peace) and land the body thread at the sacraments.
3. Disarm 1 John 4:18 and 2 Timothy 1:7 at full strength and hand them back as promises.
4. Commission the group: peace received becomes peace carried; each member names one person and one concrete act.

The 90 Minutes

- **0:00** Gather and opening prayer (5 min)
- **0:05** Win (10 min)
- **0:15** Build: John 14:25-27, the Spirit and the peace, and the John 20 discovery (25 min)
- **0:40** The Mass and the sacraments; the threads named (15 min)
- **0:55** The hard verses, at full strength (15 min)
- **1:10** Romans 8, read aloud; commissioning (12 min)

- **1:22** Send, Live It, memory verse (5 min)
- **1:27** Closing: the peace exchanged (3 min).
- **Non-cutable:** the John 20 discovery, the Romans 8 reading (never rushed), and the commissioning.
- **If you run long, cut in this order:** (1) the Dig Deeper on Isaiah 43, reading it aloud without discussion, (2) W2, (3) Send S1, with the cards written at home instead.

PART 2: DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles: Peace I leave you, my peace I give you.

Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church,

and graciously grant her peace and unity in accordance with your will.

Who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

(Leaders: yes, those are the words the priest prays at the Rite of Peace, used here as our opening prayer. Do not point it out yet; if anyone recognizes it, smile and keep going. It is tonight's discovery.)

Win

W1. Six weeks in: what is one moment from this study, a verse, a discovery, an envelope, that has stayed with you?

W2. Where did you actually meet peace this month, even for a minute? What was it made of?

Build

Read John 14:25-27 aloud as one unit, and then re-read verse 27 by itself. The group first heard this verse in Session 1; they have since been to a kitchen, a broom tree, a garden, a prison. Ask them to listen with everything they now know.

1. Read verses 25 and 26 again. Before Jesus says one word about peace, what does he say the Father will send, and what will that One do? Now read verse 27 straight on from it. What difference does it make that the peace is the last clause of that promise, not a separate sentence?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He promises the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in his name, who will teach them everything and bring to their remembrance all that he said. Only then: "Peace I leave with you." The peace is not a mood he wishes on them as he goes; it is the last clause of the promise that they will not be left alone. Which answers a question a group may have carried all study: if Jesus is leaving, how exactly is his peace supposed to reach anyone? By the Spirit, given and remaining, and (as tonight will show) through the sacraments the Spirit works in. Hold that; the body thread lands on it later.

2. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." After five sessions: what is "the world's" way of giving peace, and what do you now understand "my peace" to be? What has this study shown it to be made of?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The world gives peace by arranging circumstances: problems solved, threats removed, and therefore always fragile, always awaiting the next disturbance. "My peace" is different in kind: it is his own, and the study has watched him carry it through the collapse of every circumstance: troubled at a tomb, sorrowful unto death in a garden, and still praying "Abba... yet not what I will." His peace is presence held in the Father, and it has a price tag: the garden and the cross are inside it. It is a bequest ("I leave") from a man making his will, which means it was always meant to survive his death, and, as the group is about to discover, it did.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Say: "This verse is a promise, and promises get kept or broken. The next time Jesus stands in a room with these same men, listen to his first word. Find the scene: Easter evening." Point them to John 20 and let them find verses 19-21. Have them read aloud, slowly. Then ask question 2.

3. Doors shut "for fear." Disciples who fled, and one who denied him three times. And the risen Christ's first word to that room is "Peace be with you", then he shows his wounds and says it again, and then: "as the Father has sent me, even so I send you." Walk through what each element means for this study.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The promise of 14:27 is kept, in person, on the far side of death: "Let not your hearts be troubled" has become "Peace be with you," and the study's opening thread ties off: the Jesus who was himself troubled (11:33; 12:27; 13:21) has carried trouble through the cross and out the other side; peace gets the last word. It is given to frightened disciples who had failed and abandoned him, and to the one who had denied him three times, which means his peace is grace, not a reward for composure. He shows his wounds while saying it: this peace is not amnesia or the erasure of what happened; the wounds are inside the peace, glorified, which is what biblical peace so often means, and more than the absence of conflict: wholeness, welfare, right relation, not the erasure of history. (John writes *eirene*; the Hebrew *shalom* stands behind it.) And it immediately becomes a sending: peace received turns into peace carried, which is where this final session is taking us.

