Reframing Depression

Episode 9

“Sometimes there’s just a cloud. Nothing is wrong, but everything feels wrong.”

“I want to be happy. I want to find joy in Christ. But sometimes I really just don’t know how. I feel like I’m at the bottom of a well, and I can’t find the way out, no matter what I do. I just feel stuck.”

“As a friend to a handful of brothers who experience depression, my heart has ached as I’ve tried to point them to hope and have seen how hard it is for them to get out of that low place.”

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 again are my friends and professional counselors Brittany Beltran, Shanda Anderson, and Andrew Dealy, who you’ve met in our previous episodes.

Today we’re going to talk about something that can be really difficult to both understand and experience, and that’s depression. So Andrew, would you start us off with how we should look at depression?

Andrew: So, depression. I feel like it’s one of the more complicated emotions to define.
Generally speaking, it's associated with a sense of despondency, a prolonged sense of despondency. The tendency in depression is that you look at the past, and all you see is brokenness, darkness, everything has gone wrong. You look in the present, and you feel like everything's still broken and not fixed.

And then that forecasts itself into the future. Well, if my past has been full of darkness, my present is full of darkness, well, then, why do I have any reason to believe my future will be any different? Which leads to that felt sense of hopelessness or despair that would lead them to not take joy in life, not believe that there's much reason to believe things will ever get better.

**Lindsay:** How does that happen? Is sadness the thing that comes before depression?

**Andrew:** This is a great question. Sadness, sadness is the felt sense of loss. You've lost something that you cannot regain, [which] can be a cue point to move into depression. So, the loss of a career—you would feel sad about that lost job.

Depression would be the narrative getting slapped on top of that: Therefore, I will never have the right job. Therefore, I have no reason to believe things will ever get better in that vein.

Sadness [is] a natural and healthy response to loss, for sure. Depression takes that emotional material of sadness and then amplifies [it] with, the future is gonna look like this, then. This felt sadness now dictates and colors everything I expect moving forward, which, if meditated on and embraced leads to despair, leads to a life that would be full of this felt sense of, *I don't really have agency to get to the place that I feel like I need to get to.*

**Shanda:** As I talk with friends and family and clients, it's that felt sense of an inability to overcome that felt sense of sadness. That sorrow feels overwhelming, and the efforts, or at least the perspective of how to move forward, feels unattainable, or there are too many barriers in the way to change that felt experience. It just feels like this burden will never lift.
Some language that we have in the Christian life is “a dark night of the soul,” where there can be a truth to the reality of the disheartening, this discouragement, that has weight and feels insurmountable. And therein lies—how do we sit in the discomfort of a situational sadness that our human ability doesn’t have a lot of capacity to see a way through it or around it or beyond it?

I think where this conversation is going to lead us today is: How do we not grow weary when circumstantially, and in our ability to perceive a way out, the clouds have settled in? And yet, somehow the sun is still shining on the other side of the darkness. And there is a path forward. We have to have hope for something that is not tangible in that moment. That's where our belief in the person of Christ, the sympathetic high priest, and all the promises that we have in the Christian life allow us to endure, persevere.

Depression oftentimes is a season of waiting for the darkness to lift. How do we sing these liturgical songs over our souls, of this known belief about the character and nature of God, and the hope that is beyond our feeling and circumstance, that allows us to sit in the sadness with Jesus, and then figure out what these day-to-day functioning realities look like when our hearts are deeply discouraged?

Lindsay: It seems like a really powerful thing, if you're in that place experiencing depression, and you look toward the future, and you can't see that hope you're both describing. How do you think about moving forward? What does it look like to engage those promises, or even open your Bible to try to find something to latch onto when those feelings are so strong in the moment? What do you practically do?

Andrew: We see examples of this throughout Scripture. A simple response is, we take it to the Lord. Forgive me for sounding that cliché, but this is what we see in Scripture through some of the prophets and stuff like that. You know, Elijah's at the point—Jezebel's after him, threatening to kill him—and he's off in the middle of nowhere talking to Lord, saying, “Lord, I've been faithful. I did the things You asked of me. All that surrounds me is still brokenness and darkness. How am I supposed to make sense of this?”

in our analysis, if it's just what we can see, if we're looking at just the data we have in front of us, the felt experience of depression is a normal part of the human experience. If
I'm reading the data of just what I understand, I don't see reason for hope. I don't see a reason that change is going to come. And so the only place we have to go with that is the One who has the power, the authority, the graciousness, and the love to bring about a different way of seeing what's actually happening, a different way of understanding that God is at work. And that's what God reveals to Elijah in that moment, that He's partitioned off people who are His. He’s still at work, although Elijah couldn't see it in that moment.

