

Reframing Emotions

Reframing Joy

Episode 10

“Having joy has always been easy for me. There are a lot of things that bring me joy, but I tend to give myself credit for that rather than acknowledging that it comes from the ultimate Creator of joy.”

“I know joy very well. I love expressing joy, but [I] most especially love spreading joy. I think because of my hope in Jesus, I'm able to express joy easily.”

“Joy is that sweet buzz in my body of sustained peace. It's when I truly feel like I lack nothing at all. All my desires are satisfied in God's presence.”

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, as always, are my friends and professional counselors Andrew Dealy, Shanda Anderson, and Brittany Beltran.

Now we're going to do something a little bit different today. Normally we just focus on one emotion and unpack it and talk about where we see it in Scripture and how we can help one another engage it in community. But today we're going to talk about both happiness and joy.



Happiness is an emotion. And I recently learned from all of you that joy is not. And so, Andrew, would you give us a definition of happiness, and then, Shanda, would you unpack what joy is so that we can see how those things are different?

Andrew: Happiness—truly the emotion that we all enjoy and want in many ways.

And so when I think about happiness, I think about it in terms of, essentially, an immediate response to the perception that good things are happening. Good things are coming my way. Good things are coming to fruition in the moment. And so the perception piece becomes quite significant, and—we'll get into this—because the perception may be right or wrong. The good thing that we're assessing as good may or may not actually be good in a fallen world. Again, happiness, the perception that something good is actually happening right now. We may find that oftentimes that good thing turns out to have some baggage with it.

Shanda: Well, as we dive into our conversation today, it's going to be really helpful for us to define joy as a distinctly Christian experience. It is a state of being, *not* an emotion. Meaning, I can have joy in the midst of trial. I can be sorrowful and still rejoice. That is rooted in a gospel grid of believing that God is the source of joy and that the joy of my salvation is always accessible, even when I might be navigating an uncomfortable situation. My human reality does not determine my joy that is given and sustained by God, who is outside of my experience and my feelings.

Andrew: I love that we're having this type of conversation about happiness and joy, because in regular, everyday use I even find myself at times using them interchangeably. And yet there's quite a significant difference as we think about it [happiness and joy] in our own lives, and what the Lord has for us, living in a broken world.

So if we're to step back into Genesis, before the fall, I think happiness and joy perfectly aligned. Because, well, they're one in the same. Everything is functioning the way it should be. Everything is right. Everything is good. But it's at the introduction of suffering and brokenness and hardship that now happiness and joy have a separation from each other.

Joy becomes now, when I face difficulty in my life, I'm not going to feel happy about that difficulty. When I feel pain and suffering in my life, it would be, in many ways, inappropriate for me to be happy about suffering the loss of a loved one, happy about suffering an injury. Happiness would not be the right emotional response in those types of scenarios.

Andrew: But joy leads us into, hey, in this brokenness, the greater story, the greater perception that's happening. God is at work. God is redeeming. The brokenness is not greater than God. Therefore I can have joy, even though I may not feel happy in the moment. I can hold onto the joy that God is in control, that He is at work, that He will sustain and endure me in hardship. And yet that [joy] would be separate and different from being happy about it.

Lindsay: So culture sets happiness up as the goal. Whether it's in relationships or career, or whatever's important to you in life, it seems like culture consistently sets up happiness as the thing that we're shooting for. Follow your passion, follow your heart, and find happiness.

Happiness isn't a bad thing. But how should we rightly frame it as Christians who know that joy is deeper and more sustainable, and we can find a hope in that? But we still want to experience happiness. How should we frame that up in our lives, where we give it [happiness] the right status?

Shanda: You bring up such a great question, Lindsay. And I wish there was a super simple answer to that. But I do want to just echo what you're saying: what we're suggesting here in our conversation is not some stoic or fatalistic martyr. We don't want to suggest that the goal of the Christian life is to not experience some positive emotion along the way. We get to delight ourselves in the Lord. And we want to recognize that God is a good father. And He gives good gifts. And there's a great reality of worshiping God and experiencing true joy that also has positive feeling attached to it.

