

SESSION FOUR
ANXIETY, FRUSTRATION, AND DISCONTENTMENT

Before Gathering: Read *Respectable Sins* chapters 8 and 9, and then respond to the “Think It Through” questions for this session.

Key Verses: “Cast all your anxieties on him [God] because he cares for you...All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” (1 Peter 5:7; Psalm 139:16, NIV).

GET FOCUSED

Each of us experiences pain and difficulties. Cars break down. Accidents hurt us or those we love. Relationships sour. Certainly you could list many examples. During this session, we’ll consider three common “respectable” sins that often surface during painful or difficult times—*anxiety*, *frustration*, *discontentment*—and their considerable impact.

Anxiety (sometimes translated *worry*) shows up frequently in the Bible. Jesus often spoke about anxiety—once using this word six times in ten verses (see Matthew 6:25-34). (“Sister” words also show up often: “fear” and “afraid.”) Why is anxiety—a fearful uncertainty over the future—among the “respectable” sins we’re examining? Because when we are anxious, we distrust God and we don’t accept His sovereign orchestration of circumstances and events. We chafe under His providential will for our lives when it is different from our agendas.

Frustration usually involves becoming upset or even angry at whatever or whoever blocks our plans or desire. We forget that God’s invisible hand is behind whatever triggers our frustration. As we’ll see, whenever we face frustration we can rely on key resources and probably need to learn to pay attention to certain things.

If all things are in his [God’s] hand if the very hairs of our head are numbered; if every event, great and small, is under the direction of his providence and purpose; and if he has a wise, holy, and gracious end in view...then we have nothing to do but with patience and humility to follow as he leads, and cheerfully to expect a happy issue (John Newton, Letters of John Newton)

Discontentment, which often arises from ongoing and unchanging circumstances we can do nothing about, is sinful when it negatively affects our relationship with God. How do we respond to Him when a job or marriage doesn’t work out, we remain childless, chronic pain continues, or we face burdensome administrative details?

With the Holy Spirit's help, not only can we deal effectively with these sins as they crop up, but we can also experience more of God—and learn to trust Him no matter what circumstances we face.

THINK IT THROUGH

For Personal Study

Anxiety and Frustration

1. When did Jesus teach, in Matthew 6:25-34, about how believers should respond to anxiety (worry)?
2. What do Matthew 26:39 and Philippians 4:6-7 reveal about our need to pray for relief and deliverance from whatever tempts us to be anxious?

When I give away to anxiety I am, in effect, believing that God does not care for me and that He will not take care of me in the particular circumstance that triggers my anxiety of the moment...Anxiety is a sin also because it is a lack of acceptance of God's providence in our lives...[His] orchestrating all circumstances and events in His universe for His glory and the good of His people. (Chapter 8, Respectable Sins)

3. When our faith falters and our situations loom larger in our minds than God's promises, how should we obey Jesus' command in Matthew 6:34 and find hope in Luke 12:6? What insight does Mark 9:23-24 offer?
4. Our frustration, which usually involves being upset at whatever or whoever blocks our plans or desires, has roots in ungodliness because we are living as if God is not involved in our circumstances. What comforting and encouraging insights can we gain from Psalm 139:16 (NIV): "All the days ordained for me were written in your [God's] book before one of them came to be?"

Discontentment

5. What is discontentment? When does it spur us to positive action—and when is it sinful?
6. Jerry writes, “It is our response to our circumstances rather than the degree of difficulty [in them] that determines whether or not we are discontent.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?
7. One of the key verses for this session is Psalm 139:16. How might this verse help us in dealing with circumstances that tempt us to be discontented?

TALK IT OVER

For Group Discussion

1. Why is anxiety so common in our culture—in our daily activities, in advertising, in news reports? How does the Bible’s teaching about anxiety contradict what modern culture teaches about it?
2. Which other sins often crop up if we tolerate anxiety, frustration, and/or discontentment in our lives?
3. Do you think God sometimes allows us to face difficult, unchanging circumstances for reasons we may never know? Feel free to share a situation in which you learned a key lesson because you accepted that situation as part of God’s plan for your life.

4. Discuss this quote from the author: “Suppose someone you love were to say to you, ‘I don’t trust you. I don’t believe you love me and will care for me.’ What an affront that would be to you! Yet that is what we are saying to God by our anxiety.”

5. Throughout *Respectable Sins*, Jerry encourages us to remember God’s attributes. If we believe and remember that God is infinitely wise and loving, and knows what is best for us, then how will we respond to circumstances that tempt us to be anxious, frustrated and discontented? On the other hand, if we think God is simply toying with us and wanting us to suffer, how will we respond to trials?

Group Prayer

In group prayer, thank God for making each of you more aware of “respectable” sins and their impact on your lives and relationships. Ask God for faith to believe that His providential will for you in all circumstances comes from His infinite wisdom and goodness—and is ultimately intended for your good.

For Next Time

Read *Respectable Sins*, chapters 11 and 12, and then respond to the questions in the “Think It Through” personal-study section for session 5.

TAKE IT TO HEART

A Personal-Growth Journal

Personal Reflection

What types of circumstances tempt you to become anxious, frustrated, and/or discontented?

When has God used your anxiety, frustration, and/or discontentment to teach you something, help you grow in a particular area or get your attention and make you more attentive?

Which particular insights, quotations, or verses in session 4 especially connected with you? Why?

Personal Action Point

This next week, carefully note which circumstances tempt you to be anxious, frustrated, or discontented, and when temptation occurs, immediately ask God to help you must and obey Him.

Personal Prayer

Write a prayer thanking God for being in control of your circumstances (even when you don't *feel* that certainty). Invite Him to help you respond in ways that serve and glorify Him.

Progress Report

Since the last section, how did you do at trusting God with your anxieties and accepting His sovereign will?

If you became frustrated or discontented, what steps did you take? Or, what steps *should* you have taken?

In which specific area(s) have you noted progress?