

Reframing Emotions

Reframing Anger

Episode 5

“Being angry feels out of control. It’s often easier to bottle it up and stew on it, which only makes it grow, and leads to deep bitterness in my heart that hurts both me and others.”

“I grew up thinking that anger is always a negative emotion, and therefore one that needed to be masked or pushed down. But I’m now slowly learning that there is a time and a place for anger, and that when handled rightly, it, too, can be used to turn my eyes toward God.”

“For a long time I never thought of myself as an angry person, because I minimize my anger by calling it frustration. Now I’ve come to learn that when I’m frustrated, I’m actually angry.”

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, Brittany Beltran, and Shanda Anderson. Today, we’re going to be talking about anger.

So Brittany, start us off with a definition of anger.

Brittany: Sure. We can think about anger as a response to a perceived injustice. When we use that word “perceived,” we’re responding to our understanding in the moment of

what's going on, whether or not that's actually what's happening. We're interpreting that moment through a specific story, a specific lens, and so we're responding out of that interpretation.

Anger is evaluating the situation. And so as we learn to engage anger, we want to then evaluate our anger to see, *Hey, is this lining up to what's currently happening in reality?* When we see that show up in our lives, it can come out a couple of different ways.

So some people will have a really big bodily response. They'll feel increased heart rate. They'll feel the flush of their face. They'll feel activation in their body and a desire to move in some sort of way. For other people, it may look like a need to retreat, withdraw inwardly, and so they may visually just shut down, cease to engage with whoever they're engaging with.

And so anger can look a variety of ways for each of us. Learning to tune into how my body is responding to anger, what's my typical go-to. We can all go up and kind of explode outwardly, whether that's raising our voice or, like, physically getting bigger, expanding; or we can shut down.

It really depends. We all have the ability to do both. Some of us may have a stronger tendency toward one or the other. And so learning to recognize it. You want to pay attention to kind of what your body's doing, and then also start to understand those stories and things that are getting pinged, like, what you're recognizing as being treated unjustly and why that interpretation is there.

Lindsay: So there's a perceived injustice that, if I'm angry, I'm responding to. I then realize I'm angry, whether I'm getting bigger, I'm blowing up, and maybe getting louder, or I'm retreating within myself. Then what? What do you do once you realize you're angry? What's the next step when that happens?

Andrew: Anger, as you can find with most emotions, has a predominant behavior that it encourages us toward. So the felt injustice, it's going to be, seek justice in the way that you need to get it. And usually it can take the unhealthy form of pure vengeance. And so anger will motivate us to control the situation, or to respond in such a way to get back what we feel like we've lost, or to set things right. And so when we feel angry, we want to

attune to and listen to, *What's anger now motivating me to do next, and is that really helpful?* Because I think all of us can point to different experiences with anger where it's like, *Ooh, anger motivated me to respond this way.* So, getting cut off in traffic. Response may be to road rage at this person. Give them the one-finger salute, or something along those lines. And we immediately go, *You know, that's probably not the best way to honor the Lord in my response to dealing with something difficult while driving my car.*

And so we want to recognize the anger is there. Acknowledge the behavior it might be motivating, and then recalibrate. One, is that a healthy behavior for me to engage in? Two, does it actually lead to any product that's going to be helpful? Does it really rectify the felt injustice? And I think sometimes where we feel angry, we just don't have clarity on what's the point of contact to that injustice.

Just asking the question, *What do I feel like is happening right now that is unfair or unjust or just not okay?*, can help bring clarity to the driving motivation, and then move us toward maybe a more helpful and more proper solution.

Shanda: And I think it's helpful—as Brittany and Andrew have given such great practical wisdom on recognizing it—is to frame it up and—like we've talked about pretty much every podcast, this whole spectrum of each emotion, normalizing that anger is a part of being human. And we want to acknowledge that there is healthy anger. There are realities where we recognize our perfect and loving God is angry at sin. And we are made in His image.

And when we love something, even with the motive of loving something rightly, there are times that we will feel anger as a sense of seeing injustice done to others. And there is some beauty of reflecting God's glory, in that it would be not glorying in God if we didn't have healthy anger when people are mistreated. We get to glorify God and reflect His beauty in the world to model anger rightly.

So we see where anger can come out in healthy and right ways. We have to acknowledge and recognize that on the other end of that spectrum, we can have anger that is motivated by self glory, self-love, the self-preservation that then is about my honor in that moment. We need to slow down like Andrew and Brittany have said, and really evaluate and use discretion on how I want to move forward. I might need to do some

business internally with me and the Lord, and decide where on the spectrum of anger am I, and then how can I proceed in a way that brings glory and honor to God. And I operate out of the dignity and the significance and righteousness that I have in Christ, and then hopefully reflect that to the people that I'm interacting with.

Lindsay: So if anger is a response to perceived injustice, and we realize that not every injustice we perceive is objective truth or objective injustice, what are some ways we can start to figure out in that moment when we feel anger, is that thing true injustice that requires a righteous anger response?

