

Reframing Emotions

Reframing Grief

Episode 6

"I struggle to know how to grieve well, because my family tends to live by the 'cheer up, Buttercup' mantra."

"For me, grief is like getting stuck in the rain without an umbrella. It comes unexpectedly. It's uncomfortable, and it beats down on you until it's over."

"My wonderful friend once said, 'I used to think grief was a checkpoint, and it's not.' I've been trying to lean into this. I'm trying to let grief come and go as it should while I process it. Rushing through grief, in my opinion...I find it to be unhealthy."

Lindsay: Welcome to another episode of *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 your host Lindsay Funkhouser with The Austin Stone Institute. And joining me again are my friends and professional counselors Brittany Beltran, Shanda Anderson, and Andrew Dealy.

Today, we're going to talk about grief. Brittany, would you start us off with understanding what grief is?

Brittany: We can define grief as deep sorrow over an unexpected loss. Often we associate it with death, but we can experience loss in a multitude of ways all throughout the course of life.



Shanda: I think along with how Brittany's just started off this conversation, to frame up grief, is slowing down. The reality [is] that there's a lot of layers to grief or there's a lot of expressions, how it can play out. It can be very complicated and nuanced.

And so, first of all, there's no two people that may experience grief the exact same way. So here I say that there's not some formula for grief, or there's not some perfect way to do it. We just all experience it, and we're all going to have different scenarios in life. Whether it's losing a loved one, whether it's a deep disappointment that causes us to experience the loss of something we had hoped for, or whether it's the loss of something that we have once had. And we're having to learn to live again without it.

And many times, it's the death of a dream, the desire of what we thought maybe life would look like. And then, in the most specific of ways, it's losing a loved one. Grief is not something that we are going to in any way say that you get over. We want to frame up grief as something that, through the hope of Christ and the beauty of the gospel with an eternal perspective, we can grieve as those who have hope. We can learn to deal with our grief differently over time as our hearts long for what we were made for, which is perfection, where there is no sin and sorrow. And we don't have to say goodbye to the people that we love. But we live in broken bodies. We live in a broken world. And so grief is the most normal reality.

And we would say it's telling the truth about some of the tragedy. Oh, death, where is your sting? There is hope to know that there is the consummation and the fulfillment of God's ultimate redemption, where we get to be with Him forever. But in the meantime, in this broken world, we will lose, at some point, all the things that we care about. And so grief is something that we want to look to Jesus, who was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. Oftentimes in the Christian life, we can see grief as an unhealthy category that, if I only had faith, then I wouldn't feel sad. And we believe that the Bible is offering us a way forward through the pain and inviting us into deep fellowship with God, the God of all comfort, that can meet us there and offer us strength and encouragement and endurance while we tell the truth about this broken world.

Andrew: I think when the elements combine in grief, [it's] the felt sense of something's been lost that we care about. And I think coupled with that on the backend is the sense that it can't be regained. So as has been said, that could be a relationship, that could be

the loss of a loved one through death. It could also be the loss of career, the loss of status, the loss of security. And that felt sense that I can't recuperate—it is what leads us, I think, to a healthy place of grieving and this emotional expression, oftentimes through tears and with deep sorrow, [of] acknowledging my limitations.

My limitations are—I can't fix what's been broken here. I can't make it better. I'm going to, in one sense or another, be forced to now create a new normal in the absence of the thing I used to love, enjoy, care for. Which is a hard process. I think we look at the story of Genesis, and it's hard to see grief in there. And this is one of the things that I think is interesting with grief and some of these emotions. Adam and Eve post-sin are so imbued with shame. They cover up as quick as they can. They hear God walking in the garden; they run and hide. So we've got shame and fear dominating. And there's almost no space, it seems like, for grief to take place because they're too panicked. There's still too much more that could be lost.

I don't think we would really see grief until God's really face-to-face with them. He's walked them through the consequences and is ushering them out of the garden of Eden. At that point, I would have imagined, it's not really recorded there, but that's the space where now we've got enough space to feel the reality of what's actually been lost.

Then we move into, of course, the story of Cain and Abel. Losing Abel, there would have been grief there, but we see that grief can get buried beneath other emotions, especially when there's fight or flight type, level of emotions in play.

They can kind of bury the grief for a while, but then when there's enough space for it to surface again, for us to actually feel and become acquainted with, *no, things are fundamentally forever changed*. And now I've got to figure out how to pair that together in my new reality. That's the complexity of grief, and the complexity of us working through it.

Brittany: I think that's part of why people get really surprised by grief. Because at first, when there's a loss, you have to respond in some way. And so that response time of needing to restabilize or readjust. Say you lost a job. Well, you need to financially provide. So you're in this kind of action mode, to resettle and see what's going to happen.

And then when that slows down a little bit, oftentimes people will be surprised by their experience of tears and where they come out in a situation where they weren't thinking about what they lost, but here is all of this sorrow. And how do I navigate that? But I think a normative part of the process, of coming to the reconciliation of the thing that has been lost, is to adjust and then realize and [allow] the grief