What we want to talk about today is that, even in the midst of the realities where life is going to invite us into the discomfort, how to not negate the opportunity to see God's presence in the midst of the difficulty as what helps us to endure, to walk by faith; that we would [not] calibrate too quickly [to] a cultural narrative to escape the discomfort and

always keep happiness or comfort or that pleasant feeling as the indicator of this is good, and I want to move toward experiencing that a hundred percent of the time. We would say that will not set us up for success. It will set us up for failure, because it's not ultimately sustainable.

Andrew: So in many ways, the pursuit of an emotion is not what we're called to. And again we talked about the difference between joy and happiness. Happiness being an emotion; joy, not being an emotion, but rather a state of being that allows for multiple kinds of emotions to exist at the same moment. So to be sorrowful and joyful, or to have joy while feeling sorrowful in the same moment. In terms of Christian health and development, our hope is actually the emotions we feel in a given moment line up with what is true.

And so in the moment, if I just lost a loved one, a healthy emotional response would be grief or sorrow or sadness. That would be healthy, good, and right, even though I still have joy, because I know God holds all that in His hand. He knows about it. It's part of His plan. It's part of the work that He's doing.

And so the danger is, if we chase after a life of always feeling happy, like immediately having high, positive emotional response to everything, well, in a broken world, that's, one, impossible; two, I guess maybe with enough medication, maybe you could last a little while in just an unending state of happiness, but there's always a, you know, ditch at the end of that road.

And so, we would not develop depth. We would not develop maturity as Christ modeled for us in Scripture, where His emotional range was the whole range. He didn't just feel happy all the time. Did He have joy all the time? Was that His state of being? Yes, 100 percent, but He wasn't always happy.

And so again, I think what we're looking for in terms of actual health from an emotional discipleship perspective is, would I feel in alignment with what God feels about each circumstance that I'm going to face? Would my heart and my emotions align with how God feels about me, how God feels about my circumstances?

Brittany: I think one of the things that we're saying is that it doesn't diminish the desire for happiness, that echo of Eden, to have that alignment of experiencing the goodness that it is to be in unhindered communion with God and others. That desire for happiness is not necessarily a wrong desire.

But the pursuit of that, [that] being the ultimate thing that I'm meant to experience at all times in this broken world, is going to be unattainable and unsustainable for everyone. But as you notice, culture tries to bend reality into this false sense of security that you ought to always and only feel happy. Which is just not possible in a world that has sin and brokenness.

But that desire ought to press us into a right understanding of the world, that I have this desire that doesn't seem to match up, and asking the Lord to settle my soul into [the question], *Why is that? And what do I do with this desire?* That it [the desire] would press me further into an eternal perspective of the day when restoration will come, and it'll even be better than Eden.

Andrew: I think from a secular-cultural perspective, this is the sense that we should be able to be happy all the time, again, as a confirmation of what Scripture has told us about the way human beings have been created, created for the garden of Eden. But that's not where we live. And so that longing in our soul, even this entitlement of, *I should get to feel good all the time*, is evidence of the truth of Scripture.

It's why the culture has such a hard time letting that go. That's why medicating your way into happiness is this felt justice of, *That's what I'm supposed to get to do*. And yet it doesn't work. The more we pursue happiness through those types of means or an unending state of positive feeling—it doesn't work in this world. There's too much reality that bumps into that and makes it not last.

Shanda: That's where that promise and the hope of the future glory, where all the sad things will become untrue. And like Brittany said so beautifully, it's the echo of what once was before sin and suffering. But it [also] is the hope of what's coming, where the Christian gets to bank our hope on that realized joy that is ongoing and will be unending and will not be distracted by sin and suffering. And so the eternal hope and the eternal perspective begins to shape the grid through which we now operate in, in the midst of

hardships and discouragement or difficult circumstances. Then we can remember and call to mind, and, like Jesus did, for the joy set before Him, endure. And we know that there is this future perfect joy that helps us navigate the uncomfortable negative emotions, leaning into the promises that are true in Christ, that are always available for the Christian, in spite of the circumstances or the emotional realities.

Lindsay: So if someone's hearing this and maybe realizing for the first time they've been chasing happiness, when really what they wanted was joy, how should we start looking at joy? Is it something that we can recognize is already existing in our lives, where we just need to stop and reflect and just recognize where it's at? Or is it something that we should try to actively cultivate somehow? Or maybe it's both.