So the traffic example, road rage, is a good one that pops to mind. I have an expectation in my mind when I'm driving to work of what my traffic experience should be like. But so often, as we know in Austin, construction zones, people driving 90, people driving 50 on the same road at the same time...lots of things are happening. And anger that I experience there is perhaps not objectively unjust. It's my perceived injustice that I'm responding to. So how can we start to determine what's true injustice that we should have a righteous anger response to, and what's just my perceived injustice that I need to work through in different ways?

Andrew: So I think the road rage example can give us some more details, especially with anger and how narratives and emotions develop. Then we'll get to the end in a minute here with what does that righteous response in that moment look like?

There are a couple of pieces at play here. So walking through the example of getting cut off in traffic, let's say driving down the road right now today, you get cut off. I feel like the average person is going to feel some form of anger, frustration, annoyance with getting cut off in traffic. But if you were to go back to your young self—15, 16 years old, the first time that you started driving. Shanda, you could probably speak to this as you're rolling with somebody to learn how to drive right now. The first time you ever got cut off in traffic, what was the emotion you felt? If you think back to that time, it likely wasn't anger. It was likely shock, fear. You felt scared.

But that's different than what we feel today. It's the same physical reality, right? The same reality is happening. You're getting cut off in traffic. And yet at the beginning, your emotional response was likely fear. It was like, *Oh, something was wrong with that.* Your

brain cataloged that as a dangerous event and said, *Good golly, we don't want to experience that again. That was scary.*

And what happened between the first day where you experienced more shock to today where you drive on the road and somebody just lightly cuts you off, and like rage happens? Well, I'd say the difference is the repetition of the event. The repetition of the event has led your brain to create a narrative of what's happening.

The first time you get cut off in traffic, your thought is usually going to be, *Oh, I must've done something wrong. I must have been in the wrong space, wrong lane. I must've just missed something.* By the 1000th time you've been cut off in traffic, what's your new narrative? Your new narrative is not I'm the problem. Your new narrative is everybody else is terrible at driving. I'm the greatest driver of all time, which means if they cut me off, it's because they're being selfish. They're just breaking the rules, or whatever it might be. The reality is, though, most of us, hopefully nearly all of us, have never at any point in time when we've gotten cut off in traffic, pulled that person off to the side of the road and said, "Tell me why you did what you just did." I would not recommend doing that, at all, but that means we lack certain information in terms of the motivation of why what happened, happened.

If we're using another example—when an ambulance cuts you off in traffic, what do you feel? Well, likely not anger. You feel a different emotion, maybe even again, concern, that you were in the way of the ambulance. What's the narrative with that? The ambulance has the right of way. The ambulance is going to help somebody who's having difficulty. So because of a different narrative, you have a different emotional response.

So what's the righteous response to getting cut off in traffic? I don't really know. I think there's a healthy response. I think if we did cultivate in our minds a practice of treating every time we get cut off in traffic as though it's an ambulance moment, if we cobbled together the narrative of, *Hey, maybe that person's in an emergency situation*, we can at least cultivate probably a more enjoyable emotion than rage, because the reality is we still don't know.

We don't know why they cut us off in traffic. And we can choose to be charitable. We can choose that moment to posture ourselves in humility and say, "Okay, well maybe they

have a greater need than I have right now. Maybe there is an emergency they have got to get to,” and we help cultivate in our heart a different feeling.

And yet, is it still good and right for us to feel a level of anger that says that's not okay. I think, yes, those can co-exist together. That was dangerous. That was physically dangerous, what happened. They were not being thoughtful of you in that moment. And so there's an appropriate felt anger that I think still exists, but the righteous response might be, “Well, I do the same thing.”

And again, maybe they're in a situation [where] they need to get going. Because the irony is with the ambulance, as well, we don't know if they're going to help people, or if they're making a Starbucks run. We assume they're going to go help people, and Lord willing, hopefully they are, but we don't know the motivations of their hearts. If we don't know that, then we have the opportunity to choose. I would lean toward charity, because I think that produces more helpful emotions in that moment.

Lindsay: That's really helpful. And what I hear in that, too, is what we've already talked about, in that emotions are complex. There's often more than one emotion happening at the same time, and it sounds like you're saying even within anger, there are layers of different kinds of anger.

Is there anything else when we think about the complexity of emotions that would be helpful to know in regard to anger? Are there other emotions that often partner with anger or are layered with anger that we can be thinking about when we're trying to confront our anger?

Shanda: One way that I think we offer help to people who are really wanting to grow and understand and recognize their anger is to help explain it. It's not always, but many times it is a secondary emotion, and we just humanize, normalize, validate the reality that often it's much easier to be angry than it is to be sad.

Sometimes it feels more productive to have that visceral, either getting bigger or smaller, and orienting ourselves to the external realities, rather than looking inward and being honest with maybe there's a more primary experience at play, like shame or fear or sadness, that anger just helps quote, unquote, blow off steam sometimes. That we do get

even a bodily nervous system release that moves us forward beyond our felt experience—for better or for worse—and then sometimes we never really deal with that core issue.

