

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