But if we're trying to make that transition from I've been chasing happiness. Now, it seems like that's not the thing to chase—it's just a road sign, to go back to what you taught us in episode one. What should we do to start focusing on that sustainability that comes from the Word of God, the life of Christ?

Shanda: One of the things that I think helps us move into what you're asking, Lindsay, which is really important, is just being honest about the superficial happiness that we often find ourselves running after on this treadmill going nowhere. Because it does always run its course. Or it has a shelf life and begins to lose its effectiveness over time, because it wasn't meant to sustain.

So I think one of the first steps in that is just to be really honest about the limitations of earthly temporal means to bring about this abiding joy that is a fruit of the Spirit. It's not truly human. It's a supernatural grace, and it is a gift of the Spirit that that we ask [for] in prayer and cultivate in honoring the person of Christ, who is our peace, who is our joy, orienting to the character and nature of God that is divine and majestic and holy, and practicing delighting in those things that are not going to waiver or diminish over time. They are consistent and constant and supreme above all of these temporal human endeavors that will ultimately fail.

So I think just being honest about those things. And then cultivating those habits. We go back to our first episode: Who are we worshipping? What are we worshipping? And pointing our hearts to the better love that has the ability to sustain.

Andrew: I think this is where it does get a bit dicey here. The evidence of joy in someone's life from a Christian perspective—again, I think in your average use of the language, we think someone who's joyful is happy all the time. Go lucky. All of that. Which, I would offer—I don't think that's how Scripture describes it. But rather a joy-filled life is one in many ways that is aligned with God's design. That is humble. That has fruit of the Spirit evidenced in an individual's life. So how do you know if you have a joy in your life? In many cases, I think the evidence will be [that] you're able to faithfully do the hard things, because you're holding onto the joy that's set before you. You're holding onto the joy that one day will be sight. Where it will no longer be hope. It'll be the consummation of what's been promised.

Which is not maybe the most fun definition of what joy looks like in an individual's life. But for my own soul I just find it helpful to remember. I mean, as James talks about suffering—James, chapter one—it says count it all joy. I love the effortful language there. We have to do work to see the hard things as joy-filled because we know they're purposeful. They have a trajectory. They're doing something good in us in the process. And so we count it as joy.

If James says, “Feel happy in all your suffering,” I think I would not take great comfort in that passage, because I'd be like, *That's not possible for me to giggle about my pain*. But rather, the language used there— I just find comfort in no, we get to work at, in our hearts, to understand there's joy to be had here. ‘Cause what's being produced is worth it, though we cannot see it. It is better, though we may not understand it. And therefore we can hold to joy even when everything around us is sharp and painful. We can hold to joy in that.

And so, one of the more common questions is, “Does God want us to be happy?” Which I think is a good question. And my answer at this point is sometimes. Does God want you to be angry? Sometimes. Does God want you to be sad? Sometimes. Joy enables us to have all of those [emotions] and to learn to have God's heart in all the circumstances that we face. To feel those things—but the core reality for the believer is a heart consumed by the joy of knowing what is the greater truth, what is the greater story, what is coming. And to be able to navigate the chaos of this world in light of that.

Brittany: So if I have been in the habit of pursuing happiness, and that's what I've sought after in my experience of life, and I'm recognizing that that might not be what I ought to be pursuing, I think in that evaluation process of trying to understand, *Hey, should I always feel happy? Should I be feeling happy right now?* Along the way there are things we've had to push out of the way in order to maintain a state of happiness, and in that process of learning not to pursue happiness as the goal, it's going back to and evaluating, *What are those things that I've had to push out, deny, move away from that might actually be put there on purpose for me to lean into the Lord and experience the emotion that is rightfully aligned to the reality that I live in?*

And so in the case of something tragic happening and me wanting to maintain my happiness. I might deny that thing happened, or I might deny that thing was hurtful or sad. And so learning to tell the truth in that moment of that impacts [me], and I ought to feel sad, and I ought to let the Lord recalibrate my heart. That sadness is right to feel, and so on.

That transitioning out of the pursuit of happiness—going back to what Shanda said—learning to tell the truth about the situation. And with what Andrew was saying. Also knowing that it might be good for you to feel that way. The Lord might have for you to feel a sadness and to experience Him in the midst of that. As we allow the reality of the brokenness of the world to filter in, we can gain more of Christ and [be] more emotionally calibrated to the person of Jesus in our own life.