And so I would say the majority of our counseling sessions have some aspect of anger built into that. Because it is so easily a defense mechanism. It's an easy emotion to hide behind. It's a felt sense of safety. And then, it is kind of an acceptable form, culturally, at times, of emotion that's put forth that keeps our humanity more one-dimensional than expanding it out to really understand the complexity of what might be happening within. And so, like [with] everything else, I think it is very complicated.

But it's helpful to remember that we have to tolerate, at times, that initial forward foot of anger to really get the opportunity to know somebody's story or understand the layers beneath that anger of often hurt. If there is a lot of anger, I would say more often than not, there's a lot of hurt behind that. Because when we see those strong expressions of anger, it's usually protecting something, guarding something, trying to prevent any further pain.

And I think sometimes we can give up on people or write people off or join them in their anger unhelpfully, instead of really trying to figure out what might be behind that anger that I [would] say God cares about deeply. And as people reflecting God, we want to hang in there with people long enough to get to know those realities about them so that we can care for them and offer them the truth of God that would bring, we pray, freedom and a better opportunity to be honest about those more tricky and uncomfortable emotions that they might be hiding from.

Andrew: I think a great biblical picture that hits on what Shanda's talking about there—you look at the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis, where Cain and Abel bring their offerings before the Lord. And Abel's is regarded, and Cain's is not. And I'd offer what Cain feels in that moment of rejection is likely deep shame, rejection, hurt.

But what comes out is, as this cover-up emotion, is just anger. This anger, probably somewhat toward God, but then straight at what he perceives is the problem, which is, *Abel is the one who kept me from getting the proper affection, the proper approval that I felt like I deserved.* And so the anger then motivates a need to remove the injustice. I

need to remove the problem or the obstacle to me getting what I'm supposed to get, to what I deserve. And [that] leads to all kinds of catastrophic problems for him, for the family system, and everything else.

But I think it's such a very clear picture of, this is what anger can look like. And particularly when anger is being fed by a more significant visceral emotion, like Cain, what you felt was deeply rejected, not valued, shame.

And so you reached for the nearest thing that you felt like you could control to make it better. And as you did that, you caused more dominoes to fall that were unhelpful. The end product being, he [Cain] gets sent out. The felt shame becomes a more permanent felt experience, unfortunately, as he's marked and sent out from that family system, that community there.

And so I think that's what it can look like. It's always good for us to ask when we feel anger, *Hey, is this covering up for something? Is there a deep-seated something else that's driving this? Am I using anger to protect?* Because anger feels good to let out. Anger feels powerful to let out. Feels like when I use anger, I can control the situation. But oftentimes that expression of anger to control leads to just ongoing, more complicated consequences.

Brittany: Which, unfortunately or fortunately, those consequences are usually what people start to recognize as a problem. There's a point of recognition where we realize this anger I feel, and my actions that follow are not actually providing what it is I'm looking for, which is an answer to that deep shame, or that deep hurt, or that longing to feel known, seen, loved, and connected.

But oftentimes our anger either pushes others away, which heightens that feeling of shame, rejection, pain, hurt, or we pull ourselves away, which also leads to further isolation. Those behaviors are what are keeping us from connecting with a person that's in front of us, or whatever the situation is.

Lindsay: So if I'm with someone who's just gotten really angry at me, and I recognize that, and I can tell that they're maybe feeling ashamed, or they're trying to pull away or isolate themselves in some way, what should I do in that moment?

Should I let them walk away and have a minute? Do I ask them questions to get to the bottom of what's going on? What do you recommend in that moment, if someone we're with is responding in anger, in order to love them well?

Andrew: There'd be a tremendous amount of nuance in the response, calibrated around a level of relationship. So if this person has a pattern of expressing anger in this way, and you have a deep enough connection with them relationally that you know, *Hey, if I give space, that's going to give them what they need to actually see what's really going on, to gain clarity, to let the emotional fog dissipate a little bit so I can actually start to see what the real problem is.* And then they're the type of person who will come back, or if they're invited to come back and work through it, that they're going to be open to that.

It can be precarious depending on personality types and how they handle anger. If they're in a heightened state of anger, expressing their anger—and to ask questions that might feel invalidating to the injustice feel. Again, if you think about how deep-seated felt injustice is, something we want to fight against and get vengeance for, those questions in the moment can be a bit precarious.

And so we want to be thoughtful. So our lead foot is love our neighbor, love this person, love this individual. I want to be thinking through, *What's their level of emotion? How high is it?* In light of that, what's the best way to engage them right now, knowing that right now everything doesn't have to be fixed.

We got more time. One of the dangers in these moments of heightened conflict is we fall into the trap of believing we've got to fix it all now, otherwise it'll never get done. Again, there's nuance on the back end of that, because we don't want that to become a pattern, either, where it's like, *Okay, well, we never resolve it in the moment.* And then we never resolve it after, either. That's not helpful. So you've got multiple ditches to avoid.

But to consider in the moment of highest emotion—we don't have to figure it out right now. And even if it gives you a good bucket to lean into, the Lord already knows what's going on. The Lord knows what needs to happen here. We don't have clarity on it yet, and that's okay. So let's be patient and dip into faith. And now let's think through, *How do I not regard this person, according to the flesh, which would be to regard them just by anger defining who they are, but rather see them as a new creation, image bearer of*

God and love them as that? So what would be the most loving and helpful response in this moment?

