

Providence-Focused Therapy for Recurrent Worry: An Eight-Week Program for Christians¹

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¹ This program is based on the empirical study by Knabb and Frederick (under review). The format and structure, as well as some technical language, has been adapted from Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2013).

Beginning Handout for Providence-Focused Therapy for Recurrent Worry

Please review this handout before the first meeting.

WORRY

For many adults, worry is a frequent experience. In fact, in a recent sample of working adults and college students, 58% reported worrying every few days.² Unfortunately, recurrent worry can get in the way of day-to-day functioning, including social relationships, work, and church life. Certainly, regular worry even impacts our relationship with God. Studies have revealed a negative association between worry and spiritual functioning, meaning that a higher frequency of worry is linked to anxiety in one's relationship with God.³ Because of this, specific strategies may be helpful to address chronic worry, especially interventions that combine the newest psychological research on worry with a biblical understanding of its origin and antidote.

TREATMENT FOR WORRY

To date, you may have sought many different remedies for regular worry, including pastoral counseling, the counsel of friends or family, herbal remedies, medication, or psychotherapy. Still, some of these strategies may not have worked, leaving you feeling frustrated and discouraged in your relationship with God and others. The purpose of this program is to present a new way to make sense of, and work with, worry in order to improve your day-to-day functioning and relationship with God and others. Within this program, you will learn about an empirical model of worry that integrates the newest psychological research on the topic with a biblical view of the origins and remedy for recurrent worry. Throughout the program, the leaders will draw from psychological science and the Christian faith to support you on your journey towards a deeper union with God, which helps manage and refocus worry. To be sure, this program combines

² See Tallis, Davey, and Capuzzo (1994).

³ See, e.g., Knabb & Pelletier (2013).

cutting edge research that has emerged in recent years linking intolerance of uncertainty to worry with the contemplative Christian tradition. Contemplative Christianity focuses on one's relationship with God, helping regular practitioners to deepen the intimacy that is available to each and every one of us. After all, "to reach out to God is to reach God" in the Christian life.⁴ By drawing from contemplative strategies, this program seeks to help you turn to God, rather than worry, to navigate an uncertain future. We believe that trusting in God's protective care, including His active presence in your life, will help you to accept ambiguity and uncertainty, and, therefore, relate differently to worrying thoughts and behaviors.

REGULAR PRACTICE BEYOND MEETINGS

In this program, which combines psychological science with the contemplative Christian tradition, we will be focusing on your patterns of worry, including the ways in which you have used worry to achieve certainty in your life. Over time, our hope is that you will use contemplative practice as a way to surrender to God your own efforts to predict and control the future. In turn, you will be able to rest in God's arms, fully trusting in His benevolent, protective care. We can more confidently move in this direction when we practice contemplative strategies on a daily basis, rather than only on occasion.

As a result, daily practice will typically involve up to an hour of daily solitude with God and journaling activities. Of course, we know how busy you are, and that this is a bit commitment. However, our firm desire is that you invest in cultivating a deep sense of intimacy with the Creator, which will translate to new ways to relate to recurrent habits of worry. By spending daily time with God in contemplation, you will focus your eyes on Him during moments of uncertainty and ambiguity, rather than resorting to old habits that are keeping you stuck. When this happens, we believe that a new awareness emerges, which helps us to see God's active presence in day-to-day living. Because of the time commitment, it might be helpful to postpone this program if you cannot carve out time for daily time with God, returning to these classes when you have the ability to practice the contemplative strategies on a daily basis.

It is our desire that the introduction and practice of Christian contemplation in your life will lead to a deeper experience of a loving, nurturing God, turning to Him to restore or renew your relationship. At times, though, learning new ways to be present to His divine action might lead to struggles, including frustration, anxiety, or sadness. Still, our hope is that you will continue on, trusting that God is with you in the midst of your interior trials. After all,

⁴ Thibodeaux (2001).

one of the main goals of this program is to invite God into the process, rather than make these inner experiences go away, so as to learn to “be content in all situations.”⁵ In other words, a central component of this program involves learning to tolerate and embrace uncertainty because God owns and directs the heavens and earth—He is exalted and rules over all.⁶ With the help of both the instructors and other Christians in class, you will begin a lifelong journey to find the peace that comes from surrendering to God’s benevolent, providential care.

ASKING GOD FOR PATIENCE AND TRUSTFUL ENDURANCE

For many Christians that struggle with worry, this habitual pattern of the mind can be traced back to childhood, possibly stemming from sudden, distressing surprises in life or unmet needs in important family-of-origin relationships. For others, recurrent worry has developed more recently. In either case, because you have struggled with worrying for some time, using worry to try to manage uncertainty on your own, patience is necessary to begin to relate differently to worrying in the interior life. In other words, the journey towards surrendering control to God takes time, and does not usually occur overnight. Within the Christian faith, Jesus’ parables of the mustard seed and leaven can help us to understand the ways in which spiritual growth can occur from very small beginnings.⁷

In addition, Revelation’s theme of God’s enduring relationship with the church seems to be an unfolding encouragement for the Christian community to remain faithful to the living One that “holds the seven stars and walks in the midst of the seven lampstands” (Revelations 1:16). In many places, the church is encouraged to persevere in the face of overwhelming challenges. To be sure, *hupomonē*, meaning “steadfast endurance,” a “spirit of courage and conquest,” or “transforming suffering into glory,” is used several times within the Revelation of John (see Barclay, 2004), capturing the theme of John’s letter to the Christian church. We believe that *hupomonē*—trustful endurance—seems to capture the journey of relinquishing control to God in the midst of difficult inner trials.⁸

In sum, we ask that you “stay the course,” trusting that God is planting seeds and working in your life to help you with your worry. Through prayerful trust and endurance, our hope is that you will surrender your need for certainty to Him.

⁵ Philippians 4

⁶ 1 Chronicles 29:11-12.

⁷ Matthew 13:31-33.

⁸ This section is taken from Knabb and Frederick (under review).

SESSION 1—THE LINK BETWEEN UNCERTAINTY AND WORRY

Verse

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matthew 6:34)

Theme

The struggle to accept uncertainty is a central feature of recurrent worry. In fact, negative beliefs about uncertainty seem to cause worry. Some of the most common negative beliefs about uncertainty include (a) uncertainty is extremely distressing, (b) uncertainty should be avoided, (c) uncertainty is extremely unfair, (d) uncertainty gets in the way of day-to-day living, and (e) being uncertain means there is something wrong with the individual. Possible reasons uncertainty leads to worry include (a) uncertainty is interpreted with worst-case scenarios, leading to worry, (b) a high level of unavailable information is needed in situations with a moderate degree of ambiguity, leading to worry, or (c) people struggle to effectively problem solve when there is uncertainty, leading to worry. Many individuals use either “approach” strategies, including doing everything oneself, questioning decisions, needing excessive information, or asking for reassurance, or “avoidance” strategies,” including procrastinating and “shutting down,” when faced with uncertainty. Overall, we are faced with two options when dealing with uncertainty—we can either try to attain certainty or accept uncertainty. Of these two options, accepting uncertainty is more realistic and will tend to lead to a reduction in worry.⁹

Goals

1. Introduce the model for the program that links God’s providential care, surrender, uncertainty, and worry, helping participants to understand both the four main ingredients and the model as a whole.
2. Introduce the link between uncertainty and worry, defining Christian worry and helping participants to better understand the role that intolerance of uncertainty—

⁹ These concepts are drawn from Dugas and Robichaud (2007).

including negative beliefs about uncertainty and unhelpful strategies used to attain certainty—plays in the creation and maintenance of worry.

3. Begin to help participants notice and track uncertainty and worry in daily living.

Agenda

1. Establish the orientation of the class.

2. Set ground rules regarding confidentiality and privacy.

3. Ask participants to pair up and introduce themselves to each other, then to the group as a whole, giving their first names and, if they wish, saying what they hope to get out of the program.

4. Introduce program (Session 1—Handout 1).

5. Introduce verse and theme of the week—“The Link Between Uncertainty and Worry”—and pass out handout (Session 1—Handout 2).

6. Feedback and discussion of theme/handout.

7. Distribute homework handouts (Session 1—Handout 3, Session 1—Handout 4, Journal for weekly use) and discuss the homework assignment as a group. Then, in pairs, discuss the timing for homework practice, what obstacles may arise, and how to deal with them.

SESSION 1—HANDOUT 1

Providence-Focused Therapy for Recurrent Worry: An Introduction

UNDERSTANDING REGULAR WORRY

We are excited to begin this journey with you to learn how to surrender uncertainty and ambiguity to God during times of worry. This program is based on scientific studies within the last few years, along with a biblical view of both worry and God’s providential care. Within the classes, thus, we integrate several different disciplines and bodies of writing—contemporary psychological science, scripture on God’s attributes/actions (e.g., providence, benevolence, omnipotence, omniscience) and worry, and the contemplative tradition within the Christian faith. Throughout the course, we define Christian worry as follows:

- The unsuccessful human attempt, through cognitive and behavioral efforts, to obtain certainty about an ambiguous future because of the struggle to believe in, trust, and submit to the benevolent care of an omnipotent God.¹⁰

In terms of the basic ingredients of the above definition, we believe that Christian worry consists of struggling to accept the uncertainty and ambiguity of the future. This part of our definition is rooted in psychological science, referred to as the intolerance of uncertainty (IU) literature. Within this body of research, studies¹¹ have consistently revealed that:

- The struggle to tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity causes worry and anxiety.

Jesus, too, discussed¹² worry and uncertainty:

- “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body

¹⁰ See Knabb and Frederick (under review).

