Reframing Anxiety: A Guide for Going Deeper

Note for Users:

*Reframing Anxiety: A Guide for Going Deeper* is the eighth week in an 11-week guide that accompanies the podcast *More to It: Reframing Emotions.* Each session is designed to help you and your community know, love, and praise God for His wonderful design for our emotions, even the ones we view as “negative.” The guide features an episode summary, definitions of relevant terms, Scripture reading, discussion questions, activities, prayers, and reflection prompts.

Each section in a session (for example, prayer and discussion) features a timestamp, but the timestamp is simply a suggestion for the amount of time to spend. At times, you and your community may want to linger with the discussion questions. Or maybe you need to spend more time engaging with a concept through a small group activity. You should prioritize what produces the most flourishing in your community, even if it means bending or breaking the time “rules.”

In the podcast, one of our counselors suggests emotions—even the negative ones—are echoes of Eden. If we listen to those echoes and follow them to their source, we might just end up back in the garden, not hiding from God, but experiencing the forevermore joy found in His presence. As you use this guide with your community, we pray that a spirit of unity, curiosity, and humility will be present, creating a space in which you can be vulnerable, drawing near to God and one another.

The Austin Stone Institute, The Austin Stone Counseling Center

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1 Subscribe to the podcast here: [https://pod.link/1626545281](https://pod.link/1626545281).
Session 8: Anxiety

Episode Main Point

Anxiety is a normal response to uncertainty, but our response to anxiety indicates where we’re placing our trust.

Episode Summary

We want to be wise and plan for the future. But sometimes our pursuit of wisdom morphs into feelings of anxiety. Our hearts beat faster, our palms sweat, our thoughts race. These bodily reactions to the unknown are normal, the counselors say.

In fact, anxiety is an appropriate feeling when we encounter situations—known or as yet unknown—that seem impossible to endure. The counselors point to Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. As He considered the cross, He agonized. What was to come brought Jesus to His knees. He sweated blood, and He asked if there was any other way forward.

Yet Jesus’ anxiety never controlled His actions. Shanda Anderson says, “Jesus felt the weight of obedience, the weight of moving forward, and [still] said, ‘Not my will be done, but Father, Your will be done.’” The counselors suggest our anxiety serves a similar purpose. It invites us to recognize our need for Jesus, who knows all things and cares for all things, and to follow His ways, even when our anxiety says to do the opposite. When we do, we choose faith over anxiety, love over fear.

The counselors posit love is the antidote to anxiety. While the larger culture clamors for more information, thinking knowledge will alleviate anxiety and the discomfort it brings, the counselors argue information often isn’t the solution. It certainly wasn’t in the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and all they got, says Andrew Dealy, “was more trouble and anxiety.”

If information isn’t the remedy to anxiety, what is? The counselors state a proper relationship with God soothes our anxious hearts, minds, and bodies. “What Scripture offers,” Andrew Dealy says, “is a childlike faith...that says, ‘I don’t have to know everything.’” We lean into God and His character rather than ourselves. We learn, over time, to act according to what God says rather than what our anxiety says. This isn’t a one-time process, says Shanda Anderson, but a lifelong one. Just because we learn to navigate anxiety in one area of life doesn’t mean we’ll be able to navigate it in all areas of life.
Because of that, the counselors say we need to be patient—with ourselves and with other people. We also need to be slow to judge our anxiety so that it leads to seeking rest in Jesus, not shame and condemnation. And finally, we should confess our anxious thoughts to one another and pray for one another. Sharing our fears and worries somehow diminishes their power over us. We begin to bear each other’s burdens by proclaiming the truth: God is not absent from our life’s equations, but present in all of them. “God is our refuge and strength, a well-proved help in times of trouble” (Psalm 46:1).

Definitions

- **Anxiety**: Anxiety is the felt sense that we lack what we need to navigate what’s coming next. Anxiety is feeling so overwhelmed by the future that we sometimes lose the capacity to make moment-by-moment decisions, or we get stuck in a cycle of trying to outthink what might happen.

Scripture

Matthew 6:25–34; Exodus 3 and 4, 14–16; Isaiah 26:1–9; Jonah; Proverbs 14:12, 16:25; Philippians 4:4–9; Lamentations 3; 2 Corinthians 12:1–10; Ecclesiastes 1:16–18; Genesis 3; Hebrews 4:14–16; Luke 22:40–46; Hebrews 12:1–11; 2 Corinthians 3; Galatians 6

Pray (5 min)

Before beginning the study, pray aloud, using either your own words or the words provided.

Heavenly Father, when anxiety stirs within us, it tends to color everything. Our thoughts and pulses race, as we try to account for every possible outcome. But we’re human, God. We don’t know everything; we can’t anticipate every plausible—and implausible—scenario. Father, help us listen to Paul, who says to bring our anxiety to You. We want to do that, God. We want to honor You, in all we do and in all we feel. May our anxiety draw us closer to You, the only One who knows, controls, and cares for all things, and to Your people. Amen.

Read (5–10 min)

Either read the following Bible verses aloud or invite a volunteer to read.

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?
And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, \(^2^9\) yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. \(^3^0\) But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? \(^3^1\) Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ \(^3^2\) For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. \(^3^3\) But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

\(^3^4\) “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” (Matthew 6:25–34)

Discuss (15–20 min)

Answer the following questions.

- In what ways does this Scripture passage reorient us to what is true and good and beautiful about God? What about us?
- In the podcast episode, the counselors talk about the role of information in our lives. What is your relationship with information like? In what ways is that relationship helpful or harmful to navigating life? What would you like to be different about that relationship going forward?
- The counselors also talk about Moses’ anxiety. Why can’t Moses seem to hear and obey what God is telling him? What does God do to orient Moses toward truth, despite Moses’ ability or inability to receive it, and how are those actions kindnesses? How is Moses’ experience with anxiety resonant with your own?
- Anxiety isn’t a sin, but it can lead to sin. When do you think anxiety turns into sin? What is the better way forward, according to Scripture and what you learned from the podcast?

Engage (10 min)

In smaller groups of 2 and 3, respond to the following questions.

- What narratives shape how you consider and experience anxiety? What, if anything, needs to change about those narratives?
- No small group is perfect, and we shouldn’t expect or demand perfection. Rather, our small groups encourage us to be gentle and humble with one another, even as we evaluate what could be better. Consider your small group. What conversation topics tend to be dwelt upon? Where does that dwelling lead? What changes might you need to make to foster childlike faith in God rather than anxiety about circumstances?
Pray (5 min)

Either read the following liturgy, a worshipful prayer, aloud or invite a volunteer to read.

A Liturgy for Anxiety

Be still, my trembling spirit,
Hush, my disturbed soul.
Breathe, lungs; and beat, heart—
Ever more steady.

Because I trust in the LORD—
Trust is all I need to do.
And the LORD will supply—
Everything.
He is enough.
He knows my needs.

So I trust:
Living in today, not tomorrow.
Tomorrow will come.
But today, I am sustained.

So I rest:
Watch the cardinals—flying above me.
Smell the flowers—blooming around me.
Feel the grass—moving beneath me.

He cares for His creation.
He cares for me.

Be still, my trembling spirit,
And hush, my disturbed soul.
Breathe, lungs; beat, heart—
Ever more steady.

Reflect

Complete the following reflection on your own.

Read Psalm 23 every day this week. How can you integrate its words into your life so that you experience comfort and peace, even in a world rife with big and small worries? How can you
practice confession and intercession (praying for others) this week to ease anxiety’s influence on your life?
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