And then I think the whole smorgasbord of responses is open after that. Can you see in their anger that what they're feeling is rejected? Or do you see that they're feeling really sad? Or do you see the hurt?

If you see any of those, and it feels accurate in the moment, I think there can be a beautiful lean in of, "It seems like you feel really hurt about this." And that can lead to deep engagement.

But it will depend on the person. For some people, they'll be so angry in that moment, any press deeper into the vulnerability, they'll just be highly resistant to. And you'll get that indication where like, "It seems like you're hurt about this." and their response will be, "No, I'm not. I'm not. I'm not even angry." And you'll be like, "Ah, I think you are angry. What I hear you saying is you're not. Maybe let's take a break, you know?"

And so, I think it's great to take some of those risks, recognizing the response might be more defensiveness. If the response is more defensiveness, then it might be wise, that might be the best time to offer, "Okay, I think we need a little space here. Let's go for a walk. Let's give it a few minutes. Let's come back. The temperature's a little too hot in this moment for us to get clarity." And so a lot of nuance in all of that.

Shanda: I think Tim Keller gives us a great, easy illustration or analogy to remember. He says that our goal is not no anger or blow-up anger, but slow anger.

God is slow to anger. We want to be like Him in that. And so when we're walking with people, just rightly assessing, like Andrew said, how to bear with them and love them, meet them where they're at. We even see God responding to Jonah, right? Where God asked directly Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry?" And we see that Jonah's anger was unrighteous in that he didn't like what God was doing.

He really had a hard time with God's mercy and His grace in that situation. And he was feeling it and expressing it. But as we walk with people, we want to be able to gently pursue the glory of God in them and have a lead foot of humility and patience, especially

for those who identify as believers. And hopefully the Spirit will bring conviction and not falling into shame, but falling into healthy repentance and faith, moving from that spectrum of no and blow that we all can fall into, either extreme.

We, like Brittany said, might have a predisposition toward one or the other, but every one of us is ongoingly having to practice this element of healthy, righteous, good anger that models the glory of God. And so none of us ever arrive and get it all figured out. And so I think staying humble and then recognizing if we just hang with somebody a little bit the way God hangs with us, it can help them toward a more healthy experience of anger. And even again, getting behind it to figure out what else might be going on.

Andrew: I have a picture of Jonah. I mean, my goodness. It's got to make you giggle a little about how the Lord interacts with Jonah in this moment. 'Cause—what a textbook picture of sublimation. So sublimation, I'm angry about something else, but it's not safe to be angry toward that person, [so] the angriest, maybe in the history of mankind, that somebody has been [at a] plant. And he [Jonah] loses his mind over the plant, and God uses to draw out, “Jonah, do you see how, like, disproportionate your anger is in terms of the plant, and in terms of how you feel about the Ninevites?”

And so this is where I think on a practical level, you're going to have moments in life where you are over-the-top angry about something that is small. And it's an invitation in those moments to actually start to work through, there's something more going on here. There's insight for us to gain. There's something here that's being tapped into that's deeper than the thing in front of me. And so I think these are the moments that can be so helpful for us to cue into. When I get overly angry about something small, there's an invitation to be curious and to journey into, *What else is going on here?*

'Cause it's not just about the thing in front of me. It's not just about the dishes not being done, or getting cut off in traffic, or whatever it might be. There's something deeper here. If we're willing to explore that, I think we can see deep change happen. We can understand ourselves better and work in such a way that anger doesn't overwhelm and run our lives.

But without that insight—if we stay just on the symptomatic surface level, if we just stay looking at the plants, and the plants are the problem, we're not going to see long-term

change. To try and get rid of anger by focusing on anger is not going to lead to much change, but to change anger by understanding what's the deep-seated root that's feeding it, what's the narrative and story I'm believing that needs to be retooled, according to the gospel. That's where we can see long-term change.

Lindsay: I love the picture of God being so patient yet so wise with Jonah. It gives Jonah that moment to understand how disproportionate his anger responses are to different things. Another place in Scripture that I feel like we can so clearly see the different kinds of anger and the different responses is Jesus in the temple, when He casts out the moneychangers who've turned His Father's house into something it shouldn't be. Can we talk through what we see in regard to anger in that scene?

Andrew: So one of the more fascinating things about Jesus in terms of anger, and I think it ends up being quite convicting for us, is Jesus consistently gets angry about two primary things. Number one, the glory of God. So when His Father is misrepresented, when people are being deceptive about who God is, Jesus gets pretty radically angry about that.

You see that with the Pharisees. You see it with the moneychangers in the temple. And then Jesus also gets deeply angry about His people being mistreated. What you don't see is Jesus getting angry about offenses done to Him, which, in terms of personal evaluation, leaves us in a very awkward spot. That if we sit and really consider the majority of our anger, like the 90 percent of our anger, maybe more than that if we're honest, has primarily to do with [how] we felt like wrong has been done to us, and we're angry about it.