¹¹ See Dugas and Robichaud (2007).

¹² Matthew 6:25-34.

more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

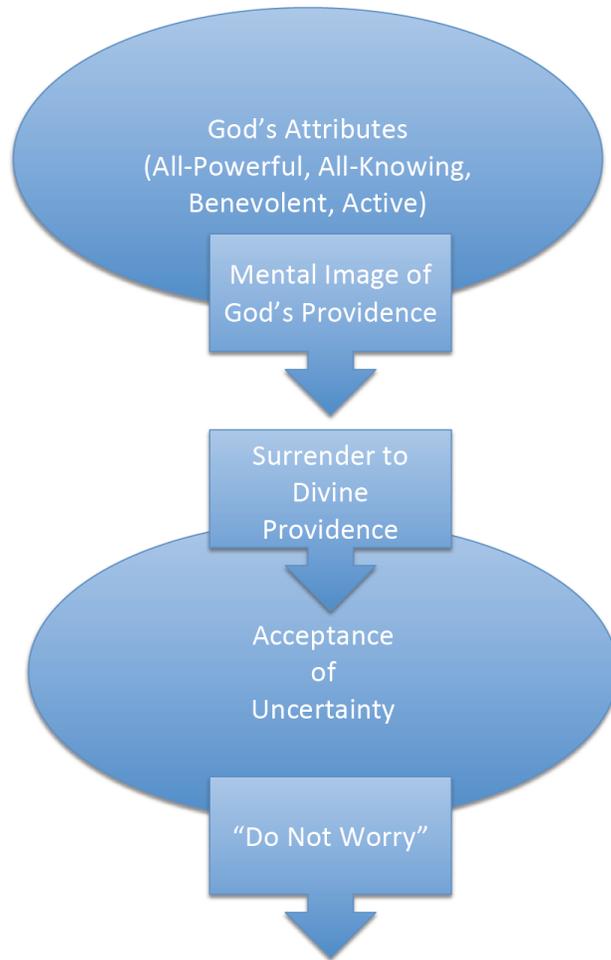
And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 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.”

In fact, Jesus declared that worrying should be avoided because of God’s benevolent, active role in the Christian life. In other words, believers are to refrain from worrying about what the future will hold (e.g., food, clothes) because God will provide for them. Overall, this key teaching on worry seems to illuminate the following:

- The need for a deep trust in God’s providence (e.g., God provides for the birds and flowers) based on his attributes.
- Instruction on surrendering to God’s will (e.g., seeking His kingdom and righteousness).
- Acceptance of uncertainty because God knows what believers need (e.g., worrying about an uncertain future cannot add a “single hour” to the life of the believer).¹³

To summarize, contemporary psychological research suggests that worry is caused by an inability to tolerate uncertainty. In addition, Jesus pointed us to God’s attributes and actions, including His sovereignty, benevolence, active presence, and, ultimately, providential care, to help us surrender worry to Him. Therefore, we believe that combining these ingredients can help Christians to relate differently to regular worry. Below is a visual depiction of our model, integrating psychological science and Jesus’ teaching on worry, followed by a review of the ways in which we believe the course will be helpful to you.

¹³ See Knabb and Frederick (under review).



HOW WILL THE PROVIDENCE-FOCUSED THERAPY COURSE BE HELPFUL TO YOU?¹⁴

In a recent empirical study, we investigated the above model, with results revealing that a deeply embedded mental representation of God's providential care is linked to an ability to surrender to God. In turn, surrendering to God is associated with lower reported levels of worry. In addition, the ability to accept uncertainty seems to partially explain the link between surrendering to God and lower worry. Overall, we believe that Christians employ a deeply embedded mental representation of God's providential care, or God image, to trustfully surrender to God's will, accept uncertainty, and relinquish worry. Sometimes, though, we struggle to trust in His providence, surrender to Him, and, therefore, try to obtain certainty on our own through worrying thoughts and behavior. In order to improve this mental representation of God's providence, surrender

¹⁴ Portions of this section are from Knabb and Frederick (under review).

to Him, and relinquish intolerance of uncertainty and worry, we believe that contemplative Christianity offers the necessary ingredients.

Described as “the practice of silence,” “interior stillness,” and communion/union with God, contemplation is “a surrendering of deeply imbedded resistances that allows the sacred within gradually to reveal itself as a simple, fundamental act.”¹⁵ In a similar vein, Merton defined contemplation as “awakening, enlightenment and the amazing intuitive grasp by which love gains certitude of God’s creative and dynamic intervention in our daily life.”¹⁶

For the purpose of this program, we define contemplative prayer as follows, which is somewhat different from the normal use of the word “prayer” in Christian life:

- “We may think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words. But this is only one expression. In the Christian tradition, contemplative prayer is considered to be the pure gift of God. It is the opening of mind and heart—our whole being—to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. Through grace we open our awareness to God, Whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing—closer than consciousness itself.”¹⁷

Essentially, contemplative prayer is a way to focus on God’s active presence within, beyond thoughts, feelings, and sensations, in order to relinquish control to Him. We believe that this form of prayer, with roots in the Catholic tradition, can help Christians to accept uncertainty and let go of worry because of the emphasis on simply being present to God’s indwelling, like Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus, rather than frantically running around like Martha in an anxious state.¹⁸

As revealed by Foster, the strengths of the contemplative tradition include the following:

- It emphasizes loving Jesus as the foundation of the Christian life.
- It helps practitioners to experience God on a deeper level, beyond mere cognitions or as an intellectual endeavor.

¹⁵ Laird (2006).

¹⁶ Merton (1961).

¹⁷ Keating (2006).

¹⁸ See Luke 10:38-42.

- It captures the fundamental importance of unwavering prayer in the life of the Christian.
- It places an emphasis on solitude and deepening a unique relationship with God.¹⁹

Because of these qualities and strengths, we believe contemplative strategies will help Christians with recurrent worry to accept uncertainty as they deepen their relationship with God, including an awareness that He is present, active, and moving them towards sanctification.

PROGRAM GOALS

1. Understand a Christian model of worry that suggests Christians experience recurrent worry due to the struggle to regularly surrender to God’s providential care and accept uncertainty because God is benevolent and in control.
2. Learn about the contemplative Christian tradition, including a variety of daily contemplative practices to deepen our union with God, beyond thoughts, feelings, and sensations.
2. During moments of uncertainty and worry, learn to use, and apply, a range of contemplative strategies to simply “rest in God’s arms,” rather than employ our own futile efforts to create certainty.

HOME PRACTICE

Each week, there will be daily home practice, possibly an hour per day. In order to integrate this time into your life, we recommend asking these questions and considering these options²⁰ before beginning the program:

- Where in your day will you find the time needed for practice?
- Let others in your family or social circle know what is involved.
- See if you can balance the different motivations that naturally come up, such as being impatient for results versus letting go of your expectations for eight weeks.
- Treat yourself with kindness throughout this time, especially if you run into some

¹⁹ Foster (1998).

²⁰ Adapted from Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2013).

rough spots.

- Use this class as an opportunity to deepen your relationship with Christ, in addition to learning new skills to manage worry.

CHALLENGES OF THE PROGRAM

At times, you might experience discouragement, frustration, or some confusion. If this is the case, we encourage you to discuss these issues with the program instructor and other group members. Above all else, these contemplative strategies take time to develop, similar to a seed being planted and watered daily. In addition, you will have the opportunity to learn new ways to connect with Jesus Christ in the present moment, which can deepen your relationship with Him. This relationship, of course, takes time to develop, and involves moments of discouragement and uncertainty. Still, Jesus tells us that He knocks on the door, and will come in and eat with those who hear His voice and let Him in.²¹

CONFIDENTIALITY AND SAFETY

One of the most important parts of this journey is the creation and maintenance of safety within the group. Thus, the following ground rules will be observed in order to ensure that group members feel safe and everyone understands the requirements.²²

- Confidentiality will be maintained by both members and instructors.
- However, if your instructor has a significant concern for your safety or well-being, including immediate risk to yourself or another, he or she will need to contact friends or family, your general practitioner, or other professional persons who can help to ensure your safety, but only after consulting you.
- Regular attendance is mandatory, and lateness is not permitted.
- Daily commitment to the contemplative exercises is required.
- Advice-giving to other group members is discouraged; instead, group members are encouraged to empathize and support one another.

²¹ See Revelation 3:20.

²² Adapted from Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2013).

PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS²³

- The group starts immediately at _____ and finishes at _____.
- Please try to wear comfortable clothes, given that a major part of each session will involve contemplative practice.
- It is crucial that members attend each meeting in order to get into the rhythm of contemplative practice, including learning and applying the aforementioned model of worry.
- Because the class may be challenging or difficult, there may be instances when you do not feel like attending. Please notify the instructor if this will be the case so that we can discuss your situation and work to resolve any issues that might get in the way of consistent attendance and practice.

²³ Adapted from Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2013).

SESSION 1—HANDOUT 2

The Link Between Uncertainty and Worry²⁴

The struggle to accept uncertainty is a central feature of recurrent worry. In fact, negative beliefs about uncertainty seem to cause worry. Some of the most common negative beliefs about uncertainty include the following:

- Uncertainty is extremely distressing.
- Uncertainty should be avoided.
- Uncertainty is extremely unfair.
- Uncertainty gets in the way of day-to-day living.
- Being uncertain means there is something wrong with the individual.

Possible reasons uncertainty leads to worry include the following:

- Uncertainty is interpreted with worst-case scenarios, leading to worry.
- A high level of unavailable information is needed in situations with a moderate degree of ambiguity, leading to worry.
- People struggle to effectively problem solve when there is uncertainty, leading to worry.

