

## youthESource Bible Study

# From Above, Around, or Within...

## What Causes Teen Anxiety and How to Cope

By Kristin Schmidt

Adolescents today seem like they "have it all": technology, opportunity, luxury...yet in many ways they also seem more anxious than ever, perhaps because of those apparent advantages. Teens receive and interpret stress from various sources. Some of it comes from parents or teachers, eager to see youngsters succeed. High expectations incite worry when students wonder what consequences await a failure to match up. Teenagers also feel peer pressure from those around them. They desire to fit in with others in their age group and worry what friends or classmates might think about how they act or what they say.

A lot of teen stress, though, comes from within. These kids have high expectations for themselves (partly brought on by culture, often by mentality). Especially with modern social media broadcast trends and high-stakes academia, it can be easy for students to place pressure on themselves and worry about potential outcomes. Whatever the source, though, the fears and anxiety are real and can be quite debilitating. This devotional Bible study seeks to discuss and address some of those stressors, and to guide students back to the peace that passes all understanding, found in Christ alone.

**Bible Focus:** There are many things that tend to bring stress in our lives. We fall into anxiety and drift away from God, allowing our focus to fix upon other things that we think will bring us peace. Ultimately, only a solid concentration on HIM will truly calm our souls.

**Student application:** Scripture reveals that a lifestyle of steadfast prayer and genuine focus on God's presence will soothe our anxious hearts. No matter where we are or what we do, when we are willing to root ourselves in God's promises, we can find peace in the midst of struggle.

**Lesson Opener:** Harder with distractions...have students participate in a couple of actions that require focus, and demonstrate how much harder it is to do them while under stress...for example:

- Stand on one foot, and grab the other foot. Is this easier with eyes open or closed? Is it easier while looking around or fixing eyes on one spot? Is it easier when the standing foot wiggles or stays firmly planted? (should provide example of our need to be rooted and focused)
- Have students write down or sing the lyrics to a song like "Jingle Bells." Once they begin, play (or sing, if you dare) another song to distract them (it's harder with something else playing!).
- Have students toss a hankie or two. Then throw them another, and another. The more scarves/hankies, the tougher it gets to juggle them all.
- Have students stand in a circle and pass a ball or balloon around. Then add on another ball/balloon. Again, the more things are in the air, the more stressful or challenging it becomes to manage them all.

After a few of these activities (or more), explain that we are going to talk about stress. Encourage students to share things in their daily lives that make them feel stressed, or worried, or anxious. What causes the most concern? Is it tests? Peers at school? Grades? Sports? Expectations? Allow each student to come up with something. If time and resources (and creativity) allow, you might even have them draw or sculpt out of Play-doh an image of what bothers them most. Ask students what helps combat the stress. How can they calm down, or can they? Describe how the Bible provides some wonderful support on this topic, and inform students that we will take a look at some ways we can counter anxiety with joy and peace.

**Lesson and Verses:** There are many passages in Scripture that serve as reminders of the source of all hope and peace. With different elements and emphases, these can calm our anxious hearts and lead us back to the strength found in the Lord. Provide each student with a list of key verses. Select from the suggested passages below, or choose others that are pertinent to the topic and to what students are dealing with in particular. After giving every student a list and some time to glance over it, play a game of "Peaceful Pictionary." Cut one of the verse lists so that the passages are separated, and give each person in the group a verse or two (or more, depending on size of the group and how long you wish to play). Warm kids up by reading off a paraphrase or key word associated with one or two verses, and see if the person with that verse can identify it. Then, have student come forward one at a time. Have them draw, act, or describe the individual verse they have been given. The rest of the students will look over their complete list and try to figure out which verse is being referenced. Distribute prizes (or points/stickers/high fives) for students who guess correctly. After several rounds, discuss the follow-up questions to bring back the significance.

Verses to consider might include:

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)*

God commands us to give thanks and present our worries to Him, and His peace will take over us.

*Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24)*

Sometimes anxiety comes from our own struggles and we need to confess to God what weighs us.

*A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?  
(Ecclesiastes 2:24-25)*

A lot of our worries are really meaningless. The important thing to do is just live and recognize that God provides every bit of what we have.

*Now all has been heard;  
here is the conclusion of the matter:  
Fear God and keep his commandments,  
for this is the duty of all mankind. (Ecclesiastes 12:13)*

Obeying God and keeping our minds on worship will cover over a lot of our stress!

*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7)*

When we have doubts and fears, the best thing to do is give them to God.

*Anxiety weighs down the heart,*

*but a kind word cheers it up. (Proverbs 12:25)*

If we see others who are anxious, we can cheer them with encouraging words, and often that cheers us up, too!

