Reframing Anxiety

Episode 8

“I spent many years confusing busyness with anxiety. I thought that being hurried was just part of who I was until I realized I was just being driven by my anxiety.”

“I never used to think about anxiety, but now it feels like a lot of my prayers and thoughts are directed toward squashing anxiety in me. It’s terrifying, because I never thought I would struggle with this while living such a comfortable life in the West.”

“I think I feel anxiety when the fear of what’s coming overwhelms my ability to prepare or just trust that God sees me. I often feel like a fraud or an imposter before my anxiety sets in, because it just always points out my inadequacies or exposes my insecurities.”

Lindsay: Welcome to Reframing Emotions, a podcast that seeks to help us understand what it means to engage emotions from a biblical foundation and through healthy habits.

I’m Lindsay Funkhouser with The Austin Stone Institute, and joining me are my friends and professional counselors Andrew Dealy, Brittany Beltran, and Shanda Anderson. Today we’re going to talk about anxiety. So Andrew, will you start us with a definition of anxiety, so we can make sure we’re on the same page with what we’re talking about?

Andrew: Anxiety generally is future oriented. It’s the felt sense that what I see coming next is going to overwhelm me, that I lack what I need—the tools, capacity, skills—to be able to navigate what I see in front of me. And so it dwells in the future. Oftentimes it’ll fall
into the trap of thinking that if I could just figure out more of the answer, if I just think it through a little bit more, that I might be able to find a resolution to it.

But oftentimes that amped up thinking and cycling through the thinking tends to just make it [anxiety] worse. The more we think through and try to figure out how to handle what's coming ahead, the more it tends to actually feed that felt sense of anxiety, that there's too much. I can't control it. I don't have what I need to get through these things.

**Lindsay:** What are some of the ways we can recognize anxiety in our lives or in our bodies?

**Brittany:** Butterflies in the stomach. You can start to feel a little fidgety. Your fingers can move around a lot. Leg tapping is a really good indicator that someone's got something going on internally. Racing heart, racing thoughts, like Andrew said. Which is not necessarily a body sensation, but it is a symptom of the felt experience of anxiety.

**Andrew:** I'd say I usually get nauseous. So nausea is for me the first indicator of anxiety. It's kind of that pit of the stomach feeling of, oh, I know I've got to do something. I know what's coming next. And I feel like I'm not going to do well at it. It's going to fail, or things are going to go wrong.

So nausea for me. Sweating. Increased heart rate. Fast breathing, an inability to cobble together words well. Your mind kind of shuts down. And then the thought component is what, at least for me, and I think it's more generally true, is the clear evidence.

It moves into this panicked racing thought of, *I've got to keep cycling through this thing.* I gotta keep working it over. I've got to keep trying to find the right answer, the silver bullet that's gonna be able to move this thing forward. Which tends to only amp up our bodies and amp up our physiological experience of the anxiety as we come face-to-face with, no, no matter how much we think of these things, there's just stuff we don't feel prepared for.

**Shanda:** And I'd add to that, a lot of people carry stress, which—anxiety is this heightened sense of stress and our dysregulation and sometimes muscle tension. Some people can get headaches. Some people can go so far as seeing spots and [feeling] a
little bit dizzy. All of that—we hold it in our bodies. And all of us have a lot of variables in
how we express that or what happens within our bodies. But it is as embodied souls, this
stress response that we have to this idea that something is coming that might overtake
me.

It [anxiety] does show up. And maybe even, we forget to breathe. I know when I'm sitting
with clients in the room, I'm paying attention to their body, and sometimes the shoulders
get high and, you know, they tense up and their fists clench. And part of a helpful
moment there is just inviting them to lower their shoulders, take in a deep breath, and
get some oxygen back in their lungs and oxygenate their blood so that the body does
calm down a little bit.

Because anxiety is very physiological. It takes over sometimes without our knowledge—
very implicit response intuitively—that we've often practiced a lot and we go to that
defense mechanism of fight or flight, and we take bodily posture of how to protect
ourselves. And so those rhythms, and identifying some of those very physical features
can help us cue in when anxiety is increasing.

Lindsay: When we think about the future, it's good to plan. It's good to think ahead. It's
good to prepare. But where does thinking about the future then cross over into anxiety?
Why do we actually start to feel anxiety about the future versus just thinking in a healthier
way about what's to come?

Andrew: Generally, we fall into anxiety at the moment that we look ahead at what's
coming, we plan the future, and we remove God from the equation. So that lands us in a
place of interpreting everything that could happen, all the things that could go wrong, as
though we have to figure it out, who have to have all the right answers to make sure that
we can get through it well.

