

Session 1: Pretending at the Expense of Peace

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: God's peace offers an alternative to the chaos and stress of life caused by trying to be great in world's eyes.

Head Change: To know that how others view us is not as important as how God views us.

Heart Change: To feel relief from pretending to have peace at the expense of your health.

Life Change: To focus on pleasing God rather than people or ourselves.

OPEN

Have you ever heard of the phrase, “Fake it until you make it?” **When have you had to keep your composure (maybe while disciplining a child, in a meeting at work, or when receiving difficult news, etc.)?**

In times of distress, we sometimes act like anxiety doesn’t affect us, even when we feel it. Anxiety is a common issue and it can feel as if there is no peace to be found in our chaotic world. Although peace can seem evasive, God is the author of true peace and provides a pathway forward to deal with anxiety rather than pretending it’s not a problem.

Pastor Jonathan Pokluda opens this series acknowledging the ubiquity of anxiety but gives us hope that God’s perspective and peace are still available to help us overcome the physical and mental problems anxiety causes.

VIEW

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Jonathan Pokluda’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

Why is anxiety prevalent in our culture today?

What’s dangerous about pretending to be okay and denying your anxiety?

What does it mean to try to be “great” and how does it relate to anxiety?

Watch Session 1: *Pretending at the Expense of Peace* (17 minutes).

REVIEW

Jonathan opened us this session by talking about how he tried to push through his anxiety before a doctor told him that he was over-stressed and needed to slow down.

What do Jonathan's opening remarks about his own struggles with anxiety show about how anxiety can be both a spiritual and medical issue?

Jonathan recognized that anxiety can be a complex issue that goes beyond a moment of distress and can require professional counseling or other medical attention. **In what ways can the help of both medical professionals and pastors or Christian community work together to help fight anxiety?**

Anthony is a musical artist whose efforts to be great caused him to experience anxiety. He talked about the pressure he felt to keep acting like nothing was wrong before his friends helped him realize he needed stop pretending and address his anxiety. **After watching Anthony's story, in what ways was his lifestyle causing him to have anxiety?**

While we may not be in the music industry, how does Anthony's struggle with people pleasing relate to the anxiety many of us may encounter? Why do you think people pleasing can result in anxiousness?

How did pastoral counsel help Anthony work through his anxiety?

Anthony learned an important lesson: life is not all about him but about God's story and God's glory. **In what ways can we become hyper-focused on ourselves rather than God's glory?**

Sometimes when we try to be great, we act as if our lives have a leading role in God's story. **What are some examples of ways we can fight against our tendency to focus on ourselves?**

In what ways can refocusing on living for God's glory and remembering our lives are a small part of his grand narrative help with our struggles with anxiety?

Jonathan talked about how trying to be great in the world's eyes is one way we put pressure on ourselves.

**When have you put too much pressure on yourself?
Why do you think we tend to put this self-inflicted
pressure on ourselves?**

Genesis shared how she hid her anxiety until her life started to spiral out of control and she lost her job. **After watching Genesis’s story, what about her struggles with anxiety have you personally experienced or what from her story resonated with you the most?**

Unfortunately, mental health issues can feel like they are too taboo to discuss in the church for various reasons. **Why do you think many Christians have a difficult time discussing their mental health issues in a church context?**

When was the last time you felt anxious? How did you respond to your anxiety in that moment or season of life?

In what ways could your relationships and church community play a significant role in helping you address your issues with anxiety?

BIBLE EXPLORATION

Read Mark 10:35–45.

Jonathan used Mark 10 to emphasize Jesus’s teaching about true greatness. While the disciples thought greatness was dependent on their status or abilities, Jesus taught them that to be great is to be the greatest servant.

In what ways does Jesus’s teaching about greatness challenge what our society says about what it means to be great?

What does it mean to be a “servant of all”?

In what ways do Jesus’s words about serving others redefine greatness for us as Christians?

What are some practical ways you can emphasize the needs of others above your own in the coming weeks?

LAST WORD

Anxiety is an issue that can be easy to ignore. We can even pretend that our anxiety is not there because we believe we can handle it on our own. However, trying to be great in the world's eyes will not only make us miss the mark of greatness before God, but it can also be detrimental to our health.

It's important to evaluate your lifestyle and what is causing you to stress. Then, go to God and let his standards shape the path you need to take to have true peace.

How much is on your plate? How fast are you running? Are you trying to pretend to have peace when you really don't?

If you're struggling right now, reach out for help and consider the effect trying to meet unrealistic expectations could be having on your mind and body.

DEEPER WALK

Read: Reflect on the biblical view of greatness by re-reading Mark 10:35–45 this week.

Pray: Pray for the members of your church. Be intentional and ask people if they have any prayer requests or needs that you might be able to meet.

Evaluate: Evaluate the sources of anxiety in your life and reach out to others to determine whether you need pastoral or medical attention.

Create: Take the time to create avenues to intentionally focus on others through service. Instead of giving in to self-focus, create ways to focus on others and give of your time, talents, and treasures to things that are greater than yourself.