

**WHAT YOUR GROUP WILL NEED**

- A quiet spot
- Something to watch a video clip on from YouTube on
- A Bible
- A pen and some paper
- A balloon

**LEADER NOTES**

This session has been adapted from the *Isolated Church: Anxiety* reflection so you can use it with your group online. Feel free to pick and choose parts of it, if you are short on time.



**Make sure you send round the link to the videos (click here) to your group before you meet or have it ready in your video chat to watch at the right time.**

**Tip:** There are a few prayers, passages and quotes included in these notes. As you'll most likely be using this session on a video chat service, text or message certain people in the group with the prayers or quotes at the start or throughout the session and ask them to read them out at the right time - it'll help break up your meeting and involve others too!

**i** **INTRO**

**Explain:** Looking around it is not hard to spot that people are anxious. Maybe it's seeing people rushing to and from the shop with their head down, maybe it's seeing people jump back in fear when someone sniffs near them. Maybe you're feeling pretty anxious as you spend lots of time reading the news and swiping through social media. We want to encourage you to lift up your head, focus on God and learn from our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world who, despite dealing with daily anxiety, have found a peace that really does pass all understanding.

**👤** **ACTIVITY: POP**

Get the group to grab a balloon, get them to give it a stretch, then start blowing it up. When they get to the point when the balloon is well inflated, tell them to keep going. Tell them to keep blowing until the balloon pops...

**Ask**

- How many of you managed it? How did you feel?
- Did it affect others in your house?

**Explain:** Having a balloon pop in your face is not a pleasant feeling is it? This challenge is now over, but the thing about anxiety is that it is rarely over quickly, and you don't get to choose how far it goes - like you did with the balloon. Anxiety can really affect us and it can affect those around us. Our prayer is that this session will help you when you are feeling anxious to get closer to God and His people.

**🙏** **PRAY**

Encourage the group to be still and pause. Ask them to slow down their breathing and focus on God. Ask Him to speak to you all whilst you go through this session!

**You might want to ask one of your group to read out this prayer:**

*Father God. You are good. You are everything we need. Please speak to us as we read these stories. Help us put aside distractions and focus on You. Teach us something new. Let us know You are with us. Amen.*

**VIDEO: CENTRAL ASIA - HALIDA'S STORY**

**If you haven't already - send round the link to the video for people to watch (click here).** This week Naomi shares about Halida from Central Asia "...they can beat us and frighten us - and they do. But they can't take away the love and hope."

**Ask**

- Halida had a friend who pointed her to God, something that ultimately brought her peace. Who points you towards Jesus? (We all need that prompting every now and then).
- Have you ever pointed someone towards Jesus? Can you think of people who need more peace?

**STORY: INDIA - KHUSHAL**

**Explain:** Khushal is a 50-year-old Pastor from central India. Because of his faith in Jesus, and his work as a pastor in his village he was attacked. A mob of people from his village and nearby villages had been turned against him by Hindu extremists, angry that he was leading people to Jesus and away from Hinduism.

*"Around 250 people surrounded my house, they caught hold of me and dragged me for about half a kilometre to the nearby temple. When we arrived at the temple they pushed me towards the idol and ordered me*

Continued...

*to bow down; I mustered all the strength that was left within me and said, 'I will die but I will not bow to this idol.'"*

The beating continued for over two hours until the police arrived and took Khushal to the police station.

*"I really thought the police would help me, but instead they questioned me about how much I give to people to convert them to Christianity. I was appalled. I told them, 'I only pray for people; they convert to Christianity when they see miracles happening.' But no one believed me."*

#### Ask

- How would you feel if your first your neighbours and then the police turned on you? Would it change how you saw your community and your safety?

Two false cases were filed against him – one blaming him for converting people to Christianity using fraudulent means, and the other accusing him of causing riots. However, Khushal was released the next day, as many local Christian leaders protested and secured his bail. He says,

*"After my release, I was happy to be home, but inside my heart I was deeply troubled. It occurred to me that such things could happen again at any time! My family also became very fearful. They kept fretting over my ministry and forced me to stay indoors."*

After this Khushal went for specialist persecution survival training provided by Open Doors local partners. He was anxious about going and leaving his family behind. But, after attending the training, Khushal says he received inner healing. He says,

*"During the training I felt the warmth of God's love and his protection. It felt as if God intended to bring me here to learn. I shared my testimony and my concerns. Many people prayed for me and I was a new person. Much more mature and much bolder!...The seminar reached me at the right time. It worked to strengthen me, my church members and my family."*

#### Ask

- Have you asked anyone to pray for you about your anxieties?
- Why do you think it strengthened Khushal, his church and his family?

Khushal continues to live in the same village he leans forward as he describes his current situation.

*"Right now things have grown calmer and the people living around my house have acknowledged that I had been framed. But in all circumstances I know God is with me." He then adds a final statement in a very strong tone. "Now I do not fear death. Everyone dies one day. I have understood that if I die a little early because of my faith or ministry, I know God will take care of my family and everything else that concerns me."*

#### BIBLE: PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

##### Ask your group if anyone knows Philippians 4: 6-7.

This is a very well-known bit of the bible - it's pretty 'gramable'. (You could have some Bible memes of the passage ready to show at this point and get a young person to read it.)

#### Ask

- What do you think of it?
- Does it seem almost too easy - just don't be anxious, give it to God and then you'll get this incredible peace - peace just like Khushal experienced? We don't want to be flippant, but is it really that easy?

**Explain:** The thing is, it's testimonies like Khushal's and Halida's that can inspire us to take passages like this more seriously - and to dig into finding that incredible peace for ourselves.

#### Get someone to read 1 Peter 5: 6-9 then ask:

- What can we learn from these verses about how to deal with anxieties?

**Explain:** Knowing God's peace starts with humility; with recognising that God is bigger than us. Halida couldn't heal herself. Khushal couldn't get rid of the people that were against him. When we recognise that **we can't**, it leaves space for us to rely on **the God who can**. Verse seven tells us that the reason we can cast our anxieties on God is because he cares. No matter how big or small your anxieties, He cares.

Anxiety is something that can creep back in, in verse eight it tells us that the enemy is always looking 'for someone to devour.' But we can go back to our Philippians passage again for help *"...in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."* Prayer reminds us of who God is and that He is big enough to hold our anxieties, because He cares.

Open Doors is known for getting stories from Christians from all over the world who are doing amazing things in the name of Jesus. Like Halida and Khushal they are standing firm, literally living out 1 Peter 5: 9:

*'Resist Him (the devil), standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.'*

If you want to get more encouraging stories to help you stand firm in this time of anxiety, consider following us on Instagram where we post daily.

#### RESPOND

**Ask your group to reflect on these 4 points – they might be willing to share, or you might want to let them quietly reflect on their answers:**

1. Who lifts my head to Jesus? Encourage and thank them.
2. Who needs more peace that you can point to Jesus? Give them a call.
3. Who can I ask to pray when I'm feeling anxious? Send them a text.
4. Learn Phil 4: 6-7 & 1 Pet 5: 6-9 – can you complete the challenge to learn and memorise these verses over the next week?

#### PRAY

**As you close the session ask the group for any prayer requests. Then pray the following prayer:**

*Father God, we thank You for the example of Christians like Halida, Khushal and our other brothers and sisters around the world who are persecuted for their faith in You. We thank You that they have discovered a peace that passes all understanding and that we too can also have that peace. Help us to humbly ask You, and people around us, to help with our anxieties, and show us people who we can also be praying for. Amen.*