

Reframing Emotions

Reframing Our Response

Episode 11

“Because I’m more of a thinker than a feeler, I often feel uncomfortable with my own or other people’s emotional responses to things. It takes work to stop and think, ‘How does this make me feel?’”

“Whenever I begin to feel something I don’t recognize or understand, it forces me to stop everything I’m doing to identify what’s causing it, what’s going on. What’s making me sad, afraid, anxious, frustrated? And what do I do about it?”

“I know we’re supposed to be intentional with our thoughts, but is taking every thought captive actually possible?”

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 Brittany Beltran, Shanda Anderson, and Andrew Dealy. We’ve got one final wrap-up episode for you.

Listeners, I just want to say thank you for joining us on this journey. I know it’s been a lot of content and probably most of it new for a lot of us. And our prayer throughout this process has been that the Holy Spirit would do the work that we know He will do in all of our hearts.

And so, with that aim in mind and that heart in mind—Andrew, Brittany, Shanda, you've shared so much insight with us and so much experience and helpful practical advice through these 10 episodes. But I know we can't cover everything. And there've been some episodes where we wanted to share more and we just didn't have the time to do that.

And so to start this final episode, what are some things that we didn't cover that you think would be important for our listeners to hear as we talk about next steps and processing what we've learned?

Brittany: One thing that can happen when you spend several weeks focusing on emotions is you can be tempted to continue to turn inward, to become overly introspective. I know something that I'm tempted to do is to dwell on how I'm thinking, how I'm feeling, how I'm experiencing things.

Our hope would be not that we would cultivate over-emphasis on that self-introspection that can lead to a hyper-fixation on self, but, as we engage our emotions and engage the stories that are driving them, we would perpetually be changing our perspective and moving our eyes outward toward God and others.

Especially in a culture that's hyper-fixated on mental health and on emotional wellbeing, that can be a really tempting thing to move into. I'm just going to spend a lot of time thinking and overthinking some things that continually move my eyes away from God or away from others. Engaging emotions ought to be something that moves us toward the Lord and toward other people. And so avoiding the danger of introspection, I think, would be something important for our listeners to hold onto as we're wrapping up our time together.

Andrew: Brittany, I love what you're hitting on there. It is tempting even to take in the 10 episodes talking about emotions and just keep rummaging around in your soul. As though if you spend enough time just looking at yourself, you'll figure out the answer. You'll figure out the solution to what will make everything make sense.

And the reality is, if we spend the majority of time just looking at ourselves, we will just naturally become selfish. We'll become people who are utterly self-oriented. And yet

Scripture calls us to actually, you know, give our eyes and attention to the Lord and to dwell on Him, to dwell on the heavenly things and let Him, in time, reveal to us what would be beneficial for us to know about ourselves. In other words, a lot of the Christian life for us is actually allowing the Lord to help us see who we truly are. It's not us figuring it out. It's Him saying, "Hey, it's time for you to see this is how I've made you and this is what I've called you into."

And so in many ways, I think one of the things I want to caution against is that the insight is really cheap. I mean, insight is fun. When we connect the dots and we have that light bulb moment of, *Oh, this is what's going on here*, that can feel great. It can feel like we've made progress down the road. When in reality, I'd say insight is the beginning.

It's like when we finally recognize there's something going on there. But it doesn't really have any lasting change if we don't move into application, if we don't move into actually practicing the new insight and the truths that we now understand. It brings to mind Peter, when Jesus asked the disciples, "Hey, who do people say that I am?"

And people are like, "Oh, you're John the Baptist, you're Elijah."

And then Jesus asks, "Well, who do you say I am?"

And Peter's response is, "You're the Son of God."

And Jesus' response to him is, "Peter you are blessed because your heavenly Father has revealed this to you," which has got to be an incredible moment. Like Jesus is saying, "God gave you special knowledge right now to get the answer 100% correct."

I can only imagine what Peter felt in that moment of, *Oh my goodness, I am the greatest. I'm so awesome right now*. And then not more than five verses later, we have Peter turning to the Son of God and trying to rebuke him.