So this is where I think the feeling of anxiety in a fallen world can be quite a gift, in
particular to the believer. That when you first feel anxiety, if we can queue up in our mind,
_The feeling of anxiety is telling me I'm looking at the things that are coming ahead, and
I'm interpreting what's coming next as though God's not part of the equation._
And so I'm putting on myself the mantle of having to try and figure out what really only God can figure out. Only He knows the future. Only He knows all the things that are gonna happen next. Only He knows the circumstances I'm going to face.

And so I pull God from that equation. I start to look ahead and go, oh, there are 14,000 different ways this could go wrong. Anxiety is that natural response. Anxiety is the appropriate feeling of going, *I can't figure all this out. I need help.*

This is where also, for those who have not given their life to Christ, anxiety as a feeling can be tremendously helpful. Again, it serves its purpose in a fallen world to lead us to the conclusion that I'm not supposed to figure this out on my own. The felt experience of anxiety in this world, that, hey, what's coming for me—I can't control [it], and it can overwhelm me, which is scary, is a right feeling apart from God.

We put God into the equation; now we think through our circumstances, *Okay, well, God sovereignly reigns. He loves me. He's here with me. He's promised to never leave or forsake me. He's told me I don't have to know what comes next.*

What I'm invited into is: take today's troubles for what they are, and trust that when tomorrow comes, God will provide what's needed. And so I can still plan with wisdom, but ultimately we get to live this openhanded life filled with faith going, *God, Your character is good. And so I trust You no matter what comes next. Though it may be difficult, it can't overwhelm me, because God, nothing can overwhelm You. And You've said, You're not going to leave me.* So I can live with confidence, even in the midst of my weakness, that whatever comes next, is not bigger than God. He's going to provide in those moments.

**Shanda:** A really simple way of saying that that I often give to clients is, we're focused on our circumstances, which is a very natural and human thing to do. So again, normalizing that. We need to remember and remind ourselves of the character of God. The circumstances don't always change, but our perspective can.

It's reorienting, like we talked about in podcast number one, coming back into an eternal perspective where the glory of God is central, and walking with Him through that discomfort. Because often the fear, the discomfort—it's not the goal to eradicate that or erase that. It's walking with God. And it's the promise of Himself in the midst of it that...
helps us move toward that scary thing and believe that God, in His perfect provision, will be there to offer me what I need that I can't fathom in the moment that my fear is overtaking me.

**Brittany:** I had a mentor in college who used to tell me that I was taking the grace that was given to me today, and I'm trying to apply it to tomorrow's situation and imagining that God's not going to give me the grace for that moment. But the Lord tells me He will give me the grace for the moment, for the day, and that His mercies are new to me each day, and that He's gonna provide my daily bread and my manna that I need for tomorrow's situation.

But when I try to take what I have right now and add to all of these other problems that I can't manage today, it's overwhelming. And that's not what God asks of me in that moment. He's like, “I've got that taken care of. I have already seen what comes, the whole story.” And so when I try to do that and lose sight of where He's at, I get anxious.

**Shanda:** Similar to some of the things that we've addressed previously—you'll notice what causes me to get anxiety may be different than what Brittany or Andrew struggles with. These perceived circumstances that may overwhelm or feel like it will be consuming or too much—it's associated meaning. We're interpreting the forecasted future based on an experience often that has history, something that has felt too hard, or something that, in my mind, will feel too hard.

But what that is for me may be different for you, Lindsay, or anybody else that we're working with. So again, to not generalize how every person is going to play out their experience of anxiety. ‘Cause it's going to be based on that associated meaning, that memory and past experience that is playing out in the moment, that's looking to the future, feeling overwhelmed, and insufficient to handle it.

**Andrew:** If we want to picture what anxiety tends to look like in the most generalized sense, what does it tend to lead us to do, and respond? The story of Moses is textbook on what anxiety will do to us. Literally, Moses is having a dialogue with God through a, you know, burning bush, and God is saying, “Hey, I've called you to go tell Pharaoh, ‘Let my people go.’”
The anxiety drives Moses to continually pull God out of the equation, to say, “God, no, You're not really here,” and to focus on, what if they don't believe me, or I'm not that skilled, or I can't do this. His attention keeps shifting back to himself, which will tend to feed and cultivate anxiety.

That's our tendency. We can look at Moses and say, “Well, gosh, if God was talking to me through a burning bush, I probably wouldn't do that.” And I think we deceive ourselves. If we're like Moses and recognize our weaknesses, even if God was saying, “Hey, I'm going to go with you,” we're like, “I'm not so sure I'm the right person for this. There are better, better people.”