That story in Scripture is such a beautiful example of, one, seeing God’s character and how He interacts with us. Because, you know, He feeds Elijah. He provides for him; He tells him, “Hey, you need to sleep. this is too much for you. You need to rest.” And then He brings to bear the answer to a question.

I think for us as counselors and for those who are going to walk alongside people who deal with depression, to have the same type of sensitivity and patience that God models of “Hey, you’re not ready to hear it yet. You just need to actually sleep. You actually need to let your body catch up.” And the answers, the addressing of the core issue, will come when it's appropriately timed.

I think Jonah is another good example of this, where God calls him to go and bring the gospel to bear on the Ninevites. And his response is, nope. He runs away; he tries to get away from God's plan; he gets swallowed up by a whale; [he] gets spit up at Nineveh; and then he does what God asks him to do, still hoping that as he's faithfully doing what God asked him to do, God would still bring judgment instead of grace.

This is an example in Scripture where we see depression worked toward, Jonah actively working against the will of God, trying to turn God's plan and purpose for the Ninevites. And so Jonah, after the whole plant incident with the worm, gets to a place where he's, like, “Lord, kill me. it's better to be dead.”

Core level, that's where depression leads us. I have no more agency to get what I feel like I need to get. For Jonah it was, “I need the Ninevites to be judged, to be okay.” And because multiple times now I've not been able to get there, life is devoid of all meaning. There is no purpose anymore. And so I think [those are] some Scripture examples of what it [depression] looks like.
Brittany: Going back to the story of Elijah—God brings him food and says to eat. I think one of the things with walking alongside those who are experiencing depression is looking at those small acts of faithful obedience in day-to-day life. To get up is an act of faith and a little bit of rebellion [against] that despondency that says, “No, you can't move forward in any capacity.”

And we see God invite Elijah into that faith of, “Here, let me provide today what you need right now, which is this act of faith, this act of feeding your body, washing your body, sleeping, resting, and entrusting yourself to Me in that process.” And so I think those small acts of faith that you get to highlight in someone's life in the middle of depression helps poke a hole in the dark curtain that blocks the view.

Shanda: I think as we come alongside people, it's good for us to remember the way Scripture talks about, even in Ecclesiastes 7, that the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning. There's something about our human experience that requires us to learn how to grieve, but how to grieve with hope, how to be sorrowful and yet rejoice.

And I think in a normal existence, if we are honest about the suffering in the world that we're all navigating and how we orient our hearts, like we've talked about in every episode, back to the truth of God that brings help in the midst of the heaviness. There are times where the pain and the sorrow of life compounds, and [it] feels like the light that Brittany was talking about, that we want to help people see and remember. Sometimes that grows dimmer and dimmer and dimmer.

Again, we all need to be able to acknowledge the sorrows of life. But from a clinical standpoint, when I'm working with somebody, we're looking at what is the frequency, the intensity, the duration of where their quality of life begins to diminish or deteriorate, or their ability to do the day to day, like get out of bed, take a shower, eat, go to school, go to their jobs, manage the relationships in their life. Sometimes that sorrow or that sense of despair and hopelessness gets so overwhelming that it interferes with their ability to hold the tensions of hope within the painful realities that they're navigating. And so we want to honor and respect where people may truly be in a state where that sadness has just become a little debilitating at times. We get to hope and have faith for them when they may not be able to do that for themselves, with a lot of patience and grace and compassion, and enter into sitting in the ashes with people.
[But] what we often do is just tell them to hope in God. And we rush really quickly into, “You have hope, you have truth, you have light. Just believe that and you'll feel better.” And the reality is that sometimes we can believe that, and we can have faith, and there's still a deep discouragement that can be part of our human experience.

We come back to the body of Christ and community and people; we get to borrow their faith sometimes when the dark night of the soul sets in. And we learn how to sing the songs of faith when it seems like winter, and spring doesn't come as quickly as we'd like it to. I want to remind us that the more we can learn to grieve and be honest about the heart of the wise learning to go to the house of mourning—that will help our hearts learn how to keep that orientation that, even when we can't see it and feel it, there is a God who has redemptive purposes that we don't know.

[And also] how can I remember to run to His Word, to prayer, or to my brothers and sisters in Christ who get to help me bear up under whatever that overwhelming weight is that feels like despair?