In other words, even God-given insight in this moment, when it was not properly applied, did not last in effectiveness more than five verses. So this would be my caution. Hey, insight's great. What we need to do is let that insight move into our heart, move into our practice, move into how we do life. And so as we think about what we've learned

throughout Scripture about all these different emotions that we've talked about, seeing us grow in Christlikeness and the experience of these emotions is going to take application, practice, time, and encouragement.

And so when I'm sitting with clients and talking through this type of process about how we move toward change that we want to see happen, I'll often use the example of learning to throw a ball with your non-dominant arm. If I were to ask you to pick up a ball and throw this ball, you'd pick it up with your strong arm. You'd chuck the ball. And what would you feel? And most clients will say, "Oh, I feel good. I like throwing a ball."

I'd say, "Great. Now, if I give you this ball and ask you to throw it with your non-dominant arm, how are you going to feel?"

And there's a different response, right? Because they recognize if I try and throw with my non-dominant arm, well, it's going to feel awkward, not work the way I think it should. It's going to feel different.

And then the question I'll ask is, "What's the difference between the two? You throw it with one arm, you feel great. You throw with the other arm, you feel a little awkward and embarrassed.

"The difference is not cognition. It's not information. Because if I ask the client, 'Hey, can you tell me how to throw a ball?' they have the right amount of information. They can describe the process. They can describe exactly how it's supposed to work. The difference between the two arms is repetition."

Andrew: One arm has had thousands upon thousands upon thousands of repetitions of throwing a ball, to the point that you don't have to think about it anymore. So you can go out and play catch with somebody and have a great conversation. I challenge you—go outside later today with a ball and try and play catch with your non-dominant arm and have a meaningful conversation.

It's not going to work. Your brain is going to cramp up, because the whole time your brain knows I have the right information. I know how this is supposed to work. But the muscles in your non-dominant arm have not been habituated to do that. So it'll be really clunky.

And so to see the change happen. If we were to say, “Hey, for the next couple of months, I want you to practice throwing a ball with your non-dominant arm every day, 30 minutes a day,” eventually the muscles catch up to the knowledge that you have, and it moves from feeling awkward and embarrassing to, okay, I feel semi-competent into a place of, hey, I can do this pretty consistently. There's a threshold where competency fully arrives.

And then when you go out and play catch with your non-dominant arm, your felt experience is radically different. It's no longer weird and awkward. The truth of what I know cognitively has now been ingrained into my experience. So I know in a way that is different now. It's not shallow knowledge. It's not insight. It's habituated into my life. And so I just wanna encourage y'all that this is the process of change.

And for all you listeners that are going to work through this, it's not an overnight thing. If you want to see long-term change, it is going to take application, patience, practice, and you're gonna need a community to encourage you along the way.

Brittany: I keep thinking of this story. We were in Canada. We were on the beach, and we were trying to throw things with our non-dominant arm. We were throwing rocks into the ocean. And my friend was watching us and taking pictures and videos. And he was like, “You look like you're just throwing angry left-handed throws.” This is what we called them. Cause they were so disjunctive, and it reminds me of when a little kid is trying to learn to throw a ball.

They don't exactly know what they're doing. They're just trying to mimic what you're doing. I'm doing the same thing, except for the ball goes into the ground immediately. And so part of the development process of that infancy moving through, and a lot of the maturing of faith, is that process of learning, receiving from the Lord and then, go and do likewise. Go and sin no more. Teach others the same way. This very infancy moving into maturity, moving into, I now know how to do that a little bit more comfortably, but not perfectly.

Shanda: Yeah. And I think in all of these episodes, we've hit on some version of a reminder that soul work is slow work and just that patient practice, and day by day, little by little, moment by moment, that ongoing transformation from one degree of glory to the next. And part of that is surrounding yourself with people that seem to be at least

practicing that, maybe even a little bit ahead of you. Where we might use the word mentoring or having a broad scope of generational expression, of life, and emotional maturity, positioning ourselves around people who are doing it well, can help us continue that observation and mirroring as we keep practicing those things.

One of the topics that I think will be helpful for our listeners to hear our conversation expand into is going to address the topic of medication and how that fits in with some people's experience of emotional distress, and trying to calibrate, at what point does medication become something to consider, and then the discernment and wisdom on how to make that choice.