Many individuals use either “approach” or “avoidance strategies when faced with uncertainty:

- “Approach” includes doing everything oneself, questioning decisions, needing excessive information, or asking for reassurance.
- “Avoidance” includes procrastinating and “shutting down,” when faced with uncertainty.

Overall, we are faced with two options when dealing with uncertainty:

- Try to attain certainty.
- Accept uncertainty.

Of these two options, accepting uncertainty is more realistic, leading to less worry.

²⁴ Adapted from Dugas and Robichaud (2007).

SESSION 1—HANDOUT 3

Home Practice for the Week Following Session 1

This week there will be two main tasks between groups:

1. Complete the Worry Diary Form (Session 1—Handout 4) at five times per day.
2. Journal for ten minutes per day about your experience of uncertainty and worry, paying particular attention to specific thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behaviors.

SESSION 1—HANDOUT 4

Worry Diary Form²⁵

In the table below, please record and rate your daily worries, ability to tolerate uncertainty, and behavioral responses, filling in all six columns. Try to be as specific as possible. Use the back of the form if you run out of space.

Date/Time	Worry	Worry Rating (0-10/None to Extreme)	Worry Type (Current Problem or Hypothetical Situation)	Intolerance of Uncertainty Rating (0-10/None to Extreme)	Behaviors Used to Increase Certainty (“Approach” or “Avoidance”)

²⁵ Adapted from Dugas and Robichaud (2007).

SESSION 2—AN INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

Verse

“I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.” (Psalm 131)

Theme

As noted last week, research suggests that intolerance of uncertainty causes worry and anxiety. In addition, our own research suggests that surrendering to God’s providential care is linked to the acceptance of uncertainty and lower anxiety. We believe that contemplative prayer can be helpful in surrendering to God during moments of uncertainty and worry because of its emphasis on yielding to God’s presence and action within. This week, we will learn more about the roots of this practice, its basic characteristics, and practice in the meeting in order to begin to surrender to God’s providence.

Goals

1. Introduce the contemplative Christian tradition, including its definition, main characteristics, and history.
2. Link contemplative prayer to the four main ingredients of the model—God’s providence, surrender, uncertainty, and worry.
3. Begin to practice contemplative prayer with a basic exercise, which will be practiced daily from this point forward in the program.

Agenda

1. Homework review—Worry Diary Form (Session 1—Handout 3).
2. Introduction to Week 2—“An Introduction to Contemplative Prayer.”
3. Review of the basics of contemplative prayer (See Session 2—Handout 1).
4. Contemplative prayer exercise (See Session 2—Handout 2 and CD—Track 1).

4. Practice review in groups of two, then as a whole group.
5. Distribute homework handouts (Session 2—Handout 3, Session 2—Handout 4) and CD, and discuss the homework assignment as a group. Then, in pairs, discuss the timing for homework practice, what obstacles may arise, and how to deal with them.

SESSION 2—HANDOUT 1

An Introduction to Contemplative Prayer

As noted previously, for the purpose of this program, contemplative prayer is defined as follows, which is different than the more traditional use of the word “prayer”:

- “We may think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words. But this is only one expression. In the Christian tradition, contemplative prayer is considered to be the pure gift of God. It is the opening of mind and heart—our whole being—to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. Through grace we open our awareness to God, Whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing—closer than consciousness itself.”²⁶

Contemplative Outreach, one of the leading organizations that presents on, and teaches about, contemplative Christianity, summarizes the essence of the practice²⁷ as follows:

- “Though it has acquired other meanings and connotations in recent centuries, the word contemplation had a specific meaning for the first 16 centuries of the Christian era. St. Gregory the Great summed up this meaning at the end of the 6th century as the knowledge of God that is impregnated with love. For Gregory, contemplation was both the fruit of reflecting on the Word of God in scripture and a precious gift of God. He referred to contemplation as “resting in God.” In this “resting,” the mind and heart are not so much seeking God, as beginning to experience what they have been seeking. This state is not the suspension of all activity, but the reduction of many acts and reflections to a single act or thought in order to sustain one's consent to God's presence and action.

In this traditional understanding, contemplation, or contemplative prayer, is not something that can be achieved through will, but rather is God's gift. It is the opening of mind and heart—one's whole being—to God. Contemplative prayer is a process of interior transformation. It is a relationship initiated by God and leading, if one consents, to divine union.”

²⁶ Keating (2006).

²⁷ See <http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/christian-contemplative-tradition>

In this description, notice that several of the main ingredients, “resting in God,” “consenting to God’s presence and action within,” “opening of one’s whole being,” seem to be antidotes to uncertainty and worry. We believe that one of the benefits of contemplative prayer is the ability to develop a deep trust in God’s providential care by repeatedly surrendering to Him. Within this practice, there is nowhere else to be, nothing else to do, and no effort on our own to control, manage, or predict the future. Instead, spending time with God in the present moment is the sole purpose, allowing Him to work “behind the scenes” in our interior life and in the world around us.

Interestingly, the contemplative Christian tradition has a long history, with many “streams.” Specifically, Contemplative Outreach reveals²⁸ the following about the rich history within this body of writings and practices:

- “Contemplative prayer is by no means a modern addition to Christianity. Contemplative Christian prayer has representatives in every age. A form of contemplative prayer was first practiced and taught by the Desert Fathers of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria, including Evagrius, St. Augustine and St. Gregory the Great in the West, and Pseudo-Dionysius and the Hesychasts in the East.

In the Middle Ages, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St. Thierry, and Guigo the Carthusian represent the Christian contemplative tradition, as well as the Rhineland mystics, including St. Hildegard, St. Mechtilde, Meister Eckhart, Ruysbroek, and Tauler. Later, the author of *The Imitation of Christ* and the English mystics of the 14th century, such as the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Walter Hilton, Richard Rolle, and Julian of Norwich, became part of the Christian contemplative heritage.

After the Reformation, the Carmelites of St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and St. Therese of Lisieux, the French school of spiritual writers, including St. Francis de Sales, St. Jane de Chantal and Cardinal Berulle, the Jesuits, including fathers De Caussade, Lallemont and Surin, the Benedictines, like Dom Augustine Baker and Dom John Chapman, and modern Cistercians such as Dom Vital Lehodey and Thomas Merton, all cultivated practices in their lives that they believed led to the spiritual gift of contemplation.”

²⁸ See <http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/christian-contemplative-tradition>

In this program, we will draw from several of these “streams,” first learning the basic characteristics of contemplative practice, then focusing on Jesuit, Eastern Orthodox, and American versions.

To begin, there are several basic steps²⁹ within contemplative Christianity to deepen our relationship with God:

1. Sit still and straight with your eyes closed, deeply relaxed and awake.
2. Breathe slowly and naturally.
3. Place your hands openly in a natural position in the lap to express receptivity to God.
4. In terms of the mind (i.e., thoughts, feelings, sensations), be present, open, and awake, neither clinging to nor rejecting anything.
 - a. When thoughts naturally arise, endure, and pass away, be present, open, and awake.
 - b. Don't think about thoughts, feelings, or sensations, or not think about thoughts, feelings, or sensations.
 - c. Seek to know God in his nakedness.
5. Strive for nonjudgmental compassion toward self and others.
 - a. Christ-like compassion of all that is lost and broken within us and others.
6. Simply be present in the present moment.
7. Stabilize the meditative practice with an awareness of your breathing as an anchor for present-moment attentiveness.
 - a. When you realize you have drifted off, simply renew your awareness of your breathing.
8. Stabilizing the meditation can also be accomplished with the interior repetition of a word or phrase (e.g., God, mercy, Jesus).
 - a. When you realize you have drifted off, simply practice silently saying the word within yourself again.

²⁹ From Finley (2004).

9. When meditation comes to end, bow to God in gratitude for it and ask God for help in continuing your awareness throughout the day.
10. Meditation can be transferred to other activities throughout the day, seeing God in yourself, others, and everything around you.
11. Practitioners should meditate every day for twenty to thirty minutes in order to have enough time to settle into a meditative state.

SESSION 2—HANDOUT 2

Contemplative Prayer Transcript^{30,31}

Please get into a comfortable position in your chair, sitting still and straight with your eyes closed. First focus on being deeply relaxed and awake, breathing slowly and naturally. Place your hands openly in a natural position in the lap to express receptivity and trustful surrender to God.

In terms of the mind (i.e., thoughts, feelings, sensations), be present, open, and awake, neither clinging to nor rejecting anything. When thoughts naturally arise, endure, and pass away, try to be present, open, and awake. Don't think about thoughts, feelings, or sensations, or not think about thoughts, feelings, or sensations. Just allow these inner experiences to pass through, and trust that God is in control of whatever happens in this moment-to-moment experience with Him.

Just seek to know God in His nakedness, striving for nonjudgmental compassion toward yourself and others. In other words, Christ-like compassion of all that is lost and broken within both yourself and others.

Simply be present in the present moment. Now, begin to stabilize the meditative practice with an awareness of your breathing as an anchor for present-moment attentiveness. Notice your breathing going in and out, and recognize that this is the "breath of life" that God gave to Adam. Notice that you do not have to control your breathing in any way; instead, God is giving you the "breath of life" as a gift, and is in complete control. When you realize you have drifted off, simply renew your awareness of your breathing. Try to notice your breathing in one place, such as the rising and falling of the abdomen, the expanding and constricting of your lungs, or the breath going in and out of your mouth.