Also—if I'm pursuing happiness, some people become inconvenient to me. They infringe on my happiness. And so how have I treated others in my life in an effort to maintain happiness? Okay, if I'm not pursuing happiness, what does it do to my relationships? How does that help me refocus and re-dignify the other person and the experience that they're having and we're having together?

Shanda: As I hear Brittany talk and remind us of these really helpful truths, a little bit of a cheesy memory I have from a camp of learning about joy, that I was told was Jesus, others, and then you. But I do believe that there's some truth in that. To say that the Christian joy is selfless in the sense that we are putting the glory of God first and seeking to love God and love others. And out of that obedience and walking by faith, there is a natural by-product of joy, delighting in God and loving others, that would bring, again, as

we're defining it, very distinctly Christian reflection of the way that God has so graciously sent Christ on our behalf. That we begin to love others out of that.

And I think it does bring the fruit of the Spirit of joy. And I think one way of thinking about happiness in its cultural context is the pursuit of self. It is my glory, my will, my desire. There's a very egocentric drive and motivation to happiness that gets set apart when we are pursuing joy that has the glory of God at the center of that, which is going to orient myself to God in such a way that I would see others with dignity and grace and honor. And I do believe that when we are rightly aligned with God's glory, there is a byproduct of joy in sharing in even Christ's sufferings but also sharing in what it is to love the way God designed us to.

Lindsay: Something you've reiterated several times throughout various episodes, and we've also touched on today is, "How we can hold the tension of a negative emotion or being in a place of grief or depression or fear, but then also hold all the promises of God and the eternal hope that we have and sustainable joy in this other hand?"

So can you talk a little bit more about what it looks like to practically walk through a situation in life that's really hard. Maybe we're tempted to want to feel good things versus feeling difficult things, and then pressing into joy and into God's promises without short-circuiting that process Brittany was talking about.

So, not using the idea of joy and the truth that we know from Scripture to work ourselves out of negative feelings, but to trust those things, to believe that they're real, and press into them, but also realize that we're still in those circumstances that feel bad.

Shanda: I think you've just described the Christian life and this journey that we're all on of sanctification, where we are being transformed from one degree of glory to the next. Those are the tensions of the already, but not yet. To not lose sight of the eternal while we live in the reality [of this world] and tell the truth about the current circumstances.

We all have to learn how to do that. That is counterintuitive. Humanly speaking, we will not do that left to ourselves. We will not work through this grid of the gospel that does not minimize the glory of God while at the same time does not minimize the pain and the

difficulty. We get to hold all of that truth together and find the presence of God. The joy of the Lord is my strength in the midst of this incredibly difficult moment.

And I think it's good for us as humans to be able to say, "Lord, I don't know how to walk with You in this. And You tell me joy is available. I don't know how to trust You for that right now. Teach me, help me. Remind me of these things that You've taught me before. Help me to believe [in] Your goodness in the midst of this incredibly difficult circumstance."

We're not looking for stoic. Just [a] smile on your face, pretending like everything's fine. We would say that will lead to depression, like we talked about in the last episode. Truly it is the person of Christ who is our hope, who is our sympathetic high priest, who is the one who has gone before us faithfully and perfectly, knowing that we can't do it in our limited humanity, but we learn from Him. And we grow into, hopefully, maturing faith that would give us greater perspective and spiritual eyes that see the spiritual truth in the midst of the brokenness.

Brittany: Just to echo what Shanda has said is, I think about what it means to be [a] Christian, to be discipled by Christ. And to follow Him into learning what that's like, as He incarnationally modeled for us what it's like to hold all of the reality of who God is and the divinity and also the reality of suffering and pain and not minimizing any of that, but to hold and walk faithfully in it.

I think it's not something that we'll learn how to practice overnight. It's not, I hear this truth, and I automatically know how to apply it. It's the little by little. We experience one hardship, and the Lord walks us through that, and then another. And then, over time, as we stay close to Christ, [we] become more and more formed into living within that context of how to have joy and peace in the midst of tribulation and how to have that through our unity with Christ, who is that for us. And so it's this little by little, one degree at a time, over the course of the Christian life.