Jesus dismisses that. He's silent before Pilate. He lets people speak about Him in horrific ways, and do horrific things to Him. And His response is not anger in those moments, but in many cases, compassion, speaking the truth in love, no defending of Himself. But when somebody misrepresents His heavenly Father, yeah, He makes a whip.

He made a weapon in the temple to drive the people out, to show how serious He was, that His anger was righteously proportionate to what was happening in the temple. And this is where I think for us the evaluation, hopefully in this life we get less and less

absorbed in the anger about the things, the wrongs, the perceived injustices due to us, [and] more and more angry about the things that God feels angry about.

Now, God does feel angry about the injustices done to us, and He feels that anger appropriately and more righteously than we ever will. And so, in one sense, we can leave that in His hands. So we know that our heavenly Father feels righteous anger toward the abuses and the sins and the wrongs that have been done to us.

And then for us to cultivate a heart that feels anger, righteous anger, toward misrepresentation of God and who He is and the abuse of His children, the misuse of them, that we would want to see that grow in our lives. And so Jesus models that perfectly, obviously. I think it gives us a good indication of where we got so much room for growth and change.

Brittany: We want to ask the question, “Lord, help me understand the things that I'm getting angry about, and if those line up to the things I ought to be angry about. And God, what are those things that You're angry about that I seem to not be angry about, that I seem to have a lack of emotional response or engagement?”

“You seem to have an emotional response here, that as I'm learning to grow and be more like Christ, what are those areas where I don't have those emotional responses, and how can I lean into cultivating a healthy form of in this case, anger, to be angry about the things that you're angry about, Lord?”

Shanda: And we see in Galatians 5 where, it's for freedom that we've been set free. And it's instructing us that out of that freedom that we would love one another. And to not let that freedom give occasion for the flesh, but it goes on to say, when we give into that unhealthy liberty, that we devour and consume, we bite, we overwhelm each other.

And I think we just need to be honest with how easily that comes, that we are provoked. Our flesh wants to vindicate ourselves in unrighteous and profitable ways. And with a humble understanding that this is a challenge that we're all navigating, but to, to come back to that place of orienting, coming back to the root and the fruit, going to the heart of the confidence that we have in Christ, that vengeance is the Lord's.

We don't have to go after our own personal vindication. That doesn't mean that we don't always speak, speaking the truth in love, but we're looking at, *What's the motivation? What is my goal and my aim? What's driving how I'm responding in that moment?* And we're hoping that we can look so carefully at what is happening at the core of where all of these emotions are stirring from and coming from out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth is speaking.

And so, might the motivation be loving, that if we even have godly anger, our motivation should be love in any type of confrontation. It should be restorative anger. It should be redemptive. It should move toward reconciling the people that we are interacting with to God. And to live at peace, as much as possible with us, as much as it depends on us, might we be people of peace, even in the midst of such a difficult dynamic where we are going to feel violated at times. And just accepting all the nuance that's involved in that.

Andrew: I love that you hit on love, because I think we've got to recognize we can't separate anger and love, that they go hand in hand. Anger will always reveal what we love most. This is why you see Jesus' anger doing what it does. He loves the heavenly Father most. He loves us most. So what does He get most angry about? When those things are misrepresented. In the same way, in our own life, the things that we get most angry about absolutely reveal what we love most. And that can be a bit of a sobering thought. We start to catalog, *Okay, what things lately have I been most angry about?*

And for most of us, again, I say for myself, for sure, included, I pretty quickly realize what I love most is just me. What I love most is my comfort, my happiness, because I get most angry when those things are taken away, I don't get as angry when it's taken from other people or things like that.

And so there's obviously still room for growth in my own heart. but what a helpful indicator for us to receive, that, *Lord, okay, You've given me this emotion, anger, to actually help me learn what my heart is doing, to see what my heart loves, and then to repent where repentance needs to happen. Or to celebrate, No, Lord my heart is actually aligned with Yours here. My anger is aligned with righteous anger.*

What a gift, when it gets properly fitted together for us. And so anger and love go hand in hand. We [have] got to keep that in mind. The opposite of love is not anger. The opposite

of love I'd say predominantly is apathy, is a lack of any sort of feeling, the absence of any sort of care.

Even with hatred, there's at least a relational component to it, an acknowledgement of the other person, and that there's value there. With apathy, it's nothing. But love will require anger. If I love it a lot, then when it is misused, I will feel angry about that thing.

Brittany: Shanda, you mentioned the restorative nature of anger, and we can see that in the way Jesus gets angry. So it's the building up of the kingdom of God. And the anger that drives from love to restore the way it ought to be, the way we ought to relate to others or to God. And anger—not to destroy things, but to build up and restore the things that we've been given by God and asked to cultivate here on earth to bring about the kingdom that is to come here and now.

Lindsay: I'm always so encouraged when I'm reading through the Psalms, and I feel like I can see that restorative anger, that crying out for injustice that leads to this, the psalmist, whether it's David or someone else, crying out to God for change in what I think is faith and trusting and believing God can do it, but not seeing it having come yet.

