

# Rest: A Small Group Curriculum

## Lesson 2

### REST FROM ANXIETY

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#### Preface:

This is Lesson 2 of *Rest: A Small Group Curriculum*. This lesson centers around the theme Rest from Anxiety. You could use this lesson within the context of the curriculum or as a stand-alone lesson in-person or online with a small group of participants as well as a large group that has the ability to break off into smaller groups. You're welcome to use *Rest: A Small Group Curriculum* on a weekly basis or on a daily basis. Though designed with students in mind, this lesson is incredibly applicable to all ages. Individuals are welcome to use this lesson as well.

The Guiding Question for this lesson is:

How do we walk with the Prince of Peace when our lives are plagued by anxiety, worry, and stress?

We encourage you to think about what that means for yourself before leading your participants through this lesson.

Students in particular are vulnerable to anxiety in today's culture. Helping your students feel comfortable and know that they are in a safe space where they are able to share their struggles with their peers can be a powerful setting for spiritual transformation. Even in that setting, some participants are going to be reluctant to share and that is okay! We have found that, generally, it's not beneficial to pressure them into sharing.

#### Key Passages:

Matthew 11:28-30, Mark 1:29-36, John 16:33, Philippians 4:6-9

#### Things You and Your Participants Will Need:

- Bible
- Paper (Printer Paper, Index Cards, Newspaper) and Writing Utensil
- Musical Instruments (Optional)
- Colored Pencils, Pens, or Markers (Optional)

## Introduction

### 3 MINUTES

**Say:** Welcome back, everyone! I hope you're well. Go ahead and break off into small groups if you're not already in them. If you don't know the people you're with be sure to say your name. This time also mention where you were born.

#### [ICE BREAKER]

Now, we're going to play the game **Zoom - Mooz**. Go ahead and form a circle (if you're playing in person) and pick a person to begin. The person you picked will determine the order each of you will say the word Zoom. The same would be true if you were playing online via video platform. The goal of the game is to be able to pass the word Zoom beginning with the person you picked and ending with the last person in the order established.

Once you've passed the word Zoom all the way around one time, do it again, but this time use a stopwatch and time yourself. See how quickly you all can pass around the word Zoom again. And remember, each person must finish saying Zoom before the next person starts!

Once you've gotten really good at it, change the order of the people passing around the word Zoom, and see which ordering of people can pass the word faster. Finally, if you have time, pass around the word Mooz. And if you're really crazy, pass both words around at the same time.

Ready. Set. Go!

**Say:** Alright, let's get started! Go ahead and pull out your Bible to turn to or pull up Mark 1:29-36.

## We All Feel Anxious About Something

### 5 MINUTES

**Say:** Using three words or less, how would you describe what anxiety *looks* like for you.

**Say:** Now, in three words or less, what does anxiety *feel* like to you?

**Leader's Note:** Begin by sharing some of your own anxious thoughts, fears, or worries. They do not necessarily have to be true in the present moment. You could share something from your past that illustrates your struggle. Here the point is not for participants to hear your entire story, so keep an eye on the time. Yet in sharing a bit of your own story, you want to break the ice and help others realize this is a safe space to talk about these things.

You could use some of these examples:

How will I pay for that? What will my friends think of me? Who will love and affirm me?

**Say:** Often the church is great at acknowledging the good and beautiful things God is doing in our lives. Hopefully, worship also speaks to the more difficult times in our lives. Life lacks certainty and is full of hardships and suffering. But God is certain, trustworthy, and isn't going anywhere. That's something we can rest in.

But when it comes down to it, why is it so hard to actually rest from anxiety, fear, and worry? Why does our attention so easily focus on the things in our lives that lack certainty? This brings us to our guiding question for this lesson:

How do we walk with the Prince of Peace when our lives are plagued  
by anxiety, fear, and worry?

And speaking of the Prince of Peace, it would do us well to go to scripture and see how Jesus rested from anxiety.

## Scripture 5 MINUTES

**Leader's Note:** Invite everyone to open their Bible and turn to Mark 1:29-36. Ask someone to read this passage. Begin an "observation conversation" about the passage. Use the following questions as a guide to lead you through this discussion.

**Say:** What was Jesus doing before he went off by himself and found a quiet place?

[Allow a moment for participants to answer.]

[Answer: Healing many people and preaching to thousands of people.]

**Say:** I don't know about you, but I imagine healing people of impure spirits and preaching to thousands of people would take its toll on you. Jesus had sick people coming to him in droves. He had hungry people coming to him looking for food. He had religious leaders and authorities spying on him, questioning his teachings, and looking for ways to stop him.

If I were Jesus, I would want to find a quiet place to chill for a bit too. Jesus was fully God, but he was also fully human, just like us. He got tired of people. He probably got tired of his disciples. He probably got tired of everyone looking to him to heal them and feed them. He probably got tired of people not understanding his message. He probably got tired of pharisees trying to derail his ministry.

And so, Jesus leaves and rests. Jesus finds a quiet place. What time of day does he do this?

[Allow a moment for participant(s) to answer.]  
[Answer: Early in the morning, while it was still dark.]

**Say:** And what happened next?

[Allow a moment for participant(s) to answer.]  
[Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you!"]

**Say:** Do you ever just want to be alone? Are there days when you don't want to go to school, you don't want to go home, you don't want to go to soccer practice, or band practice?  
[Allow a brief moment for most, if not everyone, participating to say or nod that they have.]

