

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)