And so it's that tension we hold. That we live in a broken world, and we know God could and will one day restore everything. But right now we have to live right next door to injustice. But it doesn't mean we can't cry out and ask God to change things in the here and now. I feel like the Psalms is a place where I at least so deeply connect with that heart of God.

And I'm so often convicted about my own motivations and my own selfish emotions. To your point, Andrew, when I'm reading through that and hearing people who are connected to God's heart crying out for all things to be restored.

Andrew: I love what you're hitting on there, because this invites us into a space with our anger to be slow. Because what you've hit on is, God will bring justice. That day is coming. It is a certainty. So we don't have to cobble together our own, according to our own wisdom and understanding. His pacing and timing for it will be right. That also doesn't mean that we can be lazy about it. Where we see injustice happening in this

world, we should seek to intercede, be ministers of reconciliation and ambassadors for Christ in that moment.

Yet our baseline is, okay, if our God is slow to anger, how much more should we, His humble children who see in part while He sees in whole, how much more so as image bearers—we have that bank of hope that goes, because we know also God will bring actual true right justice in each of these cases. There's no injustice that will survive. In other words, He will bring it all to a conclusion in time. And so we can rest in that.

Shanda: It's just humbling to remember that we're all spiritually blind. We're all lacking full capacity to see all the details, but God is moving toward us in love and through His beautiful expression of healthy anger and His compassionate pursuits of His people. He's given us His Word, not with a formula where there's a plug and play for every situation, but He is teaching us through His wisdom, how to be wise, how to think about anger, how to conceptualize, and reflect on, and assess what's happening internally, and apply that to these external situations so that we are being renewed and restored to God and to others through all of these moments where we are going to bump up against the emotion of anger.

If we're honest, probably every day we're dealing with this in some form or fashion, because we're human, and the world is broken, and we're learning. That's what disciples do. We're learning how to walk by faith. We are learning how to live as image bearers, anchoring our hope in Christ Jesus.

And so back to the community piece, that we might spur each other on toward love and good deeds. So we might bear patiently with each other and lovingly confront and rebuke for the restorative purpose that we would be reconciled to God and each other.

Lindsay: When we think about being ministers of reconciliation and ambassadors for Christ in our culture, our culture is so angry. There's anger everywhere—whether it's online, and our neighbors, and our workplaces, politically—it just seems like we're surrounded by anger. And so when we think about what it means to be ministers of reconciliation, showing people a better way through how Jesus responded in Scripture, what are some really practical ways you feel like we can show up in the world? Or we can interact with people around us, or online even, in that being slow to anger mindset

versus maybe the reactionary nature of what I know I would naturally want to do in some circumstances?

Shanda: I think anger is, if we want to distill it down, it's bringing somebody into the courtroom of my judgment. In the midst of the cultural anger that you're addressing, Lindsay, I think it goes back to that kind of Galatians 5. We're biting, devouring, consuming, and bringing people under our judgment, that we want to recognize God's wisdom and His judgment. We care about that. But how we dispense that, how we talk about that, how we represent that—I think there is a better way forward other than devouring one another and consuming and condemning. These quarrels and fights among us—our desires kind of run amuck, that it is more about me in that moment than it is about the glory of God.

So being able to listen and, I need to do this myself, and not be so reactive and reactionary, and how our judgment is falling on others. Even when we might have some of those convictions brewing within that are good and right, that we would, again, we're going to say over and over, slow down, and have a forward foot of love and honor and respect. Which, in the midst of anger, I think that's what's being lost is the dignity of honoring and respecting one another in the midst of our beliefs, because we are going to disagree with people.

We are going to have people that see things differently and have different preferences or different values. And might we learn how to be kind to one another in those situations, and still seek to understand, listen, to grow in the ability to consider their point of view, even. That our anger doesn't circumvent the opportunity to love people and be moving toward them, even while we hold different ideas.

And so I think that's where the church and us, as Christians, can bring the glory of Christ and the light in the midst of darkness, because it is so thick, and the anger is so palpable in our culture right now. That we can express differences and ways of viewing things that may not line up but still have deep respect and kindness offered to one another in the midst of it.

Andrew: I think one of the greatest problems we have right now is, Scripture would call us to be quick to listen, and our culture is relatively opposed to that idea. That we should

not be quick to listen. In fact, we're being taught and inculturated to be quick to respond. In Proverbs it talks about there's a man who sounds right in his perspective until someone comes along and examines him.

We've lost the examining part. And now we're only listening to the first part. And then even in our listening, our tendency is to listen to only one version of the story, to only listen to one side. We're being taught, "You listen to this part of the culture, because the other part of the culture is perhaps dangerous or not worthy of being listened to." All of that cultivates immediate anger and justice; we're the right perspective, we've got it right, and no real listening, no real humility. And so we've lost where Scripture says, "Hey, you know in part. One day you'll know in full."

Right now, this side of heaven, you always know in part, which invites us into a wide range of humility to, in every circumstance go, *There's more of the circumstance I don't know than I do know. There's more I have to learn before I respond.*

So I should be quick to listen. I should be slow to speak. So that in my speaking, when the time comes, I've got as much of the data on both sides of this that's helpful to move us in a positive direction. And so I think even, just the practice of our gut response to respond to everything, to react to everything in the moment, to be the armchair quarterback that knows all the right answers, even though we're not really in the game, to instead be slow to speak, quick to listen, learn from others, and learn from different perspectives.