Are there days you don't want to deal with particular people? Are there days you're overwhelmed and frustrated and tired and weak?  
[Allow a brief moment for most, if not everyone, participating to say or nod that they have.]

**Say:** Jesus felt that too. And so, he went off by himself, casting his cares upon a Father who cares for his son. He releases his grip on the worries of this world that could plague him in order to receive the peace and power to do what he came here to do.

We are encouraged to do likewise. We read in 1 Peter that we are to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time we may be exalted, casting all our anxieties on him, because he cares for us. (1 Peter 5:6-7)

Jesus becomes the person on whom we can cast our cares, our fears, and our anxiety. He receives them with open arms on the cross and in doing so, extinguishes the power they hold over our lives. He says, "In this world you will have tribulation. *But take heart; I have overcome the world*". (John 16:33) The work of the cross frees us from the oppressive burden of anxiety, putting to the rest the incessant voices of fear and worry. Jesus' resurrection has made a way for us to know him in the midst of loss, death, failure, and judgement. Even if we cannot see a way through our anxiety, we can see Christ, whose resurrection has made a way.

To cast something off means that we are to let go of it. In letting go, we open ourselves up to receive just as Jesus did early that morning. And so, break up into Small Groups and take a couple minutes to answer these questions:

- How do you cast your cares, worries, fears, and anxiety upon Jesus?  
(Describe how, when, and where you take the time to sit with Jesus and cast your cares upon him.)
- When something overwhelms you, what is typically your first response? Is that a helpful response, or a harmful one? What are some things that help you transition from being overwhelmed to looking to God for help, guidance, and comfort?

## Introduction to Casting Our Cares

### 5 MINUTES

**Say:** There are many ways to cast our cares upon Jesus. We typically think about this the way Jesus did, in a quiet place by ourselves. But we are also invited to do this each and every Sunday in corporate worship. God does not ask us to leave our cares at the door, but instead invites them in with us so that we may cast them upon him. We can cast our anxiety upon God in a coffee shop having an honest conversation with a friend or in a counselor's office.

We can also do this by pouring these things into our work. Some of the best art is art that is able to speak to these things that we so often don't want to talk about. Some of the most moving songs or plays or sermons are ones that help us realize that we are not alone in our fears, worries, doubts, and anxiety. (This is why breakup songs are so popular ... ) They give us a place to exchange our cares and anxiety for comfort and healing.

**Say:** And so, we're going to take these next few minutes to cast our cares and anxiety upon God by creating something. You may create anything that you feel inspired or led to create. You can use this time to write a poem or song lyrics, play or sing a song, write a short devotion, visually map out a short play or drama, or draw or create a visual art piece.

My hope and prayer for you all is that this would be an opportunity to rest from listening to the voices of anxiety and instead to listen to the voice of God, a voice that encourages and equips us. The Prince of Peace gives us peace by means of the Holy Spirit, who comforts and restores us.

We are encouraged by Paul to not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, to present our requests to God. And this is when the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Our hearts and minds are then free to think on whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, and excellent. (Philippians 4:6-9)

And even still, we as Christians are not promised a life free of suffering and anxiety. In fact, we are promised the opposite. So much so that it is in our suffering that we become more like Christ. We become keenly aware of our dependency upon God to lead and guide us through this life.

Casting our cares upon Jesus often does not allow us to escape the world. What it does do, however, is allow us the opportunity to rest from it and its concerns, its fears, its principalities and powers. We can lay those aside, knowing that God sustains us and is even sanctifying us in the midst of a broken world. This is why we return to God, just as Jesus did, quietly resting and trusting in God's goodness and strength, God's provision and will, believing that though our path will involve suffering, it leads to resurrection.

Jesus says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30

And so, as you cast your cares upon the Prince of Peace, I invite you to rest from your fears, worries, and anxiety.

## Casting Our Cares Upon God – An Artistic Exercise

### 5-30 MINUTES

[If no one in your group is working on a music-based project, perhaps playing the Center for Worship and the Arts playlist on Spotify could help inspire creativity and connection.]

[Allow an ample amount of time to complete this activity. Participate in the activity yourself while still monitoring how everyone is doing.]

[If you’re running this curriculum online, this activity likely is best implemented asynchronously as “homework” before the next session. Then, at the beginning of the next session, you can pick up with the subsections below before you move on to the next lesson.]

## Sharing Your Story

### 5 MINUTES

**Say:** Let’s finish up and then get together in Small Groups in order to take a couple of minutes to answer these questions and to share your art with your group. Don’t be afraid to talk about what inspired you to create what you crafted and how it helped you rest from anxiety and cast your cares upon the Prince of Peace.

[Allow ample time for this sharing, processing, and reflection to occur. Move between the groups to listen and reflect with them.]

## Wrap Up

### 1 MINUTE

**Say:** I am so encouraged by the beautiful things you have created. It’s said that light shines brightest in the darkness and this is true with art. And so, may your beautiful work, shine in the darkest parts of our lives, reminding us that God loves us, is for us, and is with us. I hope that this time helped you to rest from anxiety. Even when we experience anxiety, we are invited to worship God in the midst of it, because it is Jesus who knows what to do with our fears and doubts.

Though this life lacks certainty, we can be certain that the Holy Spirit is with us to comfort, protect, and restore us. In our restoration, may our lives and our worship bear witness to Jesus, and in that may we help others rest from their own anxieties.

## Closing Prayer

### 1 MINUTE

[Choose a person in your Small Group to offer a closing prayer on behalf of the group.]