Your breathing symbolizes a trustful gaze upon God, similar to Mary simply sitting at the feet of Jesus. There is nowhere else to be and nothing else to do. You are simply resting at the feet of Jesus, trusting in His providential care. Just notice your breathing as a

³⁰ Adapted from Finley (2004).

³¹ Please also refer to the CD (Track 1) for home practice.

symbol of your time spent with God, neither clinging to nor rejecting your thoughts, feelings, or sensations.

Now that the exercise is coming to an end, bow to God in gratitude for it and ask God for help in continuing your awareness throughout the day.

This meditation can be transferred to other activities throughout the day, seeing God in yourself, others, and everything around you.

SESSION 2—HANDOUT 3

Home Practice for the Week Following Session 2

This week there will be three main tasks between groups:

1. Practice the 20-minute contemplative exercise daily (See Session 2—Handout 3 and CD—Track 1), recording the experience on the Home Practice Record Form (Session 2—Handout 4).
2. Journal for ten minutes per day following the contemplative exercise, noting what the experience was like and all thoughts, feelings, and sensations that arose after the exercise.
3. At least five times each day, try to notice and find God, including His active presence. Journal about this experience for ten minutes per day.

SESSION 2—HANDOUT 4

Home Practice Record Form—Session 2³²

Name: _____

Record each time you practice on the Home Practice Record Form with the CD—Track 1. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

Day/Date	Practice (Yes/No)	Comments
Wednesday Date: _____	Contemplative Prayer:	
Thursday Date: _____	Contemplative Prayer:	
Friday Date: _____	Contemplative Prayer:	
Saturday Date: _____	Contemplative Prayer:	
Sunday Date: _____	Contemplative Prayer:	
Monday Date: _____	Contemplative Prayer:	
Tuesday Date: _____	Contemplative Prayer:	

³² Adapted from Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2013).

SESSION 3—AN INTRODUCTION TO IGNATIAN CONTEMPLATION

Verse

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2)

Theme

Ignatian spirituality focuses on “finding God in all things,” with Jesuit spirituality being described as “an active attentiveness to God joined with a prompt responsiveness to God, who is ever active in our lives.” In other words, “everything that exists is born of God,” and God reveals Himself to us in all situations and circumstances as “a lover” Who wants to wrap us in His arms.³³ These qualities lead to a “nowness” with God.³⁴ Within the Ignatian tradition, we believe that meditative exercises can help us to experience God’s benevolent, active presence in new ways, including imagining oneself as fully present to Jesus’ teaching on worry, as well as practical steps to surrender to divine providence.

Goals

1. Learn about Ignatian spirituality, including its emphasis on God’s active, sovereign, loving presence in the world, even in the midst of suffering.
2. Apply Ignatian principles to our understanding of the relationship between providence, surrender, uncertainty, and worry, emphasizing that trustfully surrendering to His providential care involves seeing His benevolent action in all things throughout the day.
3. Practice an Ignatian meditation focused on Jesus’ teaching on worry in order to cultivate a deeper experiential knowing of God’s providential care.
4. Learn about, and practice, several basic steps, rooted in a 17th century Jesuit writing, to surrender to God’s providential care on a day-to-day basis.

³³ Fink (2001).

³⁴ See Jackson (n.d.).

Agenda

1. Homework review—Home Practice Record Form (Session 2—Handout 4).
2. Week 3 introduction—“An Introduction to Ignatian Contemplation.”
3. Review of the basics of Ignatian spirituality (See Session 3—Handout 1).
4. Ignatian meditation exercise (See Session 3—Handout 2 and CD—Track 2).
5. Practice review in groups of two, then as a whole group.
6. Review of “Exercise of Conformity to Divine Providence” (See Session 3—Handout 3)
7. Group discussion on “Exercise of Conformity to Divine Providence”
8. Distribute homework handouts (Session 3—Handout 4, Session 3—Handout 5), and discuss the homework assignment as a group. Then, in pairs, discuss the timing for homework practice, what obstacles may arise, and how to deal with them.

SESSION 3—HANDOUT 1

An Introduction to Ignatian Contemplation

In the mid-1500s, Ignatius Loyola founded the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits, which consists of ordained priests who follow particular spiritual practices and are connected to the broader Roman Catholic Church. Around this time, Ignatius developed a unique type of contemplative spirituality that seeks to “find God in all things,” documenting his vision for the Christian life in *Spiritual Exercises*, which is a four-week spiritual journey. More recently, Jesuit spirituality has been described as “an active attentiveness to God joined with a prompt responsiveness to God, who is ever active in our lives.” These qualities, articulated in *Spiritual Exercises*, lead to a “nowness” with God.^{35,36}

In terms of Ignatian contemplation, several “insights” are threaded throughout the *Spiritual Exercises*³⁷:

- “Everything that exists is born of God.”
- “God dwells in God’s creatures.”
- To “truly understand events in one’s life is to uncover the One who in everything desires to touch the human heart.”
- “Through God’s dwelling God is offering himself.”
- Whether it be things of delight or things of sadness, events are life-giving or events that seem to be destructive, through them all God is present as lover.”

What is more, within the *Spiritual Exercises*, the prayer of contemplation is as follows³⁸:

- “Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Though hast given all to me, to Thee I return it. All is Thine; dispose of it according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is enough for me.”

For the purpose of this program, Ignatian’s second week of *Spiritual Exercises* will be used to cultivate a deeper relationship with Christ by meditating on His life and ministry,

³⁵ Jackson (n.d.)

³⁶ This section is also from Knabb and Frederick (under review).

³⁷ Fink (2001).

³⁸ See Fink (2001).

including His teaching on worry and God’s providence. In other words, the goal is to learn to follow Christ “regardless of where he will lead us” in our journey with Him via the “prayer of the senses.”³⁹ This is done through guided meditations, wherein practitioners “are encouraged to use [their] creative imagination to place [themselves] in a particular biblical story and situation, so that [they] can experience the situation [themselves]. All of the senses are invoked—taste, touch, smell, hearing and sight—to fully explore and enter the situation” in biblical stories. In addition, practitioners are encouraged to actually have conversations with the biblical characters, including Jesus, in order to learn to listen to God.⁴⁰

Finally, some 350 years ago, the Jesuit writer Claude de la Columbiere centrally argued that God is sovereign, and, thus, is the author of all things—except for sin. In addition, he wrote that God is infinitely wise, loving, and good, knowing all human future actions and consequences. Because of this, Columbiere explicated, if Christians truly believed in God’s qualities and characteristics—He is sovereign, infinitely wise, loving, good, and can see future actions and consequences—they would not complain about the “loss or misfortune [they] suffer” in life. As exclaimed by Columbiere, “God is looking after us yet we are full of anxiety!”⁴¹ Overall, within Jesuit spirituality, surrendering to divine providence leads to peace and happiness, rather than worry and discontentment.

In order to guide Christians in their ability to surrender to divine providence, Columbiere presented an “exercise of conformity to divine providence” that involves three steps. We will be focusing on these three steps this week, which you will be able to apply in your daily life.

- “Make an act of faith in God’s providence.”
- “Make an act of hope” that God will meet every need.
- “Two these two an act of charity should be added,” which involves cultivating a deep love for God’s divine providence.

In sum, focusing on God’s protective care, which includes all of His creation, trusting that God will provide for each and every need, and praising God for his benevolent intentions, according to Columbiere, is the “secret of peace and happiness” in our relationship with God.⁴²

³⁹ Fink (2001).

⁴⁰ Mobsy and Berry (2014).

⁴¹ This section is taken from Knabb and Frederick (under review).

⁴² Columbiere (1983).

SESSION 3—HANDOUT 2

Ignatian Meditation Transcript—“Prayer of the Senses”⁴³

To begin, please close your eyes and get in a comfortable position in your chair. As Ignatius instructed, quietly “ask grace of God our Lord that all [your] intentions, actions and operations may be directed purely to the service and praise of His Divine Majesty.”

Now, gently recite the prayer of contemplation: “Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Though hast given all to me, to Thee I return it. All is Thine; dispose of it according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is enough for me.”

Next, begin to see Jesus as he is teaching the Sermon on the Mount in the first century A.D. A crowd has gathered as he is sharing His teachings on topics such as giving to the needy, prayer, and fasting. The hillside is green and spacious, with grass and wildflowers blowing in the wind. The sun is shining, and there is a light breeze in the air. As you listen to Jesus’ powerful voice, you can see the Sea of Galilee off in the distance, radiating a bright blue color in the sunlight. Immerse yourself in this landscape, imagining that you are there among first-century Jews listening to Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus starts to teach about worry, in a gentle, confident voice. “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?” Feel your feet on the grass as you listen to His words. See the sunlight shining on the Sea of Galilee, and notice that you are in the presence of your Lord and Savior. Sense the energy among the crowd as you listen, firsthand, to His words on “worry.”

Jesus continues: “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” Hear the birds as Jesus points to God’s active role in their life. Watch them effortlessly fly through the air.

Jesus goes on: “And why do you worry about clothes?” See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor

⁴³ Please also refer to the CD (Track 2) for home practice.

was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?” Smell the wildflowers and grass blowing in the wind as Jesus points his finger in their direction. See their beauty as you fully surrender to Jesus’ teaching, trusting that He is offering you true peace through this teaching on God’s protective care.

“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.” Feel your way into Jesus’ powerful declaration. Experience a deep trust in Jesus’ words as he confidently assures you that God knows what you need and will provide for you.