Andrew: Yeah, Lindsay, I think what you're hitting on [is] the temptation to let the right answers eclipse the emotional experience. How do we keep it from becoming, *Well, I know the right answer is God works all things for the good of those who love Him and according to His purposes, yada, yada; therefore, I should just feel happy.*

In my mind, maybe the most helpful place to go is literally to just look at the life of Christ. Here's someone who had all the right answers. He didn't get one of them wrong. Right theology, perfect theology. And yet His emotional range was the full continuum. The right answers did not prevent Him from feeling and experiencing those emotions. Even to the extent that those emotions were part of the human process.

I think that where we get to see Jesus experiencing those emotions, He's teaching us something about what it means to be His image bearer that we tend to want to skip over. No. Hebrews talks about that He was perfected through suffering. There's something mysterious there. There's something in the suffering. Second Corinthians talks about this current suffering is preparing us for a weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17), that somehow this is all knit together. That our experience and our feelings, those negative emotions that we would rather just avoid or we'd rather shut down with the right answer, has a formative effect on us as human beings. I think we just don't fully understand.

Yet it's what Jesus modeled for us: This is what it looks like to live in a fractured world full of joy. Still feel all the things, and to not then be controlled [by them]. That's the last part in my mind. To not be controlled by those feelings that will come and go. To not let them determine what's right or wrong or determine what you're going to do next, but rather to remain holding on, in joy, to faith, to God's design, to God's purpose.

And even when your emotions are screaming that you have to go a different direction—to be able to step in faith toward what you know is good. And so, we'll just say it this way—that's hard. It's just hard. It feels much easier to just be like, *Well, the right answer is God's good, and He's working everything out, so just don't feel*. But that's not what Jesus did. I think He invites us into something more complicated and more difficult, yet in the end, much more fruitful.

Shanda: Which circles back to our definition of our purpose, our meaning. If we're orienting our lives around the American dream of health, wealth, and the pursuit of happiness, if those are the goals—we won't find ourselves moving toward not letting the emotions control us. 'Cause the end goal is going to be constantly driving how I'm orienting and defining success. But if we define our purpose and meaning in what we were created for is to worship God, to glory in God. Even in the midst of difficult circumstances we can do that, and we don't have to pretend like that's easy. We can be

honest that the Christian life is hard. Walking with God in a broken world is not easy. It is challenging. And God often asks hard things of His people. And we don't have to pretend like we always like the story that He's writing, or that the path that we're being asked to walk through is one that is pleasant or feels good. Because the reality is, to walk by faith often feels uncomfortable. And we don't have to pretend that it doesn't.

But in the midst of that, there is hope. And I think joy and hope are so closely related: there's a hope outside of my circumstance. There is a hope and a joy, a promise outside of the way I feel right now.

And that is the gospel. That is the promise of a risen Savior. and a returning King who is going to remedy the things that seem hopeless right now and feel overwhelming. And so it is that truth that brings perspective and freedom that helps me not grow weary in doing good even when life is really hard.

Andrew: It's maybe important to even say at this point—'cause I think we can almost color happiness as though it's bad. I don't know that we want to land there. So the perception of something good is happening and that perception is true, *and* it aligns with what God says is good and right—we have a moment of happiness and joy knit together that I think is that glimpse of what eternity will be like. It's that glimpse of, oh, when everything finally settles in its right position and everything works the way it's supposed to. There's a holistic happiness, joyness, whatever you want to call it, that happens in that moment that I think kind of rings that bell of heaven in our being of, *That's what it's supposed to be.*

And I honestly think that's what kind of catches the culture is that they have those moments where it rings. And it feels like this is how it's always supposed to be. And again, they're in one sense, right. That's how it is going to be. That's how it was before the fall.

And so I think we can even leverage that, you know, walking alongside those who are yet to become Christians and helping them see that that felt experience is very congruent to what you're made for. But if you try and find it through building happiness in your own life, you're chasing the wind. It's not going to work out.