I just want to bring to our conversation—we and our Counseling Center respect and appreciate and recognize the help of medication, at times. I think there can be an unhelpful, maybe strong, aversion to medication at times, historically from some of the Christian narratives and perspectives. And I think we've found that medication can be helpful to some people who need that. But what I'd love to share today, and for people to consider, is that the way that I approach medication with people that I'm working with is recognizing that medication in and of itself is not bad. That as human beings, we can misuse anything. Food is not bad, but we can misuse food. Money in and of itself is not bad, but we can misuse money. It's not money that is bad, but the love of money is bad. We can take any good thing and make it an inappropriate, ultimate thing where we are putting our hope or our confidence in something other than Christ.

And medication is just like that. We want to use it in its proper form, meaning that I believe you could take medication out of a heart that is leaning too much into the medication to be your savior. That is unhelpful, looking to whatever prescription to save you or to find an escape from that difficult circumstance. But you could also potentially not take medication out of a heart that is trusting in self too much. We can miscalibrate that decision, because of inappropriate hope in the medication, or potentially even an inappropriate hope in the competence of self or flesh. We would want to bring the heart before the Lord, and as we trust in God, discern whether or not that medication could be helpful, and hope in God. And if you choose to take the medication, knowing that the medication in and of itself doesn't have the power to save you, but it might help you.

But keep trusting in God, ultimately, because what we know about medication is there's a lot that we don't know. And there's a broad scope of, "it depends," on how medications react with each individual. And oftentimes when something does work, there's a threshold where it begins not to work. And what works for one person may not work for another. And so there's a lot of dynamics involved. And so we do defer to a physician and medical help and professionals that can help somebody that we're working with. We refer out to a physician or a psychiatrist to help them make those decisions.

But we get to work with the person and how they're thinking about that medication, and how they're thinking about where their ultimate hope and confidence and trust is, regardless of if they choose to take the medication or not. And so we are open to common means of grace that God has given us in this day and age, where there are some very beneficial realities that can come from a psychotropic interventions for some people that we hope are still ongoingly doing work and processing where those narratives are skewed. Meaning, that it's not just the medication as this prescription, and that's the end of how I begin to find my way forward. But the medication can enable people to get that stabilizing ability to do the work emotionally and spiritually, orienting their lives back to a more helpful perspective.

And some people need medication for a season, and some people might need medication for a longer reality. And that's where we just take it slow and steady and see what each individual might need, coming back to that heart of who and what are we worshiping, and what are we putting our trust in, and how are we discerning, whether the medication works or not, where our hearts are going to find rest.

Andrew: Shanda, I appreciate you hitting on that. It's a challenging topic, and I think this brought to mind another truth that I think we've covered in previous podcasts a little bit, but maybe to put it more succinctly, if we can cultivate hearts that receive discomfort as not automatically bad, that can receive discomfort in a biblical paradigm as potentially an opportunity for growth or even special seasons of growth.

I think the model that the apostle Paul gives us in 2 Corinthians 12, where he's talking about this thorn in the flesh that afflicted him. And we don't know what that thorn in the flesh was. He models in that moment what I think we all have the freedom to do, this acknowledgement. The thorn in the flesh was uncomfortable. He didn't like it.

It's not what he would have chosen for himself, not what he wanted according to what he could see. And it says that he prayed three times that the Lord would take it away. And the Lord's answer was no. but rather that God's power is made perfect in weakness.

And that was enough for Paul. We don't know how much of an ongoing wrestle it was for him. But I love that in Scripture we have this example, this dude, who wrote most of the New Testament, is saying he asked three times. I'm assuming the answer was no, no, no three times.

And yet to get to a place to receive, *Okay, Lord, if Your answer is no, then this discomfort is for my good. If this displays Your power, then it's worth it.* That was enough to help Paul's heart, progressively over those three times that he asked, get cultivated in that direction.

And so I also want to be careful, though, in saying that. That's not to say then that we should avoid medication. I think that could be the conclusion to some degree from what I'm saying. No, I think we model like Paul. In faith, go, "Lord, it seems better to me that this would be done. It seems better to me to take this medication that would remove this suffering." And I absolutely believe sometimes the Lord is going to say yes. That it's good for you to take the medication. And in other cases, He's going to say no.