So as we fall into that type of trap of staying within ourselves, pulling God out of the equation, the natural buildup is this continual anxiety, to the point where even Moses at the end, after God has shown him miracles, is still saying, “Could You just please choose someone else? Could You, please?”

That's how strong anxiety is as a feeling in embodiment, how strong an impact it can have on us. That even as God is speaking, we can be like, No, I still can't see it. I still can't see that You're at work. I still can't see that You're big enough. [But] it's not about how big I feel. It's not about what I think I can do. Really it's about what You can do.

That's what you'll see when you see anxiety in people's lives. They'll find every justification for why they don't have to do that thing, or why it's wrong for them to do it, or why it's not a good thing for them to take that step that feels risky.

We want to encourage by faith, put God back in the equation, and try and lean into that. Well, we [face] some pretty scary things, as Moses did, as Moses by God's grace, got to that place and you get to see God work that out of his heart.

Lindsay: Brittany, you were talking about not trusting the grace God will provide for tomorrow. It makes me think of Matthew 6, when we're told that God clothes the lilies of the field. He provides for the birds of the air. How much more will He provide for his people who are made in His image, whom He loves so dearly? We don't know what tomorrow will bring.
We aren't in control. We are called to trust God and have faith and believe that He'll give us what we need. How do we balance the tension of that with our innate desire to move forward and to know that God's in control, but to want to control things ourselves, to want to know exactly what the provision is going to be. Where does wisdom cross the line into sin?

**Shanda:** Well I think it's helpful, like we've done in every episode, to normalize this experience. Even looking back to the Old Testament, how the Lord chose to provide for His people every day through [the] manna, that it was each according to their need, and you couldn't store up extra for the day ahead.

Every day it would come, and each person would have to go, and they would gather what they needed, and it was manna in the Old Testament. And it's the grace through Christ Jesus here in the New Testament where we go, every day, to seek first His kingdom, to renew our mind in His Word, and remember who we are in Christ,

Knowing that His perfect provision of that manna for every moment is going to show up for us, even when we can't see a way. Often His way is one that we haven't considered. Like we see in the Red Sea, He'll part the waters and surprise us all as how He might show up for us in that moment.

But it's practicing that and believing that and rehearsing that and banking our hopes on His character that has been proven over time through His faithfulness that He is trustworthy. We're all at different places learning that. But I think that is how we end up navigating the anxieties that emerge, because, if we're honest, we could all name something right now today that we can think of in the future that feels like I don't know how I'm gonna manage that.

And so for the child of God, we do get the hope that God will meet us there, and He's gone ahead, and He's with me, and I get to live faithfully today with what He's given. Isaiah 26:3 says He will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast. And I think we've got to remember to rehearse and to think on the things that are offering us that perspective.
Shanda: Because when the mind relaxes, the body relaxes, and vice versa. We can relax our body, then the mind will often follow. And being able to bring to mind these things that guide us forward, where it's uncharted waters, these are places that we may not have trusted God or practiced our faith or applied His truth in the past. And so we want to learn how to do that by keeping an eternal perspective and focusing our eyes on Jesus and not the circumstance.

Lindsay: Amen.

Andrew: It's so fascinating in Matthew 6, the way it's structured, and the way Jesus walks through it, when He says, “Do not be anxious.” You're going to notice all those verses in Matthew 6, there's never a do not be anxious, but instead feel something different.

But rather it's a call to action. It's a call to look at the birds of the field, look at the grass of the field. Recognize your God, the Creator, the One who rules and reigns. He makes beautiful things. He provides for His creation. In other words, shift your eyes off of yourself and set your eyes onto these things that remind you of who's God, and that, frankly, you are not.

And so when does it [anxiety] transition into sin? When does this idea of dealing with anxiety move us into a place that we need to repent of? I would offer, it's when anxiety controls what we do. It's when we move to the place that we have the felt experience of anxiety, of overwhelm, and then that controls the parameters of what we say we can and cannot do.

That's what you see with Moses over and over in his interaction with God. It's, “I'm going to keep setting the parameters and limitations on what You can ask me to do based on my weakness. Based on my understanding.” And so as we start to plan for the future, where it transitions into sin is where we start to think, God, Your character will only be good if You do it according to my plan.

We see that with Jonah. Jonah's version of justice was only this way and any other version is wrong. And so the same way, I think we find it transitioning into sin when we start to frame God's character about, hey, if it doesn't happen the way I've planned it, or the way I think it should, then God, You're somehow wrong.
Even though Proverbs 14 and Proverbs 16 remind us—there's a way that seems right to a man, and in the end it leads to death. We're still going to be tempted to believe, as we measure on our weakness, that this is what we can and cannot do. God invites us into a different way of living, invites us into a childlike faith that does say, “Okay, God, I need that new provision every day. I don't need to worry about tomorrow.”