Andrew: Emotions want to justify their existence by controlling the future. In terms of having empathy for those who are dealing with depression, that feeling will want to, in essence, justify its presence by controlling what we do next.

And so when we feel depressed, when we feel like there is no reason, there's no hope to believe that change will happen, our behaviors that make sense in that system are to do nothing, to give up, to no longer try. The game's already determined, therefore—and so you'll find yourself, if you lean into letting that emotion rule you, if you let the emotion rule you and control your behavior, you'll find yourself doing the things that amplify depression, that make the felt experience stronger. As that feeling grows stronger, then it will try and control more to justify my strength of emotion. It'll try and control the future behavior of, well, therefore, I should just keep doing the same things. Which is, in the brokenness of humankind, quite twisted. Misery loves company is one of those cliché phrases. I think [it] hits to the core of this. For some reason, when we feel bad, we just want to do bad and almost make the bad worse.

There's just a sense in us that desires that. And so a lot of the unhinging of depression will come through what Brittany was hitting on earlier. Helping a client recognize where
they are pushing against the felt experience, even through small things, just through getting out of bed, just showing up at work, or just being open and honest about, hey, I literally don't feel like doing anything right now. I'm trying, but this is how I feel. Nothing feels purposeful right now.

And yet we move against it by doing, by leaning into—but these are the things that God has said is good. If I'm going to sow to a different emotional harvest in the future, I'm going to engage in behaviors that God says right now are good. So I'm going to be open and community—I'm going to engage. I'm going to seek to honor others and do the work that's set before me. I'm going to seek to believe that God is present, that He is orchestrating all of this. I'm going to believe that none of this is unredeemable, that God's arm is not too short. I'm going to believe that this emotion is not stronger than the power of the Holy Spirit within me to be able to step forward.

However, I think it's quite important to put on the other side of the coin, this empathizing with how difficult it is. This is why I love John 11:35. Jesus wept with Mary and Martha. This is why I love the garden of Gethsemane where Jesus shows us the strength of emotion, the strength of how persuasive and overwhelming these emotions can be, while the fix is just on the other side. Jesus is going to resurrect Lazarus, and He's going to resurrect himself. The fix is there. And yet honoring the emotional weightiness in those moments. There's something important about that.

And so for us to be able to hold that space with people as they walk alongside or deal with the felt experience of depression. For them, making the decision to get out of bed is, I would say, qualitatively different than for the rest of us. It will feel much more difficult for them. And if we can enter in and hold that space with them. That this is, on paper, an easy decision [but] in felt experience, tremendously difficult. It's going to feel like we're climbing Everest a little bit here. And so what they need in that moment is burden-sharing, encouragement. Let's walk together in this, while honoring for some reason in this season, it's just more difficult to do.

Lindsay: I love that all of you were emphasizing empathy and slowing down and being patient with your own emotions and with someone who's experiencing depression, which is what you've emphasized [in] all of our episodes before now. But it's such a counter-cultural thing to believe.
We live in a culture that is very utilitarian, very productivity driven. What you provide to your job or your family or culture is your worthiness. So if you aren't someone who can get out of bed and be productive that day and do all these things, you're lesser than somehow, or you are not fulfilling your cultural obligation to everyone else. I'm generalizing, but I think that's a prominent cultural narrative.

But what you're saying is, Jesus didn't short-circuit the process of, emotions don't change overnight. Depression isn't something you can speak trite statements to, and then it goes away. It is a long slow process of sitting in the ashes, being patient, taking those small steps of faithfulness, and knowing that those are worthy, and those are valuable and important.

But that cultural narrative is really powerful. And if I'm someone struggling with depression, I may even have well-meaning Christians in my life who are looking at me [and] saying, “Okay, you keep going to bed at six o'clock at night; that can't be healthy. You need to come do this or that, or you've missed too much work. You need to get out and be productive. That's the way you're going to get through this.” And they mean well, but they probably don't know how to sit and be patient in the way you're talking about.

If we're someone with depression and we're hearing the lies of that cultural narrative that we can't slow down, we can't be patient, taking care of ourselves isn't the right answer. What are some of the ways that you can ask other people for help? How can we communicate to our community how to help us take those small steps of faithfulness and not believe those lies?

Andrew: First off, Lindsay, I love the way you're framing this up. Because if you want to talk about a quick and easy way to land somebody in depression—live in a productivity-oriented culture where performance is everything, and then find yourself in an emotional state where you can't do much of anything.