4. Here is tonight's second discovery, by way of a question: where have you heard the sentences "Peace I leave you, my peace I give you" and "Peace be with you" before, outside this study, out loud, possibly thousands of times?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

At Mass. After the Our Father and its embolism ("...free from sin and safe from all distress"), the priest prays: "Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles: Peace I leave you, my peace I give you: look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church..." That is John 14:27 in the Church's liturgical wording, and it was tonight's opening prayer. Then he greets the assembly, "The peace of the Lord be with you always," which echoes the risen Lord's Easter greeting rather than quoting it, and when the sign of peace is exchanged the faithful offer that peace to one another before Communion. Many of you have heard these words your whole lives. The Church did not leave Christ's peace in the past tense; she put it in your mouth on the way to Communion. **Leaders: now name the body thread's whole arc aloud:** bread under Elijah's broom tree, an angel strengthening Christ in the garden, last week's written casting, and now the sacraments, where grace reaches us through sensible signs. The water of Baptism, where the Spirit promised in tonight's first reading is given. The Eucharist, Christ's own Body and Blood under the appearances of bread and wine. For the burdened conscience, Confession, whose absolution can bring "peace and serenity of conscience" (CCC 1468). In serious illness, Anointing, which gives "peace and courage" (CCC 1520). This is why the divided self of Sessions 2 and 5 finally hears "one thing is needful" (Luke 10:42): the one needful One is not an idea. He is given, in signs you can touch, because God made the body too and is saving the whole person.

Before the press, put both texts in front of them. Read 1 John 4:12-18 aloud, and ask: what kind of fear does John actually name in verse 18? Then read 2 Timothy 1:6-8, and ask: what is Timothy being urged to do, and what is he being urged not to shrink from? Let the group answer both before you say anything below.

BUILD, THEN PRESS The hard verses: "perfect love casts out fear" and "a spirit of timidity"

Build them at full strength. Two verses are regularly used, sometimes from pulpits, against the very people this study is for. First, 1 John 4:18: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear... he who fears is not perfected in love." The anxious reader hears a verdict: my fear is the measure of my failure to love. Second, 2 Timothy 1:7: "God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control." Build the serious version, not only the abusive one: since fearfulness is set in contrast to what God gives, persistent fear can look like evidence of failing to cooperate with grace. (The crude version, that anxiety is literally a demon to be cast out rather than treated, has certainly been used on people, and some in the room have been struck with it.

Answer both.)

Press, then answer from the texts. John first: his subject is *teleia agape*, love brought to completion, and "perfected" is a trajectory word running through the whole passage (4:12, 17, 18): love is being perfected in us; no one in the room is finished. And the fear John names is specific: "fear has to do with punishment," fear of condemnation on the day of judgment (4:17), the servile cringe before God-as-condemner. So the verse is not a thermometer reading your anxiety and returning a love score; it is a promise about direction: as love matures, terror of a condemning God gives way to the confidence of a child. Growth, not verdict. One Catholic precision, because it matters: fear of punishment is not simply a false picture to be demolished. The Church teaches that such fear can be a real beginning, and imperfect contrition born of it is a gift of God that can start a conversion (CCC 1453). John is not condemning the beginning; he is describing where love takes you from there. Paul next: the word is *deilia*, cowardice, and the context is a minister told to rekindle his gift, not to be ashamed of the gospel, and to share in suffering for it (1:6-8). It is a word about shrinking back from witness, not a clinical word about a nervous system, and the text does not diagnose Timothy's temperament. Catholic teaching does not identify an anxiety disorder as a demonic spirit or, of itself, as a moral failure; the Church sends her anxious children to the sacraments and, gladly, to doctors (Session 1). Whether Paul means the Holy Spirit directly or the disposition the Spirit produces is disputed, and it does not change the point: what God gives is ordered to power, love, and self-control rather than to cowardly withdrawal. Read rightly, both verses turn protective: one promises the death of servile fear as love grows; the other insists your anxiety cannot disqualify you from mission.

Now read Romans 8:31-39 aloud: one strong reader, slowly, the group following silently. Let the reading itself do the work; do not talk over it. Then a full ten seconds of silence before question 4.