I love the way Jesus wraps up Matthew 6. He says, “Don't worry about tomorrow, because today is going to be terrible. Today's gonna be tough. So just stay in today. And if tomorrow comes, those new mercies will come. It will come again.”

Part of the problem is you try and leverage today to get through tomorrow or to get through to the rest of the week. You haven't been developed or received what you need for the rest of the week. And so that will always feel off. If we measure the future based on our provision today, our growth today, and we try and look ahead a month from now, it should always feel like we've got a shortcoming there, that there's a gap there that we don't have enough. And it's because we haven't walked through it yet. We haven't grown and matured in some ways, and that's going to happen over time as God feeds us literally every day, what we need.

And so the apostle Paul, just to add to this, does the same thing. Philippians 4 says, “Do not be anxious.” It does not offer a replacement emotion, but instead says, “Here's what you do. Do not be anxious, but instead with prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God, and the peace of God that surpasses understanding will be given to you in that process, to set your eyes on the things that are excellent and noble and beautiful and pure.”

It's a calling to action. In other words, we don't let anxiety control what we do. Instead we let faith. We set our eyes on the Creator. We set our eyes on the greater things, and that's what motivates us to then respond to our anxiety or felt anxiety in particular ways.

**Brittany:** I think it's interesting in a lot of those passages you mentioned, it isn't denying human weakness. It's very aware that we are weak, and we are frail. The call is, “I'm Lord over your weakness. I'm aware of your weakness.”
He's familiar with our frame and that we are weak. So it's a reminder to not fixate on our weaknesses, but to fixate on that God knows our weakness, and He also provides for our weakness by offering us Himself for the task ahead that is not meant to fall on my shoulders. He's meant to bear that burden and to provide for me in the moment when I need it.

I think it's just a cool way of seeing the Lord in those passages ministering and being aware of, “Yes, I know you're frail, and I'm a good Father. I know you can't do this, and I'm going to be with you.” We don't have to deny our weakness before God. We can be genuine with the reality and also be aware of the reality of who He is and His character toward us.

Shanda: I love what Brittany's saying. His power is perfected in our weakness, and we get to live that out every day and normalize that we’re all gonna have to learn to walk with Him through these things. Lamentations invites us into believing these things and gives us Scripture to rehearse, even when we don't know in our hearts how to go there. But His steadfast love endures, and His mercies never end, and great is His faithfulness. Every day those new mercies are coming. The new day with its new troubles has its new mercies that will meet us there.

Often, in our culture we want to eradicate the discomfort, and we think we need to remove that. Or we have the narrative that, if I only had faith, I wouldn't feel this. Reframing that to be able to think about it in a way that is inviting me into trusting God in new ways. Or even as a friend is gifting me the opportunity to remember my need for Jesus. And I don't have to be [afraid] of [that]. I get to own that and hide myself in His righteousness.

And there is a whole other category that we don't like to talk about. I think in light of Scripture, it's appropriate to remember that sometimes the anxiety that we may feel, if we happen to be in unrepentant sin, is actually helpful. It is meant to bring us into the conviction of repentance and faith.

And even for somebody who hasn't put their faith in Jesus, I think they have great reason to feel anxiety in a world that is overwhelming without that confidence of the truth of a loving God that is offering the hope of Christ. And so we would say even in pre-salvation,
anxiety is good and needed to bring us into our realization that we need the perfect power in our weakness.

So we don’t want to alleviate all anxiety, because sometimes it is working for our good to bring us under the providential wisdom of God that is covering us in the righteousness of Christ. And as we’re sanctified, for those of us who find ourselves in that place, then that anxiety is going to invite us into deeper intimacy with Jesus, reminding us of the opportunity to grow in grace and knowledge of God over and over and over again, to help us in our times of anxious thoughts toward the future.

Lindsay: I’m just sitting here soaking in all this Scripture y’all have been saying over us these last few minutes. I love the framing—Brittany, I think you started us here—that when our anxiety dictates our actions and the way we move forward, and we’re applying our human wisdom or human limits to God, we’re limiting Him so much.

We’re forgetting that He’s God. But I love that picture that you painted for us: we’re called to live by faith, and we’re called to walk by faith, and we’re called to think of God as bigger than that. He’s God. When He answers those fears of the future, He provides for us the manna and the grace we need each day with creative solutions we would have never thought of or answers our problems in ways that builds our faith. It’s just such an encouraging thought, because it happens so often. And I know I’m guilty of taking it for granted. And you were just so great to remind us of that.