It's going to cycle in on itself of, hey, I can't do work like I used to do; therefore, in this cultural narrative, I am useless. I am unvaluable. Which creates an echo chamber that will just keep feeding that, which is not going to lead to productive work or health. It's going to lead to darkness.
And this is one of the areas that can be quite difficult for us as counselors, where, we're helping a client hold in their depression, that the goal is not to get rid of the feeling of depression. That's not our primary goal. We hope for it. We would love for that to be the case. But oftentimes in the felt experience of depression, God is doing work that will not be accomplished through any other means.

God is bringing to bear work on a spiritual level and in their heart. That the depression is the tool that's being used. And that's what we long for, for our clients, not just relief, but actually more of Christ, more of what God is doing in your heart, more of the work that He wants to do, because He is constantly, lovingly, and gently working in that person's life.

And so trying to help them reframe that felt experience with depression. The feeling of depression being present in your life doesn't mean you're necessarily doing anything wrong. Definitely doesn't mean that God's left you, or He's upset with you. In many cases, it might be you're actually rightly calibrating to the brokenness of this world, and you're feeling it. And now God's going to bring comfort and meet you there.

For the first time, you actually might be rightly attuning to the depths of sin, the depths of the brokenness of the world, the depths of suffering in the world, and He's going to meet you there. And so that's what comes to mind as we think about that cultural narrative. We're not really helping people when we frame up their identity and their value on it's what you do that defines who you are. There's a natural path to depression in that.

**Shanda:** And another element of that is the cultural narrative that can often even creep into some of the Christian spaces of, we're entitled to feel good. Or if I had faith, if I believed God, or if God loved me, then there would be a felt experience of a pleasant day-to-day life, which is not biblical or an accurate understanding of what it is to be fully present in a broken world where we're going to bump up against sorrow and sadness and suffering.

But also there's a very physiological aspect of living in a very productive, achievement-oriented, approval, addictive type of people pleasing, performing, and trying to earn our way forward. There is a stress response that, if we calibrate our daily
life into this activity, fatigues our bodies to a degree. There is a chemical depression that can result in just burning out our nervous system over time.

We want to be careful and not assign a clinical depression to a very circumstantial sadness that's appropriate—which I think gets very confusing in our culture as well. But to say, if we operate in this performance mindset and then lose that ability, mixed in with this very biophysiological experience, where our adrenal glands get fatigued, and this instinct that we once relied upon is no longer present—that gets really confusing. And learning how to calibrate this narrative internally of God's grace and my identity and who I am in Christ, regardless of my daily capacity of functioning. But also recognizing we can live in a very stressed out, burnt out way of trying to gain approval that will set us up for depression.

And then we get very confused as to how we got here. And so it's not only just dealing with some of that experience of lack of motivation and discouragement, and where it seems like the lights go out, so to speak, in the way that I'm thinking and feeling and able to perform. But then it's recalibrating my identity and this way of living that I don't want to return to.

So I, I just want to scaffold some of that scale, some of that reality of how we can perpetuate our own depression when we're living for a wrong hope that was never meant to satisfy. And so there can just be layers of navigating how to help somebody get back to a healthy sense of self and then a healthy way of operating in their daily life.

**Brittany:** I think for those that are walking alongside someone who is experiencing depression and maybe get stuck in that echo chamber of cultural context and narrative, it's really important for those on the outside looking in to understand and have a right view of, what does it mean to be faithful?

What has the Lord actually called us to? Both people are needing to calibrate, both the person who's walking alongside and the person who is experiencing prolonged despondency and hopelessness. Both are calibrating to, hey, God, what have you actually asked? What have You said in Your Word? It makes a faithful life. And you won't find that He says, like, “Be more productive, and that's how you'll know that I'm pleased.”
And so, as you calibrate for both people, untangling slowly over time those feeders that keep the depression in place.

One of the most interesting and powerful moments for some of my clients, or some of the people I've walked alongside who've experienced prolonged seasons of depression, is when they start to realize the safety that depression has for them. It keeps them in a space of familiarity. And to start to look at how they themselves lean into it. They start to get a grasp of the things that are going on and how they perpetuate their own depression. It's such a fascinating experience to watch them come to that conclusion and then to figure out, how do I take then steps of faith in the midst of my despondency and see things as real and true in my experience of reality of the brokenness in my own self and in the world around me, while also untangling my self-perpetuating behaviors that continue to sow to that depression?

And for a lot of people, I find that it can feel really safe there, 'cause I don't have to take the risk of, well, what happens if I feel anything different? That fear of future loss keeps me, then, in this place of, okay, well, I just don't have to feel that again. That's been an interesting dynamic to navigate with people and to help hold space for and understand and help untangle over time those narratives that keep us in those spaces.