And so, again, happiness is good. I would say—and this might sound negative—it [happiness], generally in this life, is kind of cheap. It's short-lived. If we try to keep pursuing it, it'll escape us. But to be able to celebrate and rejoice in the Lord when those moments happen that our hearts just go, *Yes, there it is*. And to know, oh, Lord, thanks for that appetizer. Thanks for that taste in this moment. But not to grasp onto it as though, oh, now for the rest of my life, I'm always supposed to feel this way.

Shanda: I would just love to echo what Andrew is saying. Because we don't want to cheapen grace that is offering us moments of pure delight and joy that is a little foretaste of heaven to come. Whether it's laughter, or taste buds, or just being able to be with family and friends. There are many things that evoke feelings that are good, and we don't want to dismiss those or gloss over them. We want to praise God and give credit where credit's due. That is a gift from God, and it is meant to help us worship God, not worship the emotion that it's producing.

And I think that's where the cultural confusion can come in. We worship feeling good instead of, in feeling good, we worship God, and say, “Thank You.” And [we] can still worship God and praise Him when those emotions are not so positive and pleasant. But whether pleasure or pain, our hearts still turn to God and acknowledge His goodness in the midst of whatever experience we have. But the good moments that come are really good, and we get to celebrate those.

Lindsay: I realize this idea is a little bit cliché, but it makes me think of the whole idea of the darkness proves the sunshine, those echoes of Eden moments where we get true glimpses of a redeemed and completely restored heaven and earth, a future that we're promised in Christ.

I feel that I appreciate those all the more for the 99 percent or 98 percent—I'll be generous—of the difficulties of Christian life, all of the suffering and all of the pain and all of the things that we're told we would have in this life if we follow Jesus. And for me, it makes those glimpses of heaven, those glimpses of restoration, where I feel happy, those true perceptions of that good feeling, feel so much bigger than I think it would be if life was easy all the time.

So in every episode we've talked about the importance of community as we're experiencing emotion, navigating emotion. So how do we cultivate joy together in community?

Shanda: When we're talking about the distinct definition of joy as a Christian reality, because of the person of Christ, we want our communities and our conversations within our communities and the encouragement within our communities to orient around the glory of Christ, and the hope of the gospel.

And so I think the more that we do that and remind each other of these promises that are true that do not fail, there's a hope that doesn't disappoint, even in the midst of suffering and challenge. The more that we believe that *together* and then walk *together* through whatever circumstances may challenge that belief, but hold fast to the grace and wisdom of God in the midst of that, that's where I think the beauty of the body of Christ can help us do that when it feels like, *Lord, I can't do that on my own.*

Praise God, I don't have to. I have other people to help me believe. Lord, I believe; help my unbelief. Teach me how to believe that this hope is true and sufficient and better than the thing that I want and I don't have.

I think community helps us practice those things, remember those things, believe those things—and grieve rightly and rejoice. We want to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. And that's what community gets to do, is tell the truth together and hold space for the complexity and the tension and the difficulty without letting go of that centrality of the gospel truth that anchors us, and is the north star that we're always coming back to.

Brittany: I am reminded in Scripture how often it uses the word “today” or “daily” or just the invitation to moment-by-moment engage one another and remind one another of the true reality that we live in. Which is that, in every circumstance we face in life, God is present with us and actively near.

And so we get to encourage one another in that process of learning to grow in our ability to experience joy in all circumstances. But it is a growing and a learning and a cultivating together, and a sharing of life with one another—to be so closely knit that you are

impacted by one another's sorrow and by another's joy. When one part of the body hurts, the whole body feels it. And when one part of the body rejoices, the body feels it. And so that we would grow in our ability to be the body of Christ and allow the Spirit to unify us as He [the Son] already has through His death and resurrection, that we are a people now.

It's this day-by-day learning and cultivating and sharing ourselves with one another that allows for us to actually, genuinely encourage one another and to receive encouragement and to be mutually benefited by this process. As I watch someone else's faith grow, and I'm a part of encouraging them—my faith [grows] in that, and I see God being faithful. And I see the truth of the gospel playing out in that nearness to one another and to receiving the goodness of God for every circumstance.

Andrew: We need to help each other stop settling for the shallow and cheap stories of this world and to continue to rehearse and practice remembering the story that God is telling. Deuteronomy 6 comes to mind. Put God's law in front of our face, to put it on our door posts, to talk about it with our kids. When we rise, when we eat, when we sit down.

If we're going to cultivate joy, it's a matter of ongoing rehearsal, ongoing practice of seeing the world, seeing our circumstances, and seeing ourselves [within] the more true story, the more true narrative. To help each other catch onto [it] when more, we're leaning into the world's story, the world's narrative of what will lead to happiness and meaning and purposeful life. And to let go of those narratives and grip onto consistently what God has said is true.

And, as Brittany is describing, that's every day. I think we deceive ourselves if we think we can attend church once a week and that's going to be enough to dislodge the full barrage of narratives that we receive on a daily basis for what will make us happy, what will make life meaningful, what will give us purpose. We need daily encouragement [to] recalibrate. We need help to count suffering as joy. We desperately need help [to] be able to go, *Okay, this is not what I wanted to happen, and yet you're telling me I can receive this as though it is God's good work and what He's doing in my heart and my life.*

I'm not gonna be able to do that alone. I need somebody else to come alongside me and say, "I see how difficult this is as well. And yes, this is the more true story. Yes, this is the

more beautiful thing you're going to get to live out, even though it is painful. And we're going to honor that pain. The joy set before you—it's coming, it's promised, it's secured.”

Live with that in mind. This [is] where Scripture again, would call us. Don't set your mind on the things of this world. Set your mind on the things of heaven. Set your heart and your affections to the things of heaven. That's where joy comes from. It's having our minds and our hearts properly set on what is actually true, and keeping in mind how easy it is to lose sight of that, just facing the world and what all is out there.

Shanda: Another thing that I would add to all these really helpful ideas about what leads our hearts to live an abundant life that Christ has given us, which doesn't mean a perfect life or one that feels good all the time, but to be able to be honest about our doubts or our fears, or again, our sorrows and suffering. I think practicing that vulnerability, which we've talked about several times throughout these episodes, where God is not asking us to have just the surface-y, easy answers.

Emotions are complicated. People are complex. We are living in a confusing world and to build our life on the truth that God has given us and helping, day by day, moment by moment, little by little, [us] walk with Him faithfully. I think it is not pretending, and not even selling ourselves a bill of goods that we just say the right answers. But we get really honest with God and we get really honest with ourselves. That [is where] I think God teaches us the hope that endures, because of the work that Christ has done on our behalf and His righteousness that is ours. And we can be gut-wrenchingly honest about how confusing and complex things are. And I think that leads us to seeing things more clearly when we're honest about the complications.

Lindsay: I think you've all painted a beautiful picture of community, and what we hope for one another and for everyone listening is to have the kind of community where, to use Brittany's words, if someone is experiencing sorrow, the whole body is affected. We know what's going on in one another's lives. We know what to celebrate together and what to mourn together. And we're making those little deposits and regular rhythms that will build this sustainable hope that we have in Christ and remind us of that truth that we know in a way that doesn't feel trite or like we're just putting a Band-Aid on something, but is founded in deep and abiding joy in the Lord.

So thank you so much for sharing all of your thoughts and wisdom on joy. And listeners, thank you for joining us to learn about joy today. We want to encourage you to process what you've learned about joy with your community. We've included a group's guide that has Scripture and reflection questions on the episode webpage. So you can go there and download that.

Next week is our final episode, where we'll review a few important concepts, share some final thoughts, and talk about practical next steps to reframe our response to emotions.

Every week, we provide a liturgy for you as a worship response to what you've learned in this episode. We invite you to quiet your heart, listen to the words, and worship God as you consider all you've learned today. We'll see you next episode.

Alex: *A Liturgy For Seeking Joy*

Father, I confess:

I often struggle to wrap my mind around what joy is.

Is it laughter or dinner with loved ones, delight or contentment?

What does it really mean to be joyful?

When I'm distanced by apathy, joy feels elusive: trying to strike a match in the wind.

When I'm crushed by the weight of grief, joy feels impossible: a bloom sprouting in the dead of winter.

But You, God, call me to joy anyway: Your breath, coaxing fire from embers.

Father, I ask:

When I forget Your joy, will You remind me?

Fill me with the fullness of Your joy—

For it is strength in grief, steadfastness through trial, zeal in place of apathy, an outpouring of Spirit,

A firm foundation: living in expectation

Of resurrection.