Andrew: Our culture leans in one direction with anxiety. Our tendency is to believe, apart from God, if we can just know more, become experts, learn all the right things, if we can know all the information, then we can be okay. Like that will take care of our anxiety.

And generally speaking, that's just not been the case. In many ways, the more we know, the more we feel anxious. Ecclesiastes 1:18 says, “With more knowledge comes an increase in sorrow, with much wisdom is much vexation.” We have the reality that Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and what they got was more trouble and anxiety.

They actually gained more information, and it made things more difficult. It made things more challenging. And so what Scripture offers us is not more information, but actually a
proper relationship with God. What it offers us is a call to a childlike faith, a childlike faith that says I don't have to know everything.

I don't have to understand everything to be okay. Because I know the One who does. I know the One who understands everything that's happening. I know the One who knows the future. I know the One who's working out my salvation. I know the One who's going to be with me, who's promised to never leave or forsake me.

So I don't have to know the specifics, because I know who I'm trusting in. I know who holds the future. Because of that, I don't have to know more. I can trust that if it's good and right and healthy for me to know more, then God will do that, like a good Father would do with their child, [He] will provide that information in time.

And so essentially the antidote that Scripture offers us is a leaning into an understanding of who God is, a leaning into His character. Which again, Matthew 6 says this; the apostle Paul does it in Philippians 4. It's look at God. Like the antidote to this, the antidote to not being controlled by your anxiety is to see who God is and to recognize living as He's designed is far better than picking our own way, far better than having the information and trying to put it together ourselves.

Lindsay: Amen. Jesus was an incarnated Christ. He came and was fully human and yet was without sin, and we've seen different ways He's experienced emotions. Can you talk a little bit about—was Jesus ever anxious? And how did anxiety play out in His life in that situation?

Shanda: He is our sympathetic high priest, who was tempted in every way, but He responded perfectly with perfect love, perfect submission, perfect obedience. But in His perfect divine nature, He was also human.

And so we look, I think, most often to the garden of Gethsemane to see this play out, where He saw the cross before Him. And we get the encouragement that He asked the Father, “If there's any other way, please take the cup.” Which invites us to be able to go to God and say, “Lord, if there's any other way, we ask You to provide it.”
But we also get to look at how Christ responded when it was the Lord's will to crush Him in that moment. That is a hard reality. That we know the sovereign will of God, that Jesus came to lay down His life for us.

He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf. And in that moment, there was something redemptive happening. That in Jesus' perfect knowledge, even in that, His humanity said, *This is incredibly difficult.* To the point that His body was sweating blood, that He had the physiological response, that His body was expressing the overwhelm that He was anticipating—which is an overwhelm those of us in Christ will never experience. Which is separation from the Father. He [Jesus] experienced that on the cross. He committed His spirit into the hands of the Father and conquered death and rose from the dead so that in those moments of overwhelm that we feel, we know that God turned away from Christ, that He will never turn away from us. That we have perfect access to the Father through the finished work of Christ doing that on our behalf.

But we also just get to see that our bodies are normal. In the humanity of Jesus, He felt the weight of life in a broken world. He felt the weight of obedience, the weight of moving forward and saying, “Not my will be done, but Father, thy will be done.” And angelic host ministered to Jesus at that moment.

We get to, again, keep our eyes on Jesus. Hebrews 12 says that we look to Him who scorned the cross, scorned the shame. That He was able to do what we don't have to do, which is be without the hope of the presence of God in that moment. But we do that, Hebrews 12, verse 3, so that we don't grow weary and lose heart.

And I think it's just very normal to acknowledge we are tempted to grow weary and lose heart, and we're tempted to look everywhere other than Christ Jesus. And it's [for] the joy set before Him that He endured. And we want to look to Him so that we can be transformed from one degree of glory to the next, to be like Him, even in those hard, hard moments that, with Jesus, being obedient. Taking the path of faith is often incredibly painful.

**Andrew:** Shanda, I love what you're hitting on there. You do look in the garden of Gethsemane and see Jesus in His full humanity. Again, if we're running with the definition of anxiety—what is ahead is too much. What is ahead is going to overwhelm. There's
perhaps no greater time in the history of mankind where that emotion was accurately, perfectly felt.