Andrew: I love the nuance you're hitting there. 'Cause it's important to consider, particularly with depression and some of the other persistent, we might call them negative emotions that we've covered before, that oftentimes there is something the individual is getting from the process. Particularly with depression; depression scopes down your life. It actually really simplifies, okay, my world is now only this big, which can feel, ironically, as we're dealing with hopelessness and despair, controllable.

Which leads to that safety that you're describing there, Brittany, the safety of, okay, but I know I can hold on to this. It also then gives this implicit sense of—and the world and other people can't ask much from me. They can't ask me to do more. If the emotion is ruling, if depression is ruling, my world is this big, and that means there's only certain things I can do. And the rest I don't even have to consider. I don't have to consider trying to take these steps that might feel risky, because I've already determined, well, I just can't.
Part of what's so hard in helping people walk out of that is removing the "I can't" with "can." We move that into the category of, it's possible; it's just really hard. It's possible to do some of these things again, but it's going to be really difficult.

If the "I can't" phrase holds on in those moments, or that perspective or narrative holds on, then we're unlikely to see much progress. I find that's oftentimes where I'm spending time with clients, helping them catch those words, the "always," "never," "can't" words that are being recited in their mind.

Can we just add a little wiggle room, a little wiggle room that it's really hard, it's really difficult, or it's hard to imagine being able to do that, but let's leave the door cracked, open. It's possible. Which gives us a track to move forward on in the depression.

Lindsay: I love that guide of, can we remove the words that encompass all of the future, all of the past, and can we find that wiggle room to just take a little step forward, or to just find the smallest next step that you can do. But as someone who's not a clinical professional and doesn't have the training that you have, if I want to walk alongside a friend who is experiencing depression and feels like they can't move forward, and I want to change that "never" into "maybe," or "here's a step forward," what is some actual language I can use?

Because I think it can be intimidating sometimes to know how to help someone experiencing anything, but especially with depression, because you want to reach out, you want to be available, but you don't want to be that person that's constantly knocking on their door and overwhelming to where they shut you off completely.

So what is some actual practical language we can use to check in and help them take those small steps forward in a way that's actually helpful, versus potentially doing more harm and not realizing it or reinforcing narratives that aren't helpful for them?

Shanda: Some practical steps that I think are just good ways to love one another is checking in on people, just the simple, "How are you doing?" Like, I remember you; I'm thinking about you, praying for you. Your life matters. You are meaningful, even when you don't feel a lot of purpose in your day to day. Being known and being seen, being valued,
which is true in the economy of grace about how God feels about us at all times—that's what the one anothering gift of community I think can offer.

And not going to the platitudes of, “Grin and bear it. Just memorize Scripture, and you'll feel better.” Staying away from the quick fixes that don't work. And that patient enduring, believing what maybe that individual can't believe for themselves. I think there's wisdom and discernment on how and when we may offer some of those hopeful considerations about the truth and wisdom of God, but also knowing their story and allowing somebody to talk. And being a listener, which is, in essence, kind of what we do day to day as counselors, allowing them to tell their story.

To boil it down, the path forward is, by the grace of God, to make sense out of your suffering. To get a story and a narrative that orients around the glory of God and His promises that are true in spite of, and in the midst of, our pain. And we're hopeful as an individual begins to tell their story and be honest about their sorrow and their grief.

Sometimes there's just a lot of "it depends" in that. And so don't go too quickly to script, or assume, or presume upon understanding where the depression is coming from. But listen with eager ears to learn whether or not there may be unconfessed unrepentant sin; that depression is bearing weight on their conscience of a need for confession and a need for receiving the grace of God. And so might we keep in step with the Spirit, discerningly asking God for help to know how to respond if that becomes part of the story or part of their experience. And then other people may have past regrets or grief that is just difficult. We want to slowly be the partakers of leaning into their sorrow with them and believing that God is there.

And we get to reflect that in a way that, hopefully over time, they will begin to believe in the tangible expression of God's love, that as community walking alongside somebody who is experiencing deep grief and discouragement could feel. And like Brittany said earlier so beautifully, go on a walk with them, pray over them, bring them a meal, sit down and eat with them. Help them in those small ways or be with them to the degree that they are willing and feels helpful. It's the simple things that we overlook, wanting a quick fix or some magical silver bullet that's going to come in and just make everybody feel better.
God is with us in our pain. We get to embody that as much as we can as the body of Christ [as we] come alongside people and listen and bear with and encourage them.