And so it's part of what I think makes our job as counselors tremendously difficult. It would be much easier if the answer was always yes or always no. But instead what we find ourselves doing is trying to help cultivate discernment in faith to what God has called the individual to do. And, Shanda, I think that's what you articulated beautifully. The goal is that, whether we take or don't take a medication, that it's oriented to what God would be asking us to do, oriented around what faith He has called us into.

Brittany: As we're talking about how to grow in discernment, how to grow in understanding, how to recalibrate and reframe our emotions, we've talked a lot about how emotions have physiological components. And so, in that retraining of my responses and recalibrating, one thing that's helpful to remember is that is a physiological retraining, too.

For those who have experienced trauma, their bodies may not remember how to be calm. There's a restoring of that understanding of how to calm my body and let my body know it's okay, that it's safe. It's okay to feel at ease for a moment, because there maybe was a time where being at ease was actually a threatening circumstance or state of being to be in.

And so I think as we are reframing our experience of our emotions, there is going to be a retraining of our body in that process as well. And not to say that our body won't respond the way we don't want to. 'Cause there are some times that we are still going to have responses that rightly fit the situation and rightly fit the experience that we're in. And also situations where it maybe doesn't quite fit, but they're still there. The body's still gonna respond.

And so I wanna go back again to the garden where Jesus' body's having a right response, and we don't have to follow it. We can move forward in faith and still experience discomfort in our bodies, while also working with our body to help restore some of the ease and the calm that may be available for us in different circumstances throughout the process of healing. It's helpful for me to understand that, too, for my own sake. Okay, this is a whole person experience. The Lord is restoring and redeeming and bringing me into better alignment with Him.

Lindsay: I think that's really helpful, because it can be so easy to get impatient with yourself when you want to grow and change, and you have the knowledge to grow and change, but everything else within you is not responding as quickly as you would like.

And giving that freedom to ourselves and others to embrace the slow process and the slow nature of change, will really free our listeners up to continue to press into those things that are important. And when the enemy is sitting there right behind you telling you you should be changing faster, you don't have enough faith, you're not believing correctly, you're doing something quote-unquote wrong, the Holy Spirit can remind us through your words [that] this takes time. It doesn't mean you don't have faith. It doesn't mean you don't trust and love the Lord. It doesn't mean you're not engaging in community and moving forward with trying to change those things you know you need to change. And so I'm really thankful for everything that the three of you have shared to remind us of all of those healthy ways of approaching our emotions.

Let me ask you this: we've talked a lot about community and how important it is to engage in community for all of our spiritual life, especially in regard to thinking through and processing our emotions. I imagine there are probably some people listening to this who may have community, but there may be something they connected with in one of the episodes that makes them wonder if professional counseling and seeing someone like one of you three would be the most helpful thing to do. Or maybe something triggered a memory or an experience in them where they need to talk about it with a professional counselor.

Can you give us some guidelines for thinking through when to bring something to our community and engage in that slow process of change with them, and then when it might be helpful to actually meet with a professional counselor to work through those things?

Andrew: Ideally we would always be able to bring nearly everything to our community, if we're living in a small group, [a] community of believers, and we keep in mind 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, the God of all comfort who comforts us in our affliction that we might be able to comfort those in any affliction, with the comfort that we have received from God.

Ideally that's true. Ideally we're able to go, "This is what I'm experiencing. This is my story. This is my current hardship."

And a community that understands the depth and breadth and beauty of the gospel and the patience inherent in the gospel will willingly step into whatever that season might look like. And then from there, [we] might go, in terms of our ability to be a help or support or to provide insight into what's going on, we realize we're missing something. Maybe their experiences are just exceptional, unique, or above and beyond what the group is familiar to have worked with, at which point, then I think it's great to seek outside counsel, to seek professional counseling, or to seek out an elder or pastor or minister at the church to get another set of eyes on what's going on.