In other words, Jesus' body in that moment was being a healthy body. A healthy body is saying that we have to live. We have to survive. A healthy brain is going to do whatever it takes to keep you alive. And His brain and body both realized in that moment, *If we take that next step forward, that means destruction. That means overwhelm.* So that natural feeling, that feeling of anxiety, if again, we hold to that definition of, I see what's ahead and it's overwhelming, fits.

This is what I think is so beautiful about what Jesus did. To me, this only amplifies the depth of His love for us. He didn't roll into this stoically as though there was no pain. He didn't roll in without feeling it. He felt it to its utter depths and still chose, though His body was raging, to go, “This is the path, Father? Okay. I move forward.”

I think there's a beautiful freedom that we, as children of God, are invited into in that in a similar way. He models faith rules our lives. Faith can conquer whatever our body is doing. We do not have to let what we feel in our body and our emotions control us. And that's a tremendous freedom. We don't have to be enslaved to what we feel, but rather we can, [by] God's grace, with the help of the Holy Spirit, take steps of faith that are going to seem crazy and confounding to the world, knowing that God goes with us.

**Lindsay:** So if we're in that place where we realize what's happening. We acknowledge that God is God, and we are not. We don't want to let anxiety dictate our actions. We want to grow in faith. And yet we're still having a physiological response, perhaps, even a big physiological response. Can you unpack a little bit, in that moment, what's happening?

You acknowledge God, and you want to take a step of faith and trust Him, but you're still feeling a response that feels like it's anxiety. It's hard to determine sometimes. Wait, am I really trusting God, am I really moving forward in faith? Why do I still feel this way? So can you help us understand a little bit, that distinction, and how those things might interact together within us?
Andrew: Ideally in every circumstance, when we know the step of faith that we're called to do, we would feel like doing it. However, I feel fairly confident that all of us in this room and anyone listening to this [podcast] knows exactly what it feels like to be like, I know the right road, and nope, sure don't feel like doing that.

And so there are these moments, I'd say, perhaps unfortunately, a chunk of the Christian life is lived in that tension of, I can see the good, I know the good, but everything in my emotions and my flesh are still pulling in a different direction. And I think it is God-honoring and beautiful to still choose in that moment to move forward in faith, despite our emotions. Going, God, I pray that one day You align my emotions with what I know is good and right.

That's actually progressively how we get to that space. We get to the space where our emotions line up with what God says is good and right by taking the steps of faith. And in those steps of faith, learning and experiencing, oh, this is a better way, which helps our emotions over time.

One of the most frustrating things as a counselor walking alongside people, is the reality that emotions are usually the last thing to change. Emotions are usually the most stubborn. We have to have lots of reps of practicing by faith, doing the right thing, and then our emotions slowly thaw to the idea that maybe this is the better thing.

Now God can still do that in a moment, and sometimes He does. Sometimes He brings those together in alignment beautifully. But I'd say the majority of the time, wrestle. Scripture gives us all kinds of examples of this life being wrestling or a battle or running a race. There's endurance and perseverance required.

There's a natural tension in that, that we can just embrace and understand. And so I'd be slow to judge that, to use my feelings [to judge that]. So, God, I don't feel like doing this; therefore, I must not really want to or it's lacking in faith. And rather put it in the bucket of, God, I can feel my heart's not there yet. I want that to be different. Yet, because You have made it clear what the step of faith is, I'm going to do that regardless. I'm going to choose that You'll pair up [the] backend and bring me to a place of right emotion in time.
Lindsay: When we think about culture, anxiety is almost culturally fostered in some ways. Going back to the anger episode, ideologies battling each other in the public sphere, neighbor against neighbor when there are differences, which I think breeds almost a social anxiety. And there are real things in the world that are difficult—nations invading other nations, a pandemic that shut down all the countries in the world, literally all the countries, for an extended period of time, and we're still going through that.

So there are these things that bring natural fear or concern about the future. And we've talked about the difference between anxiety and feeling that, and trusting God for our future [rather than] taking Him out of the equation, but what advice can you offer to people who, maybe it's not one situation [that] is causing anxiety, but it's literally the future, the big future, everything in the future. Looking forward feels so scary. Is there any difference when the window is that big versus thinking about a particular situation that might provoke anxiety? Or is the framing and the wisdom and the way we want to think about God the same?

Shanda: You bring up a really good point that I feel like a lot of people that I work with encounter. I mean, to be honest, I think we all do. There is an ache within us. There's the echo of eternity in all of our hearts. And even before pandemics and all of the changing dynamics in our culture, most of us fear death.

