

IGNITE



focus
fellowship of Catholic
university students



Do Not Be Anxious About Anything

UNDERSTANDING

(for your preparation as a leader)

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DISCUSSION

(to use with your group)

Pages 23 - 27

UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Anxiety and Happiness

This second chapter of the Ignite Bible Study proposes to participants that God's providence is sufficient to quell all anxiety and is also a true and lasting source of happiness. So many people across so many generations struggle with relentless anxiety about their lives. We worry about our careers: Have I chosen the right path? What will it take to achieve the success I hope for? We worry about our finances: Do I have enough? What if something unexpected happens? We worry about our family and friends: Will he recover from this health crisis? Will she find her place in the world? Am I being a good friend, sibling, parent, etc.? And this is just to name a few areas of worry!

Huge questions plague men and women of all ages, especially when it comes to the plans for their lives and the task of securing what they may require to achieve happiness. This study hopes to unearth the relationship that exists in our hearts between anxiety and fearing being in need. Through the words of the Gospel, we will propose to members of the group that a relationship with Jesus is the surest guarantee of all that we need, and the fruit of such confidence in Him will lead to peace and happiness in our lives.

The conversation prompted as the chapter begins offers participants the chance to reflect on their experience of happiness and anxiety. We turn to the writing of Fr. Jacques Philippe to make the connection between anxiety and being in need clear:

"The most common reason for which we could lose our sense of peace is a fear caused by certain situations which touch us personally, and in which we feel threatened, apprehensions in the face of present or future difficulties, fear of lacking something important, of not succeeding in such and such a project, and so forth. The examples are infinite.... In fact, in each instance, it concerns a good [material, moral, spiritual] ... that we desire and are afraid to lose or not acquire, or which we in fact lack. And the restlessness generated by this lack causes us to lose our peace" (Searching for and Maintaining Peace, 23).

As Fr. Jacques Philippe puts it so succinctly, we fear being in want – whether that be now or in the future. We fear never securing what we hope to secure, and we fear losing whatever we have already secured sometime in the future.

As a remedy to this fear, the group will read Matthew 6:25-34. In this passage, Jesus explicitly invites (and even commands) us not to be anxious. But he doesn't expect us to simply stop being anxious of our own accord. He tells us not to be anxious about anything because he and his heavenly Father know what we need and will give it to us:

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more

clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore, do not be anxious about anything, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day.

In the discussion that follows, we want to draw out the fact that if fear of being in want leads to anxiety, then the antidote to our fear and anxiety will be in having our needs met. But unlike other philosophies or self-help strategies, Jesus isn't asking us to provide for ourselves. He, rather, is promising to provide for all our needs. Provision will bring about peace in our lives. But receiving God's providence requires that we trust, in faith, that God sees us and our needs and that He both can and wants to provide for us. This is a difficult task! And requires that we become "little", like children.

In fact, this kind of trust resembles the trust a child has in a good parent. Rather than working ever more to meet our needs, we are invited to adopt the disposition of children who rest happily and peacefully, expecting the provision of their parents to be sufficient to keep them safe, nurtured, and fulfilled.

You have the option of closing in prayer by reading Matthew 11:28-30 to the group, inviting them to rest in the Lord, whose yoke is easy and burden is light.

NOTES

UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

1. Launching Question: What is the happiest moment you have ever experienced? What was it like?
a. Optional: Or have you ever experienced complete happiness?
Allow group to discuss.
2. Do you find happiness now in the same ways or places that you once did?
Allow group to discuss.
3. What things do you imagine you would need to have or need to do to be totally happy in the future?
Allow group to discuss.
4. What kinds of things would threaten your happiness, or could take it away?
Allow group to discuss.
5. How much anxiety in your life would you say is related to a fear of losing the good things you have or, instead, a fear of never obtaining the good things you long for?
Allow group to discuss.

Please read aloud: There seems to be some kind of connection, even if we don't often explicitly realize it, between happiness and having enough or being secure and anxiety and the fear of not having enough or not being secure. A wonderful French monk, named Fr. Jacques Philippe, writes about it in this way:

"The most common reason for which we could lose our sense of peace is a fear caused by certain situations which touch us personally, and in which we feel threatened, apprehensions in the face of present or future difficulties, fear of lacking something important, of not succeeding in such and such a project, and so forth. The examples are infinite.... In fact, in each instance, it concerns a good [material, moral, spiritual] ... that we desire and are afraid to lose or not acquire, or which we in fact lack. And the restlessness generated by this lack causes us to lose our peace" (Searching for and Maintaining Peace, 23).

6. How have you experienced this fear of lacking what you need or perhaps how do you experience it even right now? What is scary about lacking what we think we need?

Allow group to discuss.

7. What kinds of things do you do, or do people around you do, to try to calm this fear?

Allow group to discuss.

Please read aloud: We could work our whole lives trying to obtain everything we desire; many (if not most!) people do. Some people achieve that and more – but does that guarantee happiness? Is happiness found in possessing enough? God actually has something to say explicitly about just this. Through Jesus's words in Matthew's Gospel we can hear God directly speak to us.

Read Matthew 6:25-34

8. What is your first reaction when Jesus tells you not to be anxious about anything?

Allow group to discuss.

9. How do Jesus's words about anxiety comfort or challenge you?

Allow group to discuss.

10. Why does Jesus tell us not to be anxious? How is Jesus's approach to anxiety different than other things you have heard?

Allow group to discuss.

Answer: The Christian perspective on happiness and anxiety is unlike other religions or philosophies. The goal is not to empty ourselves of desire (like Buddhism) or master all of our emotions so we are in control of everything, unmoved by negative experiences or emotions (like Stoicism). Rather we believe that happiness comes from fulfilling relationships and security (which crowds out anxiety) comes from the ways in which those relationships provide for our needs. Our relationship with God is ultimately the place of the deepest possible security and fulfillment.

Please read aloud (or share something similar): In this short snippet of Matthew's Gospel, I hope you can get a taste of the provision or "providence" that God promises for you. Sometimes many people may find they were happiest as children, when they had few worries – often due to the reality that someone (like their parents) was taking care of them and providing for them; they had few things to be anxious about then. Even if our childhood was not like this, we can live in this child-like peace today when we have confidence in the Fatherhood of God, who provides for us in all things. In future bible studies, we will

study the ways God has provided for humanity throughout history and continues to through the saving mission of Jesus Christ.

11. Jesus says our heavenly Father does “much more” for us than He does for the birds of the air or lilies of the field, who “neither sow nor reap nor gather” and yet plenty is provided for them. What would life be like if we believed and trusted that we have a good Father who “sees all these things” that we need? Do you trust God provides for you?

Allow group to discuss.

12. How do you walk away today knowing that the words straight from Jesus’s mouth to you are ones of consolation and the promise of having enough? What impression of Him does that leave you with?

Allow group to discuss.

Please read aloud: The life of a Christian often demands regaining characteristics we naturally possessed as children. This is hard work! And life as a fully grown person is demanding, filled with many duties and worries. But Jesus speaks to us in this space, in our anxiety or in our weariness, and invites us to draw near. My invitation is that you might draw near and learn more about who he is through bible study this year.

For now, we’ll close in prayer.

Optional: But as we leave here today, let’s close with one more passage from St. Matthew’s Gospel.

Read Matthew 11:28-30, leaving some time for quiet meditation, then close the group in a prayer.

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