As Jesus concludes His sermon, imagine that you are able to approach Him and talk to Him about your struggles with worry and uncertainty. In other words, you are face-to-face with Jesus. Imagine looking into His eyes and being reassured that God is active in your life and caring for each and every one of your concerns. Wait to hear what He says to you about your unique experience of worry and uncertainty. Thank Jesus, embracing him as you surrender to God’s providential care. Feel His embrace as you trust His words and presence.

SESSION 3—HANDOUT 3

“Exercise of Conformity to Divine Providence”⁴⁴

The practice of this exercise is of great importance because of the advantages it always confers on those who undertake it devoutly.

ACT OF FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY

First make an act of faith in God’s Providence. Meditate well on the truth that God’s continual care extends not only to all things in general but to each particular thing, and especially to ourselves, our souls and bodies, and everything that concerns us. Nothing escapes His loving watchfulness—our work, our daily needs, our health as well as our infirmities, our life and our death, even the smallest hair on our head which cannot fall without His permission.

After this act of faith, make an act of hope. Excite in yourself a firm trust that God will provide for all you need, will direct and protect you with more than a father’s love and vigilance, and guide you in such a way that, whatever happens, if you submit to Him everything will turn out for your happiness and advantage, even the things that may seem quite the opposite.

To these two an act of charity should be added. Show your deep love and attachment to Divine Providence as a child shows for its mother by taking refuge in her arms. Say how highly you esteem all His intentions, however hidden they may be, in the knowledge that they spring from an infinite wisdom which cannot make a mistake and supreme goodness which can wish only the perfection of His creatures. Determine that this feeling will have a practical result in making you ready to speak out in defense of Providence whenever you hear it denied or criticized.

⁴⁴ This entire section is quoted directly from Colombiere (1983).

SESSION 3—HANDOUT 4

Home Practice for the Week Following Session 3

This week there will be four main tasks between groups:

1. Practice the 20-minute Ignatian exercise daily (See Session 3—Handout 2 and CD—Track 2), recording the experience on the Home Practice Record Form (Session 3—Handout 5).
2. Journal for ten minutes per day following the Ignatian exercise, noting what the experience was like and all thoughts, feelings, and sensations that arose after the exercise.
3. Practice the “Exercise of Conformity to Divine Providence” exercise daily for 20 minutes (See Session 3—Handout 3), recording the experience on the Home Practice Record Form (Session 3—Handout 5).
4. Journal for ten minutes per day following the “Exercise of Conformity to Divine Providence,” noting what the experience was like and all thoughts, feelings, and sensations that arose after the exercise.

SESSION 3—HANDOUT 5

Home Practice Record Form—Session 3⁴⁵

Name: _____

Record each time you practice on the Home Practice Record Form with the CD—Track 2, as well as with the Session 3—Handout 3 form. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

Day/Date	Practice (Yes/No)	Comments
Wednesday Date: _____	Ignatian Contemplation: “Exercise of Conformity”:	
Thursday Date: _____	Ignatian Contemplation: “Exercise of Conformity”:	
Friday Date: _____	Ignatian Contemplation: “Exercise of Conformity”:	
Saturday Date: _____	Ignatian Contemplation: “Exercise of Conformity”:	
Sunday Date: _____	Ignatian Contemplation: “Exercise of Conformity”:	
Monday Date: _____	Ignatian Contemplation: “Exercise of Conformity”:	
Tuesday Date: _____	Ignatian Contemplation: “Exercise of Conformity”:	

⁴⁵ Adapted from Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2013).

SESSION 4—AN INTRODUCTION TO THE JESUS PRAYER

Verse

“Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” (Romans 12:12)

Theme

The Jesus prayer, drawn from the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition, is designed to help followers of Christ continuously pray throughout the day, letting go of our own will in order to fully submit to Jesus. The actual prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me,” is drawn from numerous passages in the gospels that involved people asking Jesus for mercy, defined as “compassion plus empathy.”⁴⁶ Interestingly, though, these passages seem to convey “cries for help,” rather than merely “requests for leniency,” with the characters asking to receive Jesus’ compassion, forgiveness, and healing. When applied to worry, the prayer can be repeated as a reminder to cry out to God during moments of vulnerability: “The prayer trains you to adopt the stance of asking for mercy, because that is the posture from which you can best see his face.”⁴⁷ Overall, we believe that shifting from recurrent uncertainty and worry to the Jesus prayer will help practitioners to surrender to His providence during moments of distress, constantly praying in order to keep our eyes on Him.

Goals

1. Learn about the Jesus prayer, including its emphasis on God’s mercy (i.e., compassion and empathy) and oneness with God.
2. Apply the Jesus prayer to our understanding of the relationship between providence, surrender, uncertainty, and worry, emphasizing the act of letting go of our own futile efforts to predict and control our future and surrendering to Him.
3. Practice the Jesus prayer, including the role that breathing prays in the meditative practice, in order to cultivate a deeper reliance on God’s providential care.

⁴⁶ Talbot (2013).

⁴⁷ Mathewes-Green (2009).

Agenda

1. Homework review—Home Practice Record Form (Session 3—Handout 5).
2. Week 4 introduction—“An Introduction to the Jesus Prayer.”
3. Review of the history and basics of the Jesus prayer (See Session 4—Handout 1).
4. The Jesus prayer exercise (See Session 4—Handout 2 and CD—Track 3).
5. Practice review in groups of two, then as a whole group.
6. Distribute homework handouts (Session 4—Handout 3, Session 4—Handout 4), and discuss the homework assignment as a group. Then, in pairs, discuss the timing for homework practice, what obstacles may arise, and how to deal with them.

SESSION 4—HANDOUT 1

An Introduction to the Jesus Prayer⁴⁸

The Jesus prayer began when the Desert Fathers and Mothers moved into the desert in the third century to cultivate a deeper union with God. Primarily in Egypt and Palestine, these devoted Christians created a range of prayers to help discipline the mind, which frequently wanders away from focusing on God. In the beginning, the Psalms were heavily drawn upon, although the eventual final version focused on Jesus' interactions with people in the gospels that asked for His mercy. Although some might view the term mercy in the same way we might see someone on death row pleading for his or her life, the word actually seems to capture a "cry for help" among those who seek forgiveness and compassion from their Lord and Savior. Stated differently, the prayer is designed to call out to our sovereign, benevolent God, asking for Him to respond to us with mercy in our time of need. This "calling out," of course, assumes that we know we are in need, whether because of an illness, psychological distress, or some other experience of weakness or frailty.⁴⁹

The actual prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me," captures several powerful ingredients, and is commonly recited over and over again as one breathes in "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God," and breathes out "have mercy on me." To begin, "as we breathe in the word 'Lord,' we allow Jesus to really be the Lord of our lives," seeing Jesus as the source of our new self, found in Him. Next, the words "Jesus Christ" remind us that He is Lord and Savior, and died for our sins in a very personal way. Third, "Son of God" helps us to recognize the mystery within the Triune God, accepting that we cannot fully comprehend God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In other words, we learn to simply allow this ultimate paradox to be a mystery, yet a source of deep encouragement, knowing that God is relational and wants us to unite with Him. Finally, within "have mercy on me," "we beg God, who knows who we truly are, to reveal our true selves to ourselves. We beg the one who is closer to us than we are to ourselves to bring us back into union with ourselves through communion with all in Christ." As we breathe out "have mercy on me," we are able to completely surrender the old self in order to find the new self in Christ.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ This section combines the writings of Mathewes-Green (2009), Talbot (2013), and Knabb and Frederick (under review).

⁴⁹ Mathewes-Green (2009).

⁵⁰ Talbot (2013).

In sum, the Jesus prayer allows us to focus our entire being on Jesus Christ, recognizing that He is our sovereign, benevolent Lord who wants to offer compassion and forgiveness in our time of need. Thus, we breathe in this reminder, and breathe out all of the uncertainty and worry that clouds our vision of Him, trusting that He is completely and totally enough.

SESSION 4—HANDOUT 2

The Jesus Prayer Transcript^{51,52}

Get into a comfortable position with your eyes closed. To begin, simply notice your breathing. Pay attention to the rising and falling of your abdomen as God gives you the “breath of life.” Notice how your breath requires no effort of your own, but naturally goes in and out of your lungs.

Now, when it is comfortable for you, begin to recite the Jesus prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.” Slowly say the words in your mind, allowing them to penetrate your heart. With the in-breath, say the words “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,” surrendering to Jesus’ providential care and allowing Him to be Lord of your life. Allow these words, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,” to serve as a reminder of his sovereignty and power—He is God’s only Son, and personally died on the cross for you. Jesus is mysteriously and intimately united with the Father and Holy Spirit, which is one of the most penetrating realities of existence, yet beyond our grasp. Just accept this mystery with openness and curiosity, serving as a deep source of encouragement.

As you breathe out, completely and totally let go of your preoccupation with uncertainty and worry, feeling a deep sense of trust in Jesus’ protective care. Trust in His compassion and forgiveness, which engulfs your entire being as you simply rest in His loving arms. There is no other place to be, and nothing else to do, as you sit at Jesus’ feet.

Breathe in—“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God—and out—“have mercy on me”—over and over again, each time allowing the words to begin to recite themselves. As you deepen the practice, slowly breathing in and out, let go of the need to achieve certainty or predict and control the future. Instead, allow the Jesus prayer to serve as a reminder of Jesus’ active role in your life and His protective care, which extends to each and every experience and relationship.

Each time you recite the prayer—“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me”—sink into Jesus’ providential care, surrendering to Him as the Lord of your life. Just rest in His arms, and trust that He will guide your future.

⁵¹ Please also refer to the CD (Track 3) for home practice.

⁵² Adapted from Talbot (2013).