**Andrew:** God's example with Adam and Eve is such a remarkable picture. Adam and Eve eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and pull some fig leaves off and make some clothes. And then God shows up in the garden, and they dive into the bushes. So God is the One who seeks out even in their brokenness, who draws near to them, who calls out to them, who invites them into a new way of living.

In a similar way, I think one of the more helpful things we can do is, people who are struggling with depression, go to them. Don't wait for them to come to you. That's the very thing that they likely feel unable to do. Go be with them in their brokenness and in their difficulty.

And similarly with Adam and Eve, you look at Genesis 3, and God's interaction is—He's telling them, “Hey, here are the things that are going to happen. Here are the problems that are going to come to bear.”

At no point does God ask them to fix it. He's the One who actually says and shows by giving them animal skins, by giving them proper covering, “Hey, I am the One who will bring the healing. I am the One who will bring the covering that you actually need.”

And so in a similar way, with these individuals that we walk alongside that are struggling with depression. We can't fix them. We can't make them feel better. This is an important thing for us to keep in mind. For some of us, we have to grow in our tolerance of people struggling with hard things, of not getting better. In other words, we gotta be okay with, as they're not getting better, we don't get fatigued, because they're not moving at the pace that we want them to. Or it feels like an undue burden to us.

But rather endure in their difficulty, shoulder to shoulder with them, and lead them to, hey, Shanda as you just said, God is with you here. God is at work. There is always reason for hope though we may not feel it in these seasons. And if I can lean in with you and take the next step in a new direction, that's what we do. So the ministry of presence, I think, especially with depression being so primary, the ministry of being present with those who are hurting.
Yeah, going for a walk, always a great idea. And this would be across the board in terms of mental health—just get outside and get into a different environment. Again, I think, with depression, which oftentimes includes heavy isolation, get someone out of their house, out of their apartment, and into an environment where they can see creation. We move into a Matthew 6 reality, where it's, like, hey, look at the birds of the air, look at the grass of the field, look at, you know, the traffic in Austin. And dwell on God's goodness amidst all of this. We can help them shift the strength of that feeling by recognizing there's more to the world than what you've shrunk it down to. Or more to the world than the depression would tempt you to shrink it down to. And so I think those are some of the just very simple, practical things we can do to progressively over time, be a help.

**Lindsay:** I love what seems to me like a mark of spiritual maturity, of growing in our tolerance for people struggling with difficult things, because we're all going to be that person at some point who's struggling with difficult things, who wants people in our lives to embrace us in the way that you've all described.

And we all need to do that for one another. I think that's what we're called to in Christian community, in looking more like Jesus. How do we grow in our tolerance of helping people patiently and lovingly through difficult things?

**Andrew:** I think it's always helpful for us to meditate on God's patience with us and to not lose sight of that. I think where oftentimes, I'll just speak personally here, where I'll get frustrated in a client's lack of change is if I've, I've forgotten how patient, how many things I got wrong in my own process—depression's part of my story, so this is close to home—how many things I got wrong and felt like I couldn't do. And that I had to be patiently borne by others and by God. Because if I can hold in front of me this reality that, although I feel like I've got a good grasp on it now, I know how to navigate it well, that took decades, that I need to remember that God was patient with me in my own brokenness for decades.

Still, His patience is not running dry. It won't, which is amazing. And so, I think in one component, the meditation on how patient God is with us. With that, the only way we can do that is by remembering that God is the One who has to do the work. If we fall into the trap of believing the client can just fix themselves, or we can fix them, that patience will be thin.
But if we hold this—even in the darkness, even in the hardship, God is at work, which means we don’t know God’s at work when the suffering is removed. No, we know God’s at work, even as it remains. He’s still at work, and His pacing for them is His perfect plan, design, sanctifying process for them. Then we can have unending patience. He began a good work in them; [He] will bring it to completion. His timing is right. I can hold onto that. So remembering how patient God has been with us, remembering God is the One who brings to fruition the whole change process.

**Brittany:** I think it’s helpful for me when I start to get weary of those who are struggling and the lack, my perceived lack, of movement. I’ll ask, “Why do I feel so inconvenienced?” To help understand what is it in me that’s getting pricked right now. I’ll get, like, angry about the situation. I’m, like, I’m frustrated because nothing seems to be happening.