When you're talking about this big, broad topic that is this future-oriented thing, there is an honest vulnerability [of] how fragile the human being is. Whether it's driving down the road or getting in an airplane or all of the things that we are operating out of faith to some degree, that we are having to reconcile our fear of the unknown, of life after death. And then there are many things in the world that remind us of our vulnerability, remind us of how little control we have, remind us of the uncertainties and unpredictabilities that we are operating in and the felt sense of security that we may have one day that potentially may be gone the next, like we all experienced during COVID.

And so being invited into considering the glory of God, His character, His wisdom in these most severe and broad categories of where our concern for the future lies. We're going to have to apply that over and over again, throughout our lives. These fears or these anxieties in the future—they just grow, the more that we love. You move into caring about things. You move into opening your heart, to having healthy connection, and
realizing that in an honest evaluation, we will lose these things at some point in our lives. Death is coming for us all. And we are vulnerable to that.

And I think God, and obviously this hope of the gospel and Christ Jesus, is what helps reconcile us to the hope of not knowing all the details, but having confidence and knowing the One who does. I don't have to figure it all out. I don't have to have all the details, and I don't have confidence in even the things that offer temporary security. I see them as temporal in the economy of God and His grace, and in light of the future glory and grace that is offering hope in the midst of an uncertain world.

**Brittany:** We have more access to more information than we’ve ever had before. And that access to information is probably information we weren't really meant to hold. There are things that we don't need to know, because we know the One who does.

And so when we think about all of this information that we have, it makes sense to have some anxiety. One of the things we want to attune to is how that information is forming my thoughts, and how much of that information I'm allowing myself to take in, and whether or not it's helpful for me to take in that much information. And so just being aware of our own limitations and being able to navigate some of the information that we don't need to be navigating and allowing our brains to ruminate on.

A lot of times in those moments, for the person who's just overwhelmed by the future in general, it's, *I don't know what to do, or there's so much I can't control.* What are the things that God has actually put in front of you? Really simplify some of the complexity of looking at, okay, well, there's a lot of this information that you have. There's a lot of this anxiety that you have over situations that exist. What is it [that] God [is] actually asking you to be faithful to today? And trusting Him to guide you in that process, so you're not stuck in paralysis and overwhelm.

**Andrew:** Second Corinthians 3:18 talks about us being progressively changed from one glory to another by beholding Christ. In that verse, there's this principle we need to keep a hold of, which is what we give our attention to. What we give our eyes to progressively reshapes us. Our culture gets that. Consumerism gets that. Commercials get that. They understand, if I can capture your attention, I can start to shape your desires. I can start to shape your narrative for life.
And so whether we're looking at the big things, the global things that are going on.
Which we can say, if we know Scripture well, there's nothing happening in the world that
Scripture has not already generally told us was going to be happening. Now, which, in
one way, depending on [how] we look at it, can actually lead us to have greater
confidence: “Okay. God, You've actually already said there's going to be wars and rumors
of wars. There's going to be these things that are happening.”

So when they happen, I don't have to be shocked or afraid by them. I know, God, You
know, and You hold it in your hands. And so as we give more and more of our attention
to Him, which is what Jesus in Matthew 6 calls us to do; the apostle Paul in Philippians 4
says [to] give your eyes to the noble, pure things. Give your eyes to the Lord.

As Shanda brought up earlier, Hebrews 12, keep your eyes on your forerunner Christ, that
you would follow Him as we give our attention to those things, and we're shaped into the
image of Christ. Philippians 4 would say that as we practice looking at the right things,
the God of peace will guard our heart. He'll give us a peace that surpasses
understanding.

A key component of this surpassing understanding means we don't have to know. We
don't have to understand. That peace is bigger than the knowing piece. It's something
that's relationally understood. And so in practice, I think whether we're talking global, big
anxiety or specific, small anxiety, the things that will help are still the same. We lean into
looking at a God who holds both our personal life and all of the global world in one hand,
who knows and is working in all of it. Which hopefully, that leads us to awe, worship, and
a certain peace of, okay, God, You hold the whole universe in Your hand. I'm pretty sure
You can handle what I got going on.

Lindsay: Yeah, that's really good. When we think about how to move forward in love, to
use your phrase, Shanda, in community. What I've heard all of you say during this time is,
we can help one another by reminding one another of the truth and promises of God, the
things we can lean into, or remembering how big God is and how much He loves us, the
things that God has done in the past, both in Scripture and in our own lives, ways He's
provided for us.
We can help one another reframe both the big and little things in life, to understand that we don't have to have all the answers. We can ask good questions, like, do you really need to be on social media all the time? Do you really need to have all of this information sitting in your mind and your heart? Are there any other practical things we can do for one another as we navigate this and walk alongside one another, trying to think about things that are good, excellent, [and] trustworthy, putting our hearts and minds on God and not letting anxiety guide our decisions or our actions?