*"The Lord bless you*

*and keep you;*

*the Lord make his face shine on you*

*and be gracious to you;*

*the Lord turn his face toward you*

*and give you peace." (Numbers 6:24-26)*

We approach other people in peace, and enjoy the peace God promises us.

*In peace I will lie down and sleep,*

*for you alone, Lord,*

*make me dwell in safety. (Psalm 4:8)*

Better than melatonin!

*Great peace have those who love your law,*

*and nothing can make them stumble. (Psalm 119:165)*

There is much to be said for following God's commands and knowing His laws.

*Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior,*

*who daily bears our burdens. (Psalm 68:19)*

God wants to help us carry the load of stress...His son even bore a cross for us.

*You will keep in perfect peace*

*those whose minds are steadfast,*

*because they trust in you.*

*Trust in the Lord forever,*

*for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal. (Isaiah 26:3-4)*

When our eyes are earnestly fixed on the Lord and we live knowing His presence is surrounding us, the peace of the Lord will be with us.

*You will go out in joy*

*and be led forth in peace;*

*the mountains and hills*

*will burst into song before you,*

*and all the trees of the field*

*will clap their hands. (Isaiah 55:12)*

Worship and joyful song can lift our spirits and our burdens.

*So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not*

*worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matthew 6:31-34)*

We don't need to worry about all of the tiny details...our number one goal should be seeking the kingdom of God. When we put Him first and foremost, the rest falls into place.

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)*

Jesus wants us to rest. We rest in Him when we recognize that His humble spirit has already taken our load, and He wants us to live in His footsteps.

*"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)*

We know it isn't always easy beans. The world will give us trouble. But Christ already conquered!

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)*

There is no fear or anxiety here. When we choose to focus on fruits of the Holy Spirit, we can melt stress out of the picture by aiming our eyes on positive blessings.

### **Follow-up Questions:**

- What things stress us the most? *Answers may vary...many have likely been discussed at the beginning, but this will remind us that a lot of what worries us creeps in when our mind drifts from Christ.*
- How can we get rid of the things that distract us and really focus on God? *Sometimes it's as easy as putting down the phone or avoiding social media. Other things might be trickier. Maybe place a sticky note on the mirror, or Bible right on the nightstand, or a verse next to the head phones. Whatever drives our attention back to what matters.*
- What can we do when we feel anxious or concerned? *Pray; talk to a trusted friend or adult; read the Bible or another time-worthy text...*
- There are several passages in Scripture that include terms like "Go in peace" or "Peace be with you"...what does this mean? How can we deal with our own stress by "passing peace" onto others? *When we help others bear their burdens or deal with anxiety, it takes attention off our own worries, and reminds us to be at peace too.*
- What does being thankful have to do with anxiety? *Gratitude is the opposite of worry, in some ways. When our minds are focused on things to give thanks for, we don't think as much about fears or stresses.*
- Why does God care about our worries? *God cares about US...He made us to love Him and serve Him, and when our hearts are anxious and troubled that is difficult. He wants us to live full and complete lives, and wants us to rest in His hope and peace. He does the worrying for us because He loves us.*

## **Weekly Challenge Reminder: It's all small to God...let Him take the load off your plate..**

Ask: Have you ever been to a buffet or a Thanksgiving dinner, and just wanted some of everything? When you crowd up your plate, things eventually start to fall off, and/or the flavors meld together. It is hard to enjoy one thing in particular when there's so much on the plate. And if we fill up on salad or sprinkles or marshmallow-topped yams, we might miss the most important things that are available to us (though let's face it: those yams are tough to beat...).

When we allow ourselves to worry and get bogged down or stressed out by minor details, it takes our eyes off of God. Even things that seem significant to us are often just little specks in His eyes. When we choose the way of peace and we live daily in His presence, it brings us back to the reality of what is most essential.

Have students craft a tiny take-away. Provide each youth with a small something: a coaster, milk jug cap, tiny plate (there are some fun ones available at craft stores), etc. Then have everyone place a cross at the center of it, and if room is still available, surround the cross with decoration: tiny pom-poms, beads, stickers, etc. (why? Because attention to detail takes focus, and tiny things are great!). Provide a caption to attach: "Place GOD first, and let Him handle the small stuff." or "Don't over-crowd the plate. It's all small stuff to God." Explain that when we place God in the center of our lives first, the rest of the little details fall in as they can. Encourage students to place their craft in a visible spot, or if possible hang it or make it into a magnet. Prompt them to do the same with their verse lists, and meditate on them daily.