In my experience, most of the cases where community fumbles it would have to do with what Brittany hit on there at the end, which is more trauma and abuse background and the confusion of somebody having really strong emotional reactions that the rest of the group doesn't understand. That person is having strong emotional reactions, because that's how they learned to survive in seasons of tremendous difficulty, abuse, or trauma.

And so now it's manifesting in an environment which, to everybody else, feels safe or innocuous or whatever else, but to the individual feels highly threatening.

And so the group will be at a loss on what to do. And I would say, experientially, more often than not, the group will then blame the person for being too sensitive or over-reactive or immature in the faith. As opposed to trying to work through, “Hey, this strong emotion is telling us something. There's a deep story here. What appears to us [to be] an overreaction—there's always a story behind it that's brought that person into that experience.”

And this is where counseling gets really fun. Oftentimes that person may not know what the story is. The person who's even having the overreaction, quote-unquote, in the moment may have no concept of what's getting triggered in them from their own story. They need additional help to go, “Hey, I think this is you treating your group like your overbearing father. You hear in the group any critique from them, you hear the voice of your distant, neglectful, critical father.” And now you're responding to the group out of that well of emotion. And the group is like, “Oh. We were just trying to give you a little bit of feedback. We love you.”

And so that's where I think those situations in community can provide light. It might be helpful to get somebody outside the box or somebody with just more experience working with trauma responses and triggers and stuff like that to add a different way of looking at what's happening.

Brittany: Another space where community gets tripped up in this process is—we get to that point where we realize maybe some additional support could be helpful. And then it's like, “Okay, well, we'll put you over here. You go get your help, and then you can come back.” Nobody's actually thinking that, but functionally, that can happen a lot.

And so it's both together. I'm going to walk alongside you as you continue to get this extra support, extra care, to be a partner in what we're already doing with you. The hardest client to counsel is the one that doesn't have outside support, that doesn't have a crew of people or anybody around them [to] help speak back the truth of the gospel and to experience that safety of being in a relationship that's not like it was before. When we're walking with people, if we're going to add in additional support, also being willing

to continue on in that relationship can be a really beautiful example of the body of Christ to one another.

Andrew: What I think is so key in what you're hitting on there, as well, is, for the group to grow in its care for people, they've got to stay in it. For the group to actually develop those muscles, to be able to care for cases that are more complicated, the path to learning how is to stay in it with them, get extra help as needed, and stay in it.

Share the burdens, that you might learn what it looks like to shoulder up with that burden and find that Christ is strong enough to equip, teach, and carry you through that process. If, in every case where a group meets with somebody that it feels like their situation is beyond them, they just send them out until they get healed, and then they come back, the group is missing out on growth. The group is missing out on learning how to care for each other in a way that I think Scripture would invite them into.

Shanda: There's not a situation where a plurality of care is not really going to be helpful. Along with that, to have one person, whether it's a counselor or one member of a community, try to bear the burden of somebody's struggle—it's not meant to be that way. That's too much. And meeting for an hour a week with a therapist of any kind is not ultimately sufficient to helping somebody change, and ongoing process, and working out the difficulties. So we often say, the hardest client we will ever come in contact with is the one who has no support. And so we're always looking for somebody who has outside relationships to care for them and encourage them. And hopefully there's that plurality of opportunity, so nobody gets overly fatigued.

And it is the privilege and the honor to come alongside somebody who's suffering but to not feel the pressure and the weight and the burden of fixing it, or carrying that all by yourself. Any counselor can become overwhelmed or fatigued if they get in that wrong mindset, too. A counselor is not exempt from feeling that tension. We don't want anybody to operate out of that Messiah complex. But it's a beautiful thing where that community grows, and everybody there is learning and being invited into this process of change and growth, and everybody benefits when that is the heart posture.

Brittany: So say you find yourself as that person in the community who needs a little extra support. And you add in this outside perspective of someone who has the experience to walk alongside.

For the individual, there's also the temptation to, “Well, this feels safer. So I'm going to actually move over here.” And I have a group of people who's willing, that want to be a part of that. There's this *both and* of the individual also being willing and stepping out into risk of potentially being hurt, or being confused, or just trying to learn a new thing.