Get the whole of the story. We're shooting ourselves in the foot by just listening to a part of the story and framing up all of our reactions. We read a tweet, and, if you find yourself enraged by a one-line tweet, there's always more to the story. And this is the dilemma, in my opinion, with social media and everything else, or one of the dilemmas most toxic for us in terms of communication is when everything is boiled down to a soundbite that then we're trained and conditioned to respond as though we now have all the information.

Andrew: The Bible would just call that foolishness. That's just foolishness to just respond off of this one line. There's more to the story, and if we hold to humility, we'll explore the rest of the story. We'll be open. We'll be slow to speak, quick to listen. And then we'll speak when we've got the data, which I think will engender patience, kindness,

gentleness, all those things in communication that doesn't make anger the easy response. When we respond in anger to a short amount of information, the natural response we're going to get from somebody else is reactionary anger. Because it'll feel unjust that we only heard part of the story and respond to it. In a real sense, that *is* unjust. We only heard part of the story, and we framed their whole identity or whatever they're doing based on one phrase. And so that'll just cultivate anger.

Lindsay: Shanda, you mentioned image bearers. And I think that strikes a chord with me, Andrew, based on what you were just saying. Sometimes, when we're being so reactionary, we're lost in our anger, our feelings, our big emotions, it's so easy to forget the person across the computer screen or across the room or whatever is another image bearer. It's somebody who's been created in God's image. Someone who God loves dearly as a child.

And when it becomes us versus them, it depersonalizes all of that to where its ideologies going back and forth or opinions going back and forth. And it's so easy to forget about the people that are over there as well.

So I love that framework for thinking through scripturally. What does it mean to be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry, cultivate the humility of Jesus, consider others more important than yourself? All of those things that sound so great in sound bites, but are really hard to live out. Any last thoughts or wisdom?

Shanda: Well, I think in that same vein, it's the other part of the population that may have internalized anger or have been harmed in a way and haven't had anybody rightly and healthily lovingly advocate for their pain in expressing good, loving anger about the injustice done to them. I know sometimes the work that we do with people who have been hurt and didn't have that advocacy, didn't have somebody looking out for their best interest and their good, and they have learned to put their pain deep inside somewhere.

That being able to say, I'm so sorry that happened to you, and that makes me mad that somebody dehumanized you in that way and somebody wrongly used their power to hurt you. I'm sad about that. I am mad about that. And God is angry about that, too. There is a beautiful honoring and dignifying opportunity to come and bring the healthy anger into somebody's pain. That says, "I see you. I see your pain, and that grieves me deeply."

And part of that grief is healthy anger, because I care about your dignity that somebody didn't honor.

Andrew: I think, Shanda, what you're saying is so important for us to understand in terms of caring well for those people in particular, who would be dismissive of things done to them. Usually under the guise of, "Well, God is sovereign. He'll use all things for my good, for His glory," or "He allowed it to happen; therefore, He must be okay with it," type of thinking. And to help them receive, yeah, God will use all things, He will redeem all things *and* He's angry about it. He is righteously, perfectly angry about every injustice done. There's no minimizing of that. Those things can exist together, although it can be quite confusing for us.

Even helping them then embrace and connect with God in that. Yeah, He's angry about the injustice. That's part of His character, and He's promised to bring justice in time. None of us can escape. But it can be quite jarring for people to try and receive that when they've tried to minimize it. "Oh, I'll just be okay, it's not that big of a deal." No, it is. It is a big deal, and God cares. And God's angry with you in this, and He is going to bring justice.

Lindsay: I think that's so important. I'm glad that you brought that up.

One last question before we wrap up. So when we're thinking about wanting to advocate for others, whether that is people who've experienced injustice who are waiting for their righteous redemption or just our friends, family members, roommates, community around us in everyday life who, just like us, experience moments of anger. What are some ways we can walk forward together? And I know we've already hit on a lot of them—listening, empathizing, being slow to become angry ourselves. Are there any other practicals we can begin cultivating in our own lives to bless our community, to help one another, to advocate for one another?

Brittany: I just think it's slow. It's a really slow process to try to navigate the different hurts. So if we've talked about how anger often comes from a place of deep wounding, it takes a while to understand that. It takes us a while to really understand what's going on underneath that anger, because anger can feel really safe, can feel like I'm in control. Even if everything feels out of control, it still has that very intoxicating draw.

And so it takes a while for me, myself, to understand exactly what's going on. And I need people around me who are willing to stick it out with me.

And then for the person who is on the other end. It feels just as chaotic, because you're like, "Well, I'm not enjoying this process of your anger coming at me," and learning how to receive that and understand that. And, and try to, look at the things that need correcting, but also looking to endure and forgive offenses and be quick to do that. And really seeking after the restorative process of confrontation and conflict is [so] that we would gain one another back to each other.