And so it’s helpful for me to start to reflect on, okay, well, what about the situation is pinging me? Why am I getting frustrated with this person? Also a part of that for me is sometimes I start to feel a little hopeless. I start to feel a little helpless. I start to actually feel exactly what they’re feeling in the moment, which can remind me, one, to have increased empathy, to let that lead me more to empathy of, okay, this is what this is like.

So I’m starting to experience a little bit of what they’re walking in every day. And asking the Lord to help me lead that to Him, that I might receive comfort in Him and also have increased empathy for whoever it is that I’m walking alongside. Rather than letting that push me into the temptation of feeling bitter or frustrated or wanting to remove this person as an obstacle.

They’re not an obstacle. The Lord also has them in my life to help refine me and to bring me into greater awareness of my need for Christ. And that is what they also need. So there’s this relationship that is mutually pushing us both toward Christ, or [it] can, if we start to understand and let the Holy Spirit work it out in me as well as the person in front of me.

**Shanda:** Yeah. I think it’s exactly what Andrew and Brittany are hitting on, but we like comfort. It’s just being honest with ourselves, and we don’t have to feel guilty about that. We don’t live in a world that is guaranteed. And I think reminding ourselves of this
theology of suffering and a Christian economy of grace and hope that is not found in our circumstances. The more we can believe that for ourselves, then we don't have to be overwhelmed by our own trials and challenges or the hardships and the brokenness that we're going to navigate personally. We have confidence in what we cannot see, which is the gospel of God's love coming into our darkness, bringing His light and redemptive capacity to make some of this brokenness have meaning.

In our cultural narratives, apart from the wisdom of God, that is not available. There is meaning in the midst of pain. There is a purpose happening in the midst of a season of darkness that, generally speaking, I don't know a human who hasn't encountered that at some point. And so it is opening our own hearts up to what the Spirit might be doing in us so that we can have the confident hope and the courageous faith to not grow weary and keep our eyes on Christ, who, again, had to, for the joy set before Him, endure.

And that is the persevering Christian through this journey of faith. It's going to look different for everybody. It's the gift of this ongoing discipleship and this ongoing one-anothering, and the purpose of community. And faith to carry each other's burdens and walk with each other through that process, because that's how we learn. It's what disciples do. We learn to believe that God is good in the midst of hardship.

But that is a challenging lesson to learn, and we don't have to pretend like it's easy. And I think it's unhelpful and harmful to make it a platitude of, just know this in your head and then out comes this, like, process of not being overwhelmed by a broken world. So normalizing, validating, recognizing our own limitations and difficulty in that—being honest about that with great vulnerability. Then we just settle into the humanity, that this glorious God of grace is doing something miraculous and divine in the complexity of walking out our faith.

Andrew: Going back to the initial question, the way you phrased it. I think it's important for us to just drill down [to] the most simple practical reality is to build tolerance. Yes, there is really no other path than putting yourself or exposing yourself to the difficulty. There's not another way to build a tolerance of long suffering with somebody other than being in the presence of that individual, and then doing what Brittany was talking about earlier. See what comes out of your heart, and then start to address that. Know that God's working on you in that moment. And when you're hanging out with that person for 15
minutes, and your mind starts shooting off narratives of, *If they just did this, everything would be okay, or if they just would get out of bed and whatever else,* and you start blaming them for their problems, to catch your heart in that moment and go, *Lord, help me see them the way You do. And also forgive me for wanting to dump on them and, basically, thanks for showing me my self-righteousness, that what I really believe at my core in those moments is if they would just do life the way that I do, they'd be okay.* That's a lie.

Again, to grow that tolerance, there's really no other path than being around it. And then I would say, to have the humility to watch your heart do all that yucky stuff, and then go, *Okay, Lord, so there is for sure work that You're doing in me in this that's good, that I can receive, because You are the primary worker, both in this individual and in me, and I don't want to miss out. I don't want to miss, Lord, the things that You're going to teach me as I seek to shoulder up beside this individual and bear burdens together. There really isn't another path.*

**Lindsay:** I think that's such a wise approach also for breaking down those false labels of, you're the person that's broken, I'm the person that's here to fix you. Because we're reminded that the wonder and joy of community is, we're all broken. We all need Jesus. He's the only One who has restored our relationship back with God. And it's the Holy Spirit working in us and through us that's doing all this work, that's growing us to be more like Jesus, that's making us healthy and whole day by day.

And so I love even just the way that you frame that, that we can remember that we are not here to fix whatever we think is broken. We're all in this together. We all go through different seasons. We all need one another.