So I think it's both parties [that] can be tempted toward, “This is hard, I'm going to back up.” But staying in it together. There's that mutual benefit that we've talked about through the course of the podcast.

Lindsay: Looking at it in that framework, it's a powerful and more compelling picture of the kind of community I want to be a part of, both to receive from and to give to, versus what I think is the default: oh, this person is the one that needs help. It's easier to disengage, and they can go get fixed, in quotes, and come back. We sort of see it as a one-way relationship. When really we should be all mutually helping one another the whole time. So thank you guys for laying that out so clearly.

I want to take a little bit of a left turn from everything you've shared during this podcast. Something I'm coming away with is—learning to engage our emotions, thinking about Scripture in these healthy ways, framed correctly—is something that is really counter-cultural and can be a potentially powerful tool for showing people why Jesus is better, and why the ways that He's modeled and laid out in Scripture to engage our emotions can produce healthier results than what the culture offers.

And one of the narratives we've talked about a lot culturally is that idea that what I feel is my truth. So I'd love for you to talk a little bit more about when we're doing the hard work, the slow process of learning to have a biblical perspective on our emotions and engage them in all of these healthy ways that you've talked about—how can that be a powerful tool for sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, showing the joy that we have in Jesus, and just showing people a better way to live that is more sustainable and ultimately rooted in the faith that all of our hope is in?

Basically what I'm asking you is, how can a right view of emotions be a powerful tool for evangelism?

Brittany: Currently, and probably always throughout history, there's been an emphasis on our experience and how we interpret it. That's just to be human. Emotions are something everyone can relate to. Either it's the overwhelm of emotions or the complete lack of emotion.

And so in our learning how to engage our emotions in a healthy way, in a Christ-like way, we can see those inlets for people of the same temptations I've experienced that are attractive to my non-believing friends.

And so I think just by the nature of the fact that we're all human, and we all experience emotions. That in and of itself creates an opportunity and a door. And I think every human soul knows that. In some way, we're all trying to figure that out.

And God tells us that He has made Himself evident. He's set eternity in man. We hunger for that. And so, one expression of that is how we experience life and the emotions that come with it.

Andrew: From an evangelistic perspective, I think it's fascinating as you think about this stuff. The existence of the emotions we have and the core narratives that drive them lead to the natural conclusion that there is a God, that we were designed for a different world, that were designed for a different experience than the one we experience.

When we think about anger, anger is perceived injustice. Why on earth should we care about justice? In the history of mankind, there has never been a society that existed that was 100 percent perfectly just. So why is it still in our heart that that should be a possibility?

When we think about depression, that I have no hope that things will ever change. Why do we think we should exist in a world where hope would be true, where I would have hope and have belief that things should get better?

When we think about anxiety. What's coming for me feels like it's going to be overwhelming. Why do I have this sense or this feeling that I should be able to control my reality, and my reality should be predictable?

With happiness, why do I feel good about good things? When things are going well, when things function the way that they're supposed to, why is that emotion there?

And I think all of them [emotions] really do point back to a design. They point back to a longing for what was lost, a longing for what one day will come again. And so in many ways, I think as we walk through emotions in a nuanced way, it actually gives us a platform to help people better understand the human experience, better understand their emotional experience than pretty much anything else out there.

I think we have places like Romans 7, where the apostle Paul is describing what every human being intuitively understands. How is it that I can see the good I should do, and I find myself unable to do it? That's where I feel there's a lot of space for us to engage with those who are yet to know Christ, help them feel the intuitive, *Oh, somehow this Word of God, somehow the way God said emotions work, makes more sense of me. It reads me and teaches me unlike anything else.* Which then invites this, well, maybe you were designed for something that you have not considered yet. Maybe you were made for something other than you realize you were. Maybe your life isn't just you trying to cobble together meaning. Maybe you were designed for a specific purpose. It creates space for us to walk alongside people in that.

And then on top of that, I think just be emotionally empathetic in a way that's helpful. When we validate people's emotions, they generally feel connected. If we can acknowledge, even with those who are yet to come to faith, things that hurt, hurt. Things that lead to grief are sad. Feeling depressed sucks. We can enter in there and show compassion, because we understand more truly why those feelings exist.