As this practice comes to a close, thank Jesus for his compassion and forgiveness, and ask Him to remind you of this prayer throughout your day, especially during moments of uncertainty and worry.

SESSION 4—HANDOUT 3

Home Practice for the Week Following Session 4

This week there will be two main tasks between groups:

1. Practice the 20-minute Jesus prayer daily (See Session 4—Handout 2 and CD—Track 3), recording the experience on the Home Practice Record Form (Session 4—Handout 4).
2. Journal for ten minutes per day following the Jesus prayer, noting what the experience was like and all thoughts, feelings, and sensations that arose after the exercise.

SESSION 4—HANDOUT 4

Home Practice Record Form—Session 4⁵³

Name: _____

Record each time you practice on the Home Practice Record Form with the CD—Track 3. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

Day/Date	Practice (Yes/No)	Comments
Wednesday Date: _____	The Jesus Prayer:	
Thursday Date: _____	The Jesus Prayer:	
Friday Date: _____	The Jesus Prayer:	
Saturday Date: _____	The Jesus Prayer:	
Sunday Date: _____	The Jesus Prayer:	
Monday Date: _____	The Jesus Prayer:	
Tuesday Date: _____	The Jesus Prayer:	

⁵³ Adapted from Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2013).

SESSION 5—AN INTRODUCTION TO CENTERING PRAYER

Verse

“Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)

Theme

Within this program for recurrent worry, we use centering prayer as the central way to surrender to God’s providential care, and, thus, let go of uncertainty and worry. Within this practice, we are cultivating several contemplative attitudes, including listening to God in silence, receptivity in our relationship with God, a gentle spirit, and letting go and letting be, all of which can help us in our struggle with uncertainty and worry. In fact, letting go and letting be is the ultimate act of surrender to God, which involves fully consenting to His active, penetrating love. When we learn to let go, we are relinquishing our own futile efforts to use worry to obtain certainty. In the first four weeks of this program, the contemplative literature as a whole, along with Ignatian and Eastern Orthodox practices, have been employed to help us with recurrent worry. Now, we add centering prayer in order to practice silent surrender to God, using a prayer word to symbolically gaze upon Him and consent to His divine presence and action within our inner most being.^{54,55}

Goals

1. Learn about centering, including its emphasis on consenting to God’s presence and action within in order to let go and let be.
2. Apply centering prayer to our understanding of the relationship between providence, surrender, uncertainty, and worry, emphasizing the act of letting go of our own futile efforts to predict and control our future and surrendering to Him.
3. Practice centering prayer, including the role that the sacred word plays in this contemplative practice, in order to cultivate a deeper reliance on God’s providential care by relating to our thinking in a more gentle way.

⁵⁴ Keating (2009).

⁵⁵ Frenette (2012).

Agenda

1. Homework review—Home Practice Record Form (Session 4—Handout 4).
2. Week 5 introduction—“An Introduction to Centering Prayer.”
3. Review the history and basics of centering prayer (See Session 5—Handout 1).
4. Centering prayer exercise (See Session 5—Handout 2 and CD—Track 4).
5. Practice review in groups of two, then as a whole group.
6. Distribute homework handouts (Session 5—Handout 3, Session 5—Handout 4), and discuss the homework assignment as a group. Then, in pairs, discuss the timing for homework practice, what obstacles may arise, and how to deal with them.

SESSION 5—HANDOUT 1

An Introduction to Centering Prayer

Centering prayer is a modern version of contemplative practice, drawing from the *Cloud of Unknowing*, an anonymous 14th century English work, as well as the writings of St. John of the Cross. William Meninger, M. Basil Pennington, and Thomas Keating—monks at St. Joseph’s Abbey in Massachusetts—developed the formal practice in the 1970s, in part due to the popularity of Eastern meditative practices. In other words, Meninger, Pennington, and Keating wanted to draw from the contemplative Christian tradition in order to help Christians experience God on a deeper level, recognizing a “deep hunger” for a Christian spirituality.⁵⁶

The name comes from the writings of Thomas Merton, who states, “Monastic prayer begins not so much with ‘considerations’ as with a ‘return to the heart,’ finding one’s deepest center, awakening the profound depths of our being in the presence of God, who is the source of our being and of our life.”⁵⁷

Centering prayer helps practitioners to connect to their “center of being,” which transcends reason and is where God is located. In addition, the formal practice helps Christians to simply rest in God in the present moment, rather than ruminating about the past or worrying about the future. Also, centering prayer helps those who regularly practice to surrender to God’s presence and action within. Finally, this form of contemplation helps practitioners to relate more gently and tentatively to thinking, which can get in the way of a deeper union with God. In other words, listening to God involves focusing on Him, rather than our own distracting thought content.⁵⁸

In terms of formal practice, centering prayer involves four steps⁵⁹ and is practiced in 20-minute increments:

- “Choose a sacred word as a symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action within.”

⁵⁶ Keating (2009).

⁵⁷ Pennington (1980).

⁵⁸ Pennington (1980).

⁵⁹ Keating (2009).

- “Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as a symbol of your consent to God’s presence and action within.”
- “When you become aware of thoughts, return ever so gently to the sacred word.”
- “At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.”

During formal practice, we do not chase or push away thinking; instead, we notice when we are swept away by the “stream of thinking,” and gently return to gazing upon God with the prayer word. Interestingly, there are several types of thoughts⁶⁰ that might arise during formal practice:

- The “simple thought,” which consists of all of the thoughts that arise during formal practice.
- The “catching thought,” which includes thoughts that attempt to pull us out of formal practice. An example might be thoughts of doubt or worry.
- The “monitor,” which consists of our attempts to watch our own experience, rather than fully surrender to God’s presence and action within. These types of thoughts might include doubts about whether or not the practice is “working,” or “getting rid of my worry.”
- The “bright idea,” which includes solutions to problems or other thoughts that seemingly cannot be ignored during formal practice. For the worrying mind, this might include some sort of pursuit of certainty or a solution to a constant worry.
- The “stressful thought,” which consists of actual stressful or worrying thoughts that we believe we cannot ignore.

With all five types of thinking, we want to acknowledge the “stream of thoughts,” which does not stop or end, and gently return to gazing upon God with the prayer word. In other words, centering prayer is an act of surrender, including letting go of our own efforts to use thinking to be in control and attain certainty.

⁶⁰ Pennington (1980).

SESSION 5—HANDOUT 2

Centering Prayer Transcript^{61,62}

Get into a comfortable position with your eyes closed. To begin, simply notice your breathing. Notice how your lungs expand and contract, with your abdomen moving in and out ever so gently. Say a brief prayer, asking for God to actively move within you during this time spent with Him.

Now, begin to say the word “surrender” as a symbol of your willingness to surrender to God’s presence and action within you. Just let the word “surrender” hover in your mind. In other words, don’t try to say, or not say, the word. Instead, just allow the words to say itself over and over again as a symbol of your willingness to surrender to God’s sovereign, protective care.

At some point, you will become aware of your thoughts. When this happens, gently return to the word “surrender,” rather than trying to cling to, or push away, your thoughts. Remember to gently return to the prayer word, with compassion, recognizing that the mind is doing what it does—thinking.

Continue to sink deeper into the prayer word, each time symbolically gazing upon God, including His protective care. The word “surrender” reveals your willingness to consent to God’s presence and action within. Just rest in His presence, sitting at the feet of Christ.

Let go of everything other than gazing upon God with your prayer word, just letting everything be as it is because you know that God’s protective care extends to all of creation.

As this prayer comes to an end, just sit in silence with your eyes closed, thanking God for the ability to rest in Him.

⁶¹ Please also refer to the CD (Track 4) for home practice.

⁶² Adapted from Keating (2009).

SESSION 5—HANDOUT 3

Home Practice for the Week Following Session 5

This week there will be two main tasks between groups:

1. Practice centering prayer for 20-minutes, twice daily (See Session 5—Handout 2 and CD—Track 4), recording the experience on the Home Practice Record Form (Session 5—Handout 4).
2. Journal for five minutes after each instance of formal centering prayer practice (twice per day), noting what the experience was like and all thoughts, feelings, and sensations that arose after the exercise.

SESSION 5—HANDOUT 4

Home Practice Record Form—Session 5⁶³

Name: _____

Record each time you practice on the Home Practice Record Form with the CD—Track 4. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

Day/Date	Practice (Yes/No)	Comments
Wednesday Date: _____	Centering Prayer: Centering Prayer:	
Thursday Date: _____	Centering Prayer: Centering Prayer:	
Friday Date: _____	Centering Prayer: Centering Prayer:	
Saturday Date: _____	Centering Prayer: Centering Prayer:	
Sunday Date: _____	Centering Prayer: Centering Prayer:	
Monday Date: _____	Centering Prayer: Centering Prayer:	
Tuesday Date: _____	Centering Prayer: Centering Prayer:	

⁶³ Adapted from Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2013).

SESSION 6—A CONTINUATION OF CENTERING PRAYER

Verse

“Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)

Theme

This week, we will continue practicing centering prayer in order to surrender to God’s providential care. The formal practice of centering prayer can help us to let go of our own efforts to use worry to attain certainty, and, instead, surrender to God’s presence and action within. As we continue with the formal practice of centering prayer, we are trusting that God is working in us, “behind the scenes.” The contemplative attitudes we are cultivating include surrendering to God’s active presence, opening ourselves to God, slowing down to interact with God on a simpler level, gentleness and effortlessness in our relationship with God, letting go and letting be with God, and simply being and resting in God.⁶⁴

Goals

1. Continue to learn about centering prayer, including its emphasis on consenting to God’s presence and action within in order to let go and let be.
2. Learn about the specific contemplative attitudes we are cultivating with the practice of centering prayer.
2. Continue to apply centering prayer to our understanding of the relationship between providence, surrender, uncertainty, and worry, emphasizing the act of letting go of our own futile efforts to predict and control our future and surrendering to Him.
3. Practice centering prayer, including the role that the sacred word plays in this contemplative practice, in order to cultivate a deeper reliance on God’s providential care by relating to our thinking in a more gentle way.