Andrew: I think one practical thing in terms of whatever your close-knit community is, just run a diagnostic, maybe over the next week. What do you find your groups talking about more often than not? And think through that.

If we keep just talking about these things, let's run a Galatians 6 reality [check]. To what we sow, we will reap. God's not mocked. What you give your attention to, what you invest [in], there will come a harvest. So if we keep this the same, keep talking about the things we're talking about now, what would you expect the fruit to be in the long run? Does it lead us to anxiety? Are we constantly talking about everything that's wrong in the world and everything that's not fixed and everything that's broken?

If you spend [the] majority of your time in community talking about those things, I'd say the natural emotion is somewhere between anxiety and depression. It's going to be, oh my goodness, we have so much work, we'll never get it done. Or depression—there's no point. It's never going to get fixed, so why even try?

And so just tool it up in that direction. Let's do a diagnostic. Let's see, are we talking about God for 5 percent of the time in His awesomeness, and then 95 percent of [the] time we're just talking about ourselves? I can give you a pretty good idea of what emotions are going to predominate if that's the case.

Shanda: We can look back [at] what we were talking about a little while ago, Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. His friends fell asleep on Him. He was asking for prayer, and His friends didn't stay awake. And so we can stay awake for each other in prayer. We can intercede on each other's behalf, which I think is inviting—be honest when you're anxious and afraid and ask, “Please pray for me.”
There's beautiful power in that. And when we bring some of these fears into the light, that's half of the battle to helping them not have so much power when we just keep them inside. So I think in confessing those fears to each other, and then committing to pray for one another, checking in on each other.

And again, just normalizing that this is a human experience. And it's not eradicating and erasing it [anxiety], but it is reminding each other and bearing each other's burdens, singing songs together as we come hopefully into a local gathering of believers each week. That is the benefit of remembering together and pointing our hearts and our eyes toward Jesus so that we can go out into the world that is going to challenge us, and is going to bring these concerns to the focus of our hearts and minds. And we're going to have a choice in that moment, what we think about and how we apply the truth that we have heard.

Lindsay: Any last thoughts or encouragement as we wrap up talking about anxiety?

Andrew: I would say the general thing to keep in mind is just being patient with it, patient with ourselves. It's no surprise that we're going to feel anxiety in our lives. And it's no surprise that others are going to feel anxiety in their lives. And so, as the apostle Paul encourages over and over again, my hope is that we could do the same. That we would be slow to judge it [anxiety].

Definitely slow to move anywhere near shame, shame that we feel anxious in a world that is right now. But that even those feelings of anxiety would prompt us to say, “Okay, Lord, teach me more what it looks like to rest in You.” To not rest in my own understanding. To not try and figure out everything as though that would make it better. But rather to rest in a childlike faith that says, “Okay, God, You're good. You're here. You're present. Now teach my heart to feel that.”

Shanda: We see in Scripture, don't be surprised as if some strange thing is happening when it comes to suffering. Having a theology of suffering and a recognition that we're going to feel these stressors in life, because life is stressful.

And people who have been hurt or have a history of trauma and abuse, to love [them] deeply, patiently over the long haul. Because if you've been in a car accident, even
though you might know all of these beautiful truths, you might find yourself in a situation that evokes a new category of application, and it might feel like we've been sent back to the ABCs and one, two, threes of trusting God in these ways.

And that's normal. Just because we've learned it in one area doesn't mean that we're going to come into another life situation, and it's just going to be easily applied. Hopefully, by grace over time, we're going to learn to get there a little more quickly with a little less stumbling. But nonetheless, we're going to have to practice it over and over again in new ways.

And so, again, not putting the judgment on ourselves that, if I loved God more, if I had more faith, then I wouldn't feel these things, or putting that on one another, like Andrew's already said.

**Lindsay:** Friends, thank you so much for yet again sharing your wisdom and encouragement with us. I know the Holy Spirit is already doing so much in my heart. And I'm excited next time to talk about how we can reframe another emotion, to look at God and get more of him and consider what it means to walk by faith as we are emotional beings.

Next week, we'll talk about depression, what it is, what it does in our lives, and why community is so important, because depression can be so isolating.

Listeners, thank you so much for joining us. As always, we encourage you to process what you've learned in community. We've helped you out by providing a group guide on our episode webpage that has reflection questions and Scripture that you can walk through.

We have a short liturgy reading at the end of this episode if you just want to sit and listen to some more truth and have your own response to God based on everything you've learned. We'll see you next time.

**Alex:** *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.