Thank you all for laying out such a beautiful picture of the realities of depression and the realities of life for all of us and how much we need Jesus. And I want to end this episode with asking, so if there's someone listening right now who, their small step of faithfulness today, if they're experiencing depression, was to hit play on this episode. What do you want to say to them to encourage them where they're at?

You've already given so many good promises from Scripture. So many good understandings of the realities of what they're going through, versus probably what their
brain and what the enemy is telling them. But what's a last word of encouragement we can give to people today who have been so courageous and so faithful to take that small step?

Andrew: The first phrase that comes to mind for me is, you are not your depression. That's not the "who" of who you are. That's not the circumference of your identity. This is, in a sense, a season, even if it's a season that rolls with you the rest of life this side of heaven. It's a season that will, by God's grace, when all things are redeemed, come to a conclusion.

And yet in that, as you know that you are not your depression, your depression does not define who you are, ask that the Lord would give you a heart to be open and receptive to what He's doing. He knows the struggle far better than you ever will. He understands your frame. He made you; He knows your limitations. And as crazy as it might sound, maybe even impossible as it might feel, He's at work in you now. He's present now. He loves you now. And He's bringing about His good work in you. And so, know that you're not your depression. And talk to the Lord about what He has for you in that.

Shanda: That's the step that I would encourage anybody toward. Bring your heart to the Lord. Approach the throne of grace with confidence. Know that the accuser would want you to feel shame over feeling depressed or sad or overwhelmed,

And we would invite you to be honest. And live in the freedom, the confidence of God's love for you while you're sad. There is a space for a Christian to feel sad and walk through a season of darkness. There are many people we respect deeply who have encountered deep sorrow for prolonged periods of time, and in the midst of that have written some of the most beautiful hymns or have brought some of the most profound teachings of God's Word.

And there's just that honest opportunity to lament and to see that as worship. That we can worship God. We can honor God. We can be a believer with hope in the midst of a season where life is very challenging. And we don't want those circumstances to begin to define us, but we also don't want to deny or feel like we have to avoid being honest about the hardships and difficulties and challenges of life. I think as we begin to do that and normalize these seasonal experiences, God is the constant, anchoring, immovable,
unchanging hope in the midst of the circumstances of life that are going to ebb and flow. And we can bank our hopes on Jesus and love each other through those hardships.

**Brittany:** I think the thing that's coming to my mind is that the Lord sees that small step of faith, that small seed sown in faith in the midst of depression, to press play on a podcast about depression. And there's so many steps in the path of an experience of depression that are those small things that nobody else sees publicly,

But the Lord is in those moments, ministering, loving, witnessing, empowering that moment of faith. And so I am encouraged by that thought of the presence of God in the obscure moments of life that feel really difficult. That is worship unto the Lord, to receive from Him and to give back to Him.

**Lindsay:** Amen. Brittany, Shanda, Andrew, thank you so much for joining us and for being so diligent in your thoughtfulness and your love for Scripture to unpack this really difficult topic for us.

Listeners, thank you for joining us today. We encourage you as always to process what you've learned in community. In every episode that's important, but perhaps we've highlighted how this might be even more important if you're currently experiencing depression. We've created a group guide to help you walk through these things with your community. It has Scripture, reflection questions, and other resources for you to really dig in more deeply to what you've learned.

We also encourage you to stick around for a short liturgy reading that will help you respond in worship to what you've begun to process, but also what the Lord might be doing in your heart that you don't even see yet.

We'll see you next time, where we'll talk about happiness and joy. Thanks again for joining us.

**Alex:** *When Darkness Looms*

The darkness looms again.
The sun’s light unforgivingly descends.
Waves and breakers crash in,
And I am lost.

I cry out, but the void empties my voice.
Without power to breathe, to hope, stripped of this choice,
I lie stranded in a prison of despair,
Blind and mute, without communion.

_Speak to me, God._

In the silence, another voice looms.
The shadow whispers failure and screams defeat,
Wrapping its lies around my head.
O, where is the Rock to keep me from sinking?

_Speak truth._

I feel no rest. No rescue.
Only the weight of the waves crushing me.
Only the depleting struggle to remain afloat.
When will this dawn break?
When will the rescue come?

_Speak peace._

I believe. Help my unbelief.
Even here, in the pressing, in the crushing, lead me to trust You.
I cannot see You, I cannot feel You,
Hold me to the Rock of Your grace.

_Speak freedom._

In despairing, despair has not won.
Fill my lungs to speak like the Son.
Though dying, He lives. His Spirit now sent.
Into Your hands I commit my spirit.