⁶⁴ Frenette (2012).

Agenda

1. Homework review—Home Practice Record Form (Session 5—Handout 4).
2. Week 5 introduction—“A Continuation of Centering Prayer.”
3. Review of the contemplative attitudes cultivated with centering prayer (See Session 6—Handout 1).
4. Centering prayer exercise (See Session 5—Handout 2 and CD—Track 4).
5. Practice review in groups of two, then as a whole group.
6. Distribute homework handouts (Session 6—Handout 2, Session 6—Handout 3), and discuss the homework assignment as a group. Then, in pairs, discuss the timing for homework practice, what obstacles may arise, and how to deal with them.

SESSION 6—HANDOUT 1

Centering Prayer and the Contemplative Attitudes⁶⁵

In centering prayer, we are cultivating several contemplative attitudes that we can carry with us throughout the day. Below is a brief discussion of several contemplative attitudes that centering prayer authors have highlighted in recent years:

- Surrendering to God’s active presence: In centering prayer practice, we are consenting to God’s presence and action within our innermost being. In other words, we find God at the center when we surrender to Him. We do not actively search for Him, but passively submit to Him at our core, where he has always been, waiting for us to fully trust Him. As Augustine of Hippo explained, “God is closer to us than we are to ourselves.”
- Opening ourselves to, and recognizing, God: The prayer word, in this case “surrender,” symbolizes our willingness to open ourselves to God’s presence and action within, beyond thoughts. Within our centering prayer time, we begin to recognize that God is always active and engaged in our inner world. Stated differently, God’s providential care extends to all of His creation, including our psychological functioning.
- Slowing down to interact with God on a simpler level: Centering prayer helps practitioners to recognize God’s simplicity, which is a tremendous gift. Preoccupation with the uncertainty and complexities of life are converted to “awakening to the present life of God.” This, of course, was the deep desire of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, who traveled to the desert to simplify life and simply spend time with God.
- Gentleness and effortlessness in our relationship with God: A major component of centering prayer is the ability to let go of our own efforts, and, instead, gently submit to God. Instead of “struggling to find God,” we simply rest in His presence, with nowhere else to be and nothing else to do. Surrendering to God’s providential care occurs when we let go of our own efforts to achieve, fix, or accomplish, letting God’s gentle presence be enough.
- Letting go and letting be with God: A central piece of centering prayer is the ability to let go of our own selves, including our efforts to achieve control and

⁶⁵ The main contemplative attitudes are from Frenette (2012) and Keating (2009).

certainty, so as to rest in God. In other words, this attitude, cultivated through regular centering prayer, involves “continuously letting go of your attachment to thoughts, emotions, and all things in order to recognize God as the source” of all things in order to trust God. Overall, this attitude helps us to let go of worrying thoughts, and let the uncertainty in our lives simply “be,” given that God is sovereign and actively working in the world.

- Simply being and resting in God: Gregory the Great suggested that contemplative practice involves “resting in God.” This, of course, is one of the main contemplative attitudes we are developing in our centering prayer practice. In sum, resting is like giving in to falling asleep—we simply consent to God’s active presence—and being helps us to fully accept God’s sovereign, protective care, shedding our own efforts to attain certainty through worrying thoughts and behaviors.

SESSION 6—HANDOUT 2

Home Practice for the Week Following Session 6

This week there will be two main tasks between groups:

1. Continue to practice centering prayer for 20-minutes, twice daily (See Session 5—Handout 2 and CD—Track 4), recording the experience on the Home Practice Record Form (Session 6—Handout 3).
2. Journal for five minutes after each instance of formal centering prayer practice (twice per day), noting what the experience was like and all thoughts, feelings, and sensations that arose after the exercise.

SESSION 6—HANDOUT 3

Home Practice Record Form—Session 6⁶⁶

Name: _____

Record each time you practice on the Home Practice Record Form with the CD—Track 4. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

Day/Date	Practice (Yes/No)	Comments
Wednesday Date: _____	Centering Prayer: Centering Prayer:	
Thursday Date: _____	Centering Prayer: Centering Prayer:	
Friday Date: _____	Centering Prayer: Centering Prayer:	
Saturday Date: _____	Centering Prayer: Centering Prayer:	
Sunday Date: _____	Centering Prayer: Centering Prayer:	
Monday Date: _____	Centering Prayer: Centering Prayer:	
Tuesday Date: _____	Centering Prayer: Centering Prayer:	

⁶⁶ Adapted from Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2013).

SESSION 7—AN INTRODUCTION TO THE WELCOMING PRAYER

Verse

“Martha, Martha,’ the Lord answered, ‘you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.’” (Luke 10:41-42)

Theme

The welcoming prayer is a way to continue to deepen centering prayer in daily life. Essentially, “the welcoming prayer is a method of consenting to God’s presence and action in our physical and emotional reactions to events and situations in daily life.” With the practice, we are recognizing distressing thoughts, feelings, and sensations, including intolerance of uncertainty and worrying, as well as inviting the Holy Spirit into these experiences. In other words, we are learning to accept these experiences, knowing that God is present and active during moments of uncertainty and distress. Finally, we are letting go of our own need to control these inner experiences, and, instead, surrendering to God’s providential care. By surrendering to God, we are allowing Him to guide our inner experiences, rather than using unhelpful control strategies that keep us searching for certainty through worry.

Goals

1. Learn about the welcoming prayer, including its emphasis on accepting uncertainty and worry, as well as inviting God into this experience so as to surrender to His providential care.
2. Learn about the story of Mary and Martha, including the difference between Mary and Martha in their relationship with Jesus and the “doing” versus “being” modes in contemplative practice and psychological science.
3. Practice the welcoming prayer to continue to cultivate an attitude of surrender when faced with uncertainty and worry.

Agenda

1. Homework review—Home Practice Record Form (Session 6—Handout 3).
2. Week 6 introduction—“An Introduction to the Welcoming Prayer.”
3. Review the story of Mary and Martha, as well as the welcoming prayer guidelines (See Session 7—Handout 1).
4. Welcoming prayer exercise (See Session 7—Handout 2 and CD—Track 5).
5. Practice review in groups of two, then as a whole group.
6. Distribute homework handouts (Session 7—Handout 3, Session 7—Handout 4), and discuss the homework assignment as a group. Then, in pairs, discuss the timing for homework practice, what obstacles may arise, and how to deal with them.

SESSION 7—HANDOUT 1

Welcoming Prayer⁶⁷

THE STORY OF MARY AND MARTHA REVISITED

“As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, ‘Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!’

‘Martha, Martha,’ the Lord answered, ‘you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.’”

“In the story of Mary and Martha, we have seen that Martha is over-identified with her role, or attached, in the same way we are often attached to our roles, our thoughts, our feelings, and our agendas. The word ‘attach’ comes from the old French noun meaning ‘to be nailed to.’ When we are attached to something, we are nailed to it, connected almost inextricably, or fastened securely. We are trapped, stuck, and struggle to get loose. We need a tool that will help us build in some distance from our own attachments. One good tool is the welcoming prayer practice.”

Another way of interpreting the story of Martha and Mary involves drawing from psychological science. In particular, recent researchers have identified the difference between the “being” and “doing” modes of the mind. In the “doing” mode, which resembles Martha’s approach, we are living in the past or future, and trying to “close the gap” between how things are in life, including sources of uncertainty and worry, and how we believe they need to be. The “being” mode, on the other hand, involves accepting the present moment, as it is, without trying to change things. In the story of Mary and Martha, Mary was simply sitting at the feet of Jesus, which Jesus preferred, whereas Martha was frantically and anxiously racing around. In the welcoming prayer, we

⁶⁷ The first three paragraphs are quoted from both Luke 10:38-42 and Haisten (2006).

are seeking to cultivate the “being,” rather than “doing,” mode so as to relinquish the desire to control or change things, including uncertainty and worry.⁶⁸

WELCOMING PRAYER METHOD⁶⁹

1. “Focus, feel, and sink into the feelings, emotions, thoughts, sensations, and commentaries in your body.”
2. “Welcome the Divine Indwelling in the feelings, emotions, thoughts, commentaries, or sensations in your body by saying ‘Welcome.’”
3. “Let go by repeating the following sentences: ‘I let go of the desire for control.’ ‘I let go of the desire to change these thoughts, feelings, and sensations.’”

⁶⁸ The “doing”/“being” mode distinction/language is drawn from Williams (2008).

⁶⁹ This section is quoted from Haisten (2006).

SESSION 7—HANDOUT 2

Welcoming Prayer Transcript^{70,71}

Get into a comfortable position with your eyes closed. To begin, imagine you are sitting at the feet of Jesus, similar to Martha. Now, focus, feel, and sink into worrying thoughts you are experiencing right now. Pay particular attention to thoughts of uncertainty and worry, especially recurrent concerns that come up in day-to-day living. Just notice these thoughts as you sit at the feet of Jesus. There is no need to judge them or try to get rid of them. Simply notice them as you sit in the presence of your Lord and Savior.