And I think it's just a long, slow process of seeking to understand. We use labor to understand, and we use that word intentionally, because it is a laboring alongside each other, and a bearing with one another. Scripture is not shy about the fact that this is difficult. So I think that's really important.

The thing that kept coming back to my mind as we've been talking is the confidence that comes from being connected to Christ and knowing that in Christ I have all that I need. So I don't need to go hunting for that from others, but I get to confidently receive and understand and seek to bring about restoration for those around me.

Andrew: I think one practical to engage with a little bit, is sharing about our anger. I want to be careful about how I say this. It's not, find the nearest person and let your anger fly. But one of the dangers with anger is the tendency to hold it in.

If we've grown up in church culture, we maybe received that message implicitly, that anger is not okay. That anger is always bad. It's unrighteous. If you feel angry, then you're doing something wrong. Which I think is, generally speaking, an unhelpful way to think about it. Mostly because Jesus got angry. And if we're supposed to be Christlike, then there's gotta be space for anger in terms of our own emotional response.

But sharing with other people about our anger. So there's a cliché with anger that says, "If you hold onto your anger, it's like drinking poison and hoping the other person will die." And I'd say, that's a good thing for us to keep in mind. When we hold onto our anger, it's not like it's neutral. It eats away at us. It takes up emotional bandwidth.

It takes up capacity. It takes up willpower. And so the longer we hold on to it, the more it sucks the life out of us. And so where we have community and people we trust that we can go to in those raw moments and just say, “Hey, I'm feeling angry.” And in some cases it's going to be, “I'm feeling angry and I've got no clue why.” Maybe you had 16 cups of coffee, and it's the caffeine. But there's going to be times where you can go to a friend [and] be like, “I don't know why; I just feel really angry today. Could you pray for me? Could you ask me some questions? Could you help me work through [it] to try and discover what's going on here?”

In other cases it's going to be like, “Hey, I feel really angry about this. Could you help me think through if I'm seeing it correctly? Am I perceiving this correctly? What would be wise to do in response with this?”

And so to have those people in your life that you could share [with] in those raw moments. And hopefully the feedback you're not going to get as well, “Just don't be angry.” It would be unhelpful in those moments. But rather an engagement of, “Well, let's explore that together.” And maybe in some cases, we're going to find that your anger is righteously attuned to what's going on and to be able to celebrate that. “Hey, now there's a Christlike anger in this moment that you feel about this situation.” And in other cases, it's gonna be, “No, I think you're missing part of the puzzle here. There are a couple of elements that might be at play that would help retool that anger.” And so to be open to receiving that.

But in general, just don't hold onto it. If you hold onto it for long enough, it will explode out in some form or another. You'll find yourself getting angry at small situations because you just can't hold onto it anymore. And so, a regular rhythm of being open about when you feel angry can be helpful in the long run.

Shanda: And one of the basic practicals that we often forget, because it's so simple, but again, what you focus on in your mind is going to drive your emotions. And so if you are rehearsing and ruminating on a perceived hurt, or, or even an actual hurt, but in a very self-protective way, it is going to cause that anger to grow.

And so we want to do that internal work of reorienting or at least bringing it under the provisional helps of the Scripture and God's wisdom to help guide us through the anger

so that we don't rehearse it in such a way that it is growing and growing, and then it's going to come out sideways somewhere.

But to be honest that I'm hurt. To be honest that this feels really yucky, and I am tempted to take matters into my own hands and vindicate my own glory. God, help me believe that You care about that. God, help me surrender and yield and exchange my desire for the righteousness of Christ and walk in the freedom that He's given me.

That there's a lot of work that we can do internally. We need each other's help to do that a lot, but if we are circling the drain, so to speak, in our mind, it's just going to continue to grow and foster and fester and ooze out everywhere over the people that we care about.

Lindsay: I'm just sitting here thinking how thankful I am for God's Word to guide us and community to help us endure in all these things and be patient with us in love. So thank you all so much for sharing your wisdom today.

Listeners, thank you so much for joining us. We encourage you as always to process this in community, to find your safe people that you love and that know you well to work through everything that our counselors have shared today.

We've made a guide to help you do that. So go to our episode webpage that has our group guide that includes Scripture and reflection questions to help you process everything you've learned today.

Next week we'll talk about grief—what it is, what it does in us, the slow process of grief that may sometimes surprise us, and how we can trust God, even when we feel like grief is unending.

And if you want to reflect and worship God through everything you've learned, or you just need some words to pray to Him as you assess your own anger, we have a short liturgy reading for you. And we'll see you next time.

Alex: *A Liturgy for Being Slow to Anger*

God, You get angry.

Being angry doesn't break the bounds of Your desire for me,
but my faulty heart longs for retribution.

This hurt is a heavy burden,
and hostility feels stronger than vulnerability.

Father, when anger and adrenaline course through my veins
and harsh words beg to break out of my strained mouth,
use the hurt caused by others to remind me
how I wound You,
and how You forgive me every single time.

When I want to dwell on my frustration and angst,
or when a friend says something harsh—
make me slow to anger.
Give me a gracious heart.
Help me reconcile my pain without sin;
make me more like You.