5. Anxiety's deepest whisper is separation: you are alone, you will be abandoned, no one holds this. What does Paul's argument do to that whisper, and what makes his list (tribulation, distress, peril, sword) credible rather than rhetorical?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Paul answers the whisper at its root, not its branches. He does not promise the absence of tribulation, distress, famine, or sword; his sentence assumes they come ("in all these things," 8:37). What he removes is their power to do the one thing anxiety most fears: separate. The ground is 8:32, the study's deepest logic: the Father "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all," so he will not withhold what he wills for our salvation and final glory. Be exact rather than sweeping: this is not a promise that no good thing will ever be taken from you (verse 35 lists what will in fact come), and it is not a promise that a person cannot walk away, since grace does not abolish our freedom and grave sin remains a real possibility with repentance always open. What it promises is that no suffering, no persecutor, no power, and not death itself can force you out of the love of God in Christ. The list is credible because Paul is reading his own resume (beatings, shipwrecks, prisons; 2 Cor 11); this assurance was composed inside the catalogue, not above it. "Neither death, nor life... nor things present, nor things to come... will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord": things to come, the anxious imagination's entire territory, is on the list, disarmed.

DIG DEEPER

Is 43:1-2: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you." Have someone read it. Notice the grounds: not "the waters are shallow" but "you are mine" and "I will be with you." Ownership and presence: the same two grounds as John 14, Romans 8, and every "fear not" this study has met. Isaiah does not say the waters are shallow. He says whose you are, and who is in them with you.

Commissioning

Say: "On Easter evening, peace came with a sending attached: as the Father has sent me, even so I send you. Six weeks ago most of us walked in carrying anxiety and, many of us, shame about the anxiety. Tonight you are sent as carriers of what you have received. Not as people who have finished with fear, but as people who know where peace lives and can walk someone else there." *Then, concretely: each person writes two things on a card: (1) one person in their life who is carrying anxiety, and (2) one concrete act toward them this month: a conversation, an invitation to Mass, a shared psalm, a Gethsemane sentence taught. Cards go home in wallets. If the group wishes to continue meeting, name the next study tonight before you dismiss.*

Send

S1. Who is on your card, and (as much as you care to share) what is your one concrete act?

S2. Which single practice from these six weeks (the nightly sentence, the manna rule, the lament aloud, the broom-tree mercy, the Gethsemane pattern, the evening cast) will you keep? Name it out loud; the room is your witness.

Live It: From Here On

- **Keep one practice permanently.** The one you just named. One habit kept is worth six admired.
- **Receive the peace at Mass on purpose.** From now on, the embolism and the Rite of Peace are yours: pray them deliberately, every week, as the anxious heart's liturgy.
- **Carry the card.** The lines traditionally kept as St. Teresa's, in your wallet beside your commissioning card: let nothing disturb you... God alone suffices.
- **When the waters rise,** the pocket prayer still fits: "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you." (Ps 56:3)

Memory verse: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:27)

Closing: The Peace

Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles: Peace I leave you, my peace I give you.

Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and graciously grant her peace and unity in accordance with your will.

Send your Spirit, the Counselor you promised, upon each of us, and let no heart here leave troubled or afraid. Amen.

Then say simply: "Let us offer one another the peace of Christ." (The greeting "The peace of the Lord be with you always," with its response, belongs to the priest at Mass; do not take it here.) Unhurried, let everyone offer one another Christ's peace, by name: "N., peace be with you." Let this, and nothing else, be how the study ends.

PART 3: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

PASSAGE	WHERE IT IS USED
John 14:25-27	Opening read: the Paraclete promise ending in the gift of peace
John 14:27	Main text and memory verse: the bequest of peace
John 20:19-21	Live Discovery: the promise kept; wounds inside the peace; the sending
John 11:33; 12:27; 13:21	Thread payoff: the troubled Jesus (Session 1)
Rom 8:31-39	Read aloud: nothing can separate; 8:32 the deepest ground
2 Cor 11:23-27	Answer 4: Paul's list is his resume
1 John 4:12, 17-18	Hard verse one: <i>teleia agape</i> , love brought to completion; fear of punishment; trajectory not verdict
2 Tim 1:6-8	Hard verse two: <i>deilia</i> , mission cowardice; rekindle the gift
Ps 44:22	Quoted at Rom 8:36, though the session does not stop on it
Mark 14:36	Answer 2: "Abba... yet not what I will," recalled from Session 4
Luke 10:42	Answer 3: "one thing is needful," the <i>merimna</i> thread closing
Ps 42:5, 11; 43:5	Thread Watch: the refrain from Session 3
Ps 56:3	Live It: the pocket prayer carried out of Session 3
Is 43:1-2	Dig Deeper: you are mine; I will be with you
Num 6:26	OT Roots: the priestly blessing ends in peace
Luke 23:46	Voice background: the source of de Foucauld's abandonment
CCC 1832; 1468; 1453; 1520	Catechism Connection: fruit of the Spirit; Confession; imperfect contrition; Anointing