Also begin to notice any feelings of anxiety that might accompany your worrying thoughts. Notice where you feel the anxiety, focusing in on that area of your body and sinking into the feeling. Whether it is in your chest, head, or some other part of your body, just experience the feeling in a non-judgmental way.

Next, begin to welcome God into the worrying thoughts and anxious feelings, saying “Welcome.” Essentially, you are inviting God into the experience of your worrying thoughts and anxious feelings, surrendering to His providence and guidance as you sit at the feet of Jesus. There is no other place to be, and no other state to achieve, because you are in the presence of your Lord and Savior. Jesus is in control of your worrying thoughts and anxious feelings as you welcome Him into the experience.

As you sink deeper into the “being” mode, recognize that God is with you as you notice these inner experiences of worry and anxiety. Because He is with you, there is no other state to achieve, and there is no need to try to attain certainty or rid yourself of worry. Instead, you can just rest in His presence, knowing that everything you experience is in His hands.

Continuing on in the practice, let go of any desire you might have to change what you are experiencing, saying to yourself “let go of the desire for control.” As you say this to yourself, fully surrender to God’s providence in this moment, letting go of all desire to change. Finally, say to yourself “I let go of the desire to change these thoughts, feelings, and sensations” as you sit with Jesus in this moment. Because you are in His presence, and He is actively working in your life, there is no other state to be achieved, and no

⁷⁰ Please also refer to the CD (Track 5) for home practice.

⁷¹ Adapted from Haisten (2006).

other goal to pursue. You can simply allow your uncertainty and worry to be there, knowing Jesus will do what He wills with these experiences.

SESSION 7—HANDOUT 3

Home Practice for the Week Following Session 7

This week there will be two main tasks between groups:

1. Practice the welcoming prayer for 20-minutes, twice daily (See Session 7—Handout 2 and CD—Track 5), recording the experience on the Home Practice Record Form (Session 7—Handout 4).
2. Journal for five minutes after each instance of formal welcoming prayer practice (twice per day), noting what the experience was like and all thoughts, feelings, and sensations that arose after the exercise.

SESSION 7—HANDOUT 4

Home Practice Record Form—Session 7⁷²

Name: _____

Record each time you practice on the Home Practice Record Form with the CD—Track 5. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

Day/Date	Practice (Yes/No)	Comments
Wednesday Date: _____	Welcoming Prayer: Welcoming Prayer:	
Thursday Date: _____	Welcoming Prayer: Welcoming Prayer:	
Friday Date: _____	Welcoming Prayer: Welcoming Prayer:	
Saturday Date: _____	Welcoming Prayer: Welcoming Prayer:	
Sunday Date: _____	Welcoming Prayer: Welcoming Prayer:	
Monday Date: _____	Welcoming Prayer: Welcoming Prayer:	
Tuesday Date: _____	Welcoming Prayer: Welcoming Prayer:	

⁷² Adapted from Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2013).

SESSION 8—SURRENDERING TO DIVINE PROVIDENCE IN DAY-TO- DAY LIVING

Verse

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

Theme

In this program, we have presented a model of Christian worry—at times, Christians struggle with worry due to uncertainty, leading to their own efforts to control and predict the future with worrying thoughts and behaviors. Unfortunately, these efforts do not seem to work, especially since God is in control. Throughout the last seven weeks, we have explored contemplative strategies to surrender to divine providence, including contemplative exercises from Jesuit and Eastern Orthodox authors. Moreover, we have drawn from centering prayer and the welcoming prayer to cultivate an attitude of surrender in formal practice and in day-to-day living. In the final week of the program, we will review the model as a whole, as well as practice centering prayer again in the session. Finally, we will teach a brief version—entitled “three-minute breathing with Christ”—so as to integrate contemplative practice in day-to-day experiences.

Goals

1. Review the program model of Christian worry, including the link between uncertainty and worry, as well as strategies for surrendering to God’s providential care.
2. Practice centering prayer in order to continue to deepen our understanding of surrender.
3. Practice a brief contemplative strategy—“three-minute breathing with Christ”—in order to integrate contemplative practice in day-to-day experiences, especially during moments of uncertainty and worry.

Agenda

1. Homework review—Home Practice Record Form (Session 7—Handout 4).
2. Week 8 introduction—“Surrendering to Divine Providence in Day-to-Day Living.”
3. Review of the program model of Christian worry (See Session 8—Handout 1).
4. Centering prayer exercise (See Session 5—Handout 2 and CD—Track 4).
5. Review “three-minute breathing with Christ” by practicing this brief contemplative skill (See Session 8—Handout 2).
6. Discuss the experience of the course.

SESSION 8—HANDOUT 1

Providence-Focused Therapy for Recurrent Worry: A Review

UNDERSTANDING REGULAR WORRY

We are excited for you to exit this program and continue on your journey. Our hope is that you have learned new ways to surrender uncertainty and ambiguity to God during times of worry. This program is based on scientific studies within the last few years, along with a biblical view of both worry and God’s providential care. Within the classes, we integrated several different disciplines and bodies of writing—contemporary psychological science, scripture on God’s attributes/actions (e.g., providence, benevolence, omnipotence, omniscience) and worry, and the contemplative tradition within the Christian faith. Throughout the course, we defined Christian worry as follows:

- The unsuccessful human attempt, through cognitive and behavioral efforts, to obtain certainty about an ambiguous future because of the struggle to believe in, trust, and submit to the benevolent care of an omnipotent God.⁷³

In terms of the basic ingredients of the above definition, we believe that Christian worry consists of struggling to accept the uncertainty and ambiguity of the future. This part of our definition is rooted in psychological science, referred to as the intolerance of uncertainty (IU) literature. Within this body of research, studies⁷⁴ have consistently revealed that:

- The struggle to tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity causes worry and anxiety.

Jesus, too, discussed⁷⁵ worry and uncertainty:

- “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store

⁷³ See Knabb and Frederick (under review).

⁷⁴ See Dugas and Robichaud (2007).

⁷⁵ Matthew 6:25-34.

away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 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.”

In fact, Jesus declared that worrying should be avoided because of God’s benevolent, active role in the Christian life. In other words, believers are to refrain from worrying about what the future will hold (e.g., food, clothes) because God will provide for them. Overall, this key teaching on worry seems to illuminate the following:

- The need for a deep trust in God’s providence (e.g., God provides for the birds and flowers) based on his attributes.
- Instruction on surrendering to God’s will (e.g., seeking His kingdom and righteousness).
- Acceptance of uncertainty because God knows what believers need (e.g., worrying about an uncertain future cannot add a “single hour” to the life of the believer).⁷⁶

To summarize this program, contemporary psychological research suggests that worry is caused by an inability to tolerate uncertainty. In addition, Jesus pointed us to God’s attributes and actions, including His sovereignty, benevolence, active presence, and, ultimately, providential care, to help us surrender worry to Him. Therefore, throughout the program, we practiced combining these ingredients to help you to relate differently to regular worry.

⁷⁶ See Knabb and Frederick (under review).

PROVIDENCE-FOCUSED THERAPY⁷⁷

Overall, we believe that Christians employ a deeply embedded mental representation of God's providential care, or God image, to trustfully surrender to God's will, accept uncertainty, and relinquish worry. Sometimes, though, we struggle to trust in His providence, surrender to Him, and, therefore, try to obtain certainty on our own through worrying thoughts and behavior. In order to improve this mental representation of God's providence, surrender to Him, and relinquish intolerance of uncertainty and worry, we believe that contemplative Christianity offers the necessary ingredients.

Throughout the program, you practiced surrendering your uncertainty and worry to God, cultivating a deeper trust in His providential care through contemplative strategies. With Ignatian spirituality, you used the five senses to feel your way into Jesus' teaching on worry, including experiencing His promise that God's providential care is available to each and every one of us. Also, you were able to practice the Jesus prayer, drawn from the Eastern Orthodox tradition, in order to shift from uncertainty and worry to this powerful form of prayer during times of distress. Furthermore, you were able to practice surrendering to God's presence and action within via centering prayer, which also helped you to practice several contemplative attitudes, including letting go of our own efforts to control. Finally, you were able to deepen your work with centering prayer by practicing the welcoming prayer, which was designed to help you sit at the feet of Jesus in order to accept whatever inner experience emerged in the present moment. This "being" mode was practiced in an effort to fully accept each moment because Jesus is with us.

Before we conclude the program, we would like to practice centering prayer one last time, as well as teach a brief contemplative practice for you to use on a day-to-day basis during times of uncertainty and worry.

⁷⁷ Portions of this section are from Knabb and Frederick (under review).

SESSION 8—HANDOUT 2

Three-Minute Breathing with Christ Transcript

Settle into a comfortable position with your eyes closed. Now, begin to notice your breathing, focusing on the breath going in and out of your lungs. Notice how your breathing occurs naturally, and how you do not need to force the breath. With each breath, imagine that Jesus is giving you the “breath of life,” which is a gift from Him. Thus, there is nothing you need to do in this moment, other than watching your breathing going in and out and recognizing that your breath is a gift from God.

What an amazing gift that God has given you—the “breath of life”—in the present moment. Your breath is a reminder that God is in control—he controls the movement of your breath as you inhale and exhale. Noticing the breath, let go of all urges to control your breathing. Surrender to God’s providential care, trusting that He is providing you with the “breath of life.”

Whenever your mind wanders to thoughts of uncertainty and worry, simply acknowledge them and return to watching your breathing, recognizing that God is giving you the “breath of life” from moment-to-moment. Throughout your day, use the “three-minute breathing with Christ” exercise to surrender to God’s providential care during moments of uncertainty and worry.