Shanda: That's the power of testimonies. We can listen to people who have lived through hardship, and yet, by the grace of God, their hearts are still softened, or they have found a way to keep living in the brokenness in the midst of pain, and struggling, but struggling well, and being honest about the difficulties.

I think that's what the transparent, honest reality of the believer can bring to a broken world that either tries to dismiss hardship or tries to find a path forward that avoids and finds a path that doesn't have hardship at all. Which I think, even in the moments that that might be true, it's not gonna last long. Or they just get completely overwhelmed by the reality of things that are broken.

And I think the believer does have a path forward, banking their hopes on Christ and letting the Word of God bring truth that is established outside of my feelings. The reality of sorrowful and yet rejoicing, and grieving but grieving with hope, and hearing stories of people who have gone before me in that and persevered in faith. There is a deep encouragement in that, that we are not alone.

And the things that feel overwhelming today—not to say that we just leave the pain behind—but we learn to deal with the pain differently. Seeing and learning from the people who've gone before us, the faithful saints that are willing to tell the story of what it was like to suffer and be transformed by grace through it, helps us believe that what we are navigating is not in vain, that there is something redemptive happening, even when I can't see it. Because there's somebody who's been through a similar reality, [and] through that they've become more gentle, or more humble, more like Christ.

We can see two types of people facing the same circumstance, and by the kindness of the Lord, might the believer come out willing to praise God, even in the midst of hardships. But that's a journey. It's not logical to come out with a story of forgiveness when injustice has happened. But there's something beautiful and powerful and mesmerizing. It draws me in to say, “What is it about that? I am attracted to that.” And that is the gospel that I think leads to the person of Christ.

Lindsay: Well said. I have one final question for you. The three of you have been our guides through this entire podcast series, and we've learned so much from you. You've shared wisdom and knowledge and experience and truth from Scripture. So we've benefited greatly, but I want to know what this process has been like for the three of you.

Andrew: It's been fascinating. Shanda and Brittany and I have often had these types of conversations. But even in preparing for each one of these podcasts, there have been multiple times, just so everybody understands, that we disagreed on stuff. We're still

people in work. We're still being sanctified. We still see things differently, and yet, the depth and the truth of the gospel binds us together in that process. I'll just say from my own journey, this has been really helpful to be sharpened, to be challenged, to be encouraged to have to think about it in different ways, to really have to think through the nuance of what word we choose to use to describe what emotion, and how that's going to sit with everybody. It's been a fun journey, a fun process. And I'm thankful to the Lord for the refining He continues to do in me and in us.

Shanda: I think through the hours we've had together, and how refined I feel by each of you, and the encouragement spoken back to me from each of you, the promises and the hope and the perspective that helps me endure and helps me remember that this path forward with this counsel that we are suggesting is the better way—my heart really believes it.

At this point in my life, I've been through circumstances that have challenged my belief in these ideas that we're bringing forth, that, apart from the grace of God, would just be another theory of counseling, another methodology, another strategy to bring happiness or relief from your circumstances. And I can say, having to walk with God through unwanted circumstances and through dark nights of the soul and where my heart doubted many of these beautiful truths that I am encouraging people to believe, that the community that believed those things on my behalf when I didn't want to, or it was hard, I can say that this isn't just a theory that we're talking about.

This is the air that I breathe. This is what gets me out of bed every day and helps me continually face the ongoing challenges in life. Or the way that my life doesn't look the way that I had hoped that it would look. Or where there is ongoing grief or discouragement or disappointment. And yet, there are many beautiful things that through the path of suffering or through the path of an unwanted script in the story that God has written, I cannot deny His grace and His goodness and the hope that remains and these joyful moments that exist in the midst of the brokenness.

My hope for every listener is to know that life is hard, whether you follow Jesus or not. We live in a broken world that we cannot control. We can't predict, we can't guarantee the reality of the dream or the life that we envision for ourselves. Even in the midst of sin and suffering, there is great hope and great life to be lived in the midst of brokenness.

And I have found that to be true in my own life. And I have seen God do that in people's lives that I've had the honor and privilege of being invited into their suffering. And I've had my heartbreak from people who have chosen not to believe that. And I know that there are times that this message will be offered, and not every heart will receive it and submit to it. And we will leave that up to God.

Because I've learned over time that we cannot love somebody enough. It's not the delivery. Jesus himself brought truth, and not everybody submitted and believed it, but it's still a worthy message. It's still the path that I believe is worth our energy and effort, to continue to offer to people who are hurting. And should the Lord give the grace to receive that and walk by faith in it, I do believe it is the best path forward.

Brittany: One of the things that's been interesting is to talk about the breadth of the human experience in this small, dark, soundproof-ish room and diving into these places where there's real pain, and real difficulty, real struggle. And this environment was new to me. I hadn't done it like this before. And so that was a whole new experience, which brought up my own emotions about what this was going to be like, and what I was going to be like, and what the experience was.

And I am really encouraged by the process and the content and the sharpening and the refining and the conviction, and also just the sweetness of the nearness of the Lord and being able to talk about it in a group way, rather than just one of us presenting some information. That we also got to engage in community in this process has been really sweet to me and highlighted areas where I need to continue to grow in my experience of believing the gospel in the midst of difficulty.

And so even throughout the course of this podcast, we've all experienced different moments of difficulty in our lives. And I'll just speak for me personally, there've been moments of our recording process throughout the weeks where it's been hard. And so it's been good to be reminded of the goodness of the gospel in the midst of whether I'm feeling shame or depression or learning to live out of joy.

So I've been encouraged in this process and also been grateful to get to share that with everyone who's been involved. And get to learn how to support one another and also challenge one another. It's been fun. [I] still have more to learn. So I'm grateful and

thankful for the people who made it possible, the Spirit who's still at work in me. And it's cool to see the Spirit work, live action, while we're talking about asking the Spirit to work in other people's lives.

Lindsay: Yeah, I agree. And I'm just, again, struck as the three of you are sharing your postures of humility and knowing you're still learners as well. You have so much more knowledge and training in this than the rest of us. In our flesh, it could be easy to just assume you've made it, you've checked it off the list. You've mastered it.

That's part of the joy of living in Christ and growing in Christ, right? There's always more to learn. There's always more to submit to the Lord and have the Spirit work in you. And so I'll make it really meta, and say, even as you're sharing about your experience, I'm again being encouraged and challenged by your approach to wanting to grow as well. Thank you so much for everything that you've shared over these episodes and giving so much time, as Brittany said, in this small dark studio that we've been sharing together.

Listeners, we just want to thank you for tuning in and making it through this process with us. We've said community every episode, and I'm going to continue to say it in this one. We just want to encourage you, for all of the reasons that our counselors have shared, to process through this with people that you trust, that you can dive in deep together and set those rhythms together of what it means to walk through life, following Jesus with other believers.

If you go to The Austin Stone, you can go to the website for this podcast and we have a bunch of next steps for you. We have workshops and classes and other ways that you can get involved, and you can continue to grow and apply what you've started to learn.

And finally, we have one last liturgy for you. Take a moment to sit and worship God and thank Him for all that He's doing in you.

Alex: *A Liturgy For Bringing Our Emotions to God*

O LORD my Strength, I cry to You
for You console my soul.

When my emotions roil,
anger and sorrow and shame
all surging within me, breakers
crashing, clashing, dragging me
into their undertow—

O LORD, help!

Please help.

Lift my head above the waves
and guide my wheezing breath

until it is held

and released,

held and released.

Teach me to rest upon You,

like a child with his mother.

O Lord, calm my soul!

O LORD my Strength, I cry to You;

You are my soul's consolation.

When my emotions seem remote,
as distant and unknowable as pinprick stars,
and I drift through the days,
a sailor without compass or map—
comfort me with Your people.

Bring me to the joy
of presence: sitting and beholding
one another face to face.

And there, O Lord—

what a wonder,

what a mystery!

There, You satisfy us
with Your love. You renew
our weary souls in mercies
always new each morning.



O LORD our Strength, we sing praises to You.
Whether our emotions swell or shrink within our hearts,
You console our souls.

All praise be to the Lord who draws near and delivers us!
Amen.

