

Crosswalk Communities Discussion Guides
November 26th

Icebreaker Questions (Pick at the least one question, but use as many as your group feels comfortable)

1. How would you describe your perfect Christmas?

Bible Study Questions

1. Many people refer to the Christmas blues. How have you experienced that in the past?
2. Curtis Chang describes anxiety as moving from the present into an imagined future. What imagined Christmas experiences make you most anxious?
3. Pastor Michael said that anxiety often threatens the things that mean the most...including those that impact our identity. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
 - How do your anxieties relate to the places that you find your identity?
4. Steve Cuss teaches that we respond to anxiety by either controlling, being a perfectionist, having all the answers, needing constant approval, or just making everyone happy. What response do you gravitate toward?
5. Read Matthew 6:25-34:
 - What does Jesus teach about anxiety (worry)?
 - What difference does it make knowing that God provides for his children?
 - Why does Jesus want us to first pursue his kingdom? How does that shift our perspective?
6. Christmas tells the story of God coming into our world. How does his presence help give us peace?
7. Naming our anxiety and the cause behind it is a helpful practice. Is there anything that you need to name right now? What promises from God can you claim to confront that anxiety?

November 26th: The Grinch Within: Anxiety

Hollywood tends to portray Christmas as this magical season in which we gather with family and are filled with joy. Yet, many of us do not have that experience. We often have inward problems, grinch, that rob us of that joy. The good news though is that Jesus has an answer.

I. The Problem of Anxiety

- **Anxiety moves us from the present into an imagined future:** We have an imagine of what we want Christmas to be, but easily imagine all of the things that could go wrong. Anxiety is when we have intrusive thoughts of the possibilities that could occur.
- **We imagine a threat to the things that most give us meaning:** The reason we care about these things is that the imagined possibilities threaten the places that we find our identity. Many of us find our identity in being loved by our family, so a disappointing family gathering reflects on our ability to hold the family together. Some of find our identity as the provider, and not fully providing for our family causes us to feel that we are failures. Some find identity in body image and to gain weight is a threat to that. It is because this goes to our very identity that we can't just turn the anxiety off.

II. Our efforts to manage anxiety fail because we cannot control

outcomes: We often develop management techniques such as controlling the situation, be perfectionist, or just trying to make everyone happy. However, we are not God and cannot control every possible outcome. Therefore, our attempts will always cost us and disappoint.

III. God provides the solution

- **Trusting in a good God who provides:** In Matthew 6:25, Jesus tells us not to worry. In verses 26 through 32, Jesus explains that just as God cares for the birds and the flowers, he will care for us. Anxiety always removes God from the equation. We think that it our job to make sure that everything is right. However, God only expects us to be human sized. We can find rest in trusting in his sovereign goodness.
- **Embrace the presence of God:** In Matthew 1:23, we are told that one of the names of Jesus is Immanuel, "God with us". Christmas reminds us that God has come into our world to be among us. That means that when things don't go right, God sees it all and he is present.

- **Make pursuing his kingdom the priority:** Jesus taught in Matthew 6:33 that we should first "seek the kingdom of God and the rest would be added to us." When we do that, we become more aware of God's power and love for us. Our identity shifts from family, body image, or accomplishments to being able to rest in our place as his children.

Conclusion

There is an exercise that we can do when the grinch of anxiety shows up. When you name something, you are exercising authority over them. Name the anxiety. What future scenario are you imagining? What is being threatened? Once that has been identified, then claim the difference that God's presence and good provision makes. Use that experience to exchange the anxiety for God's promises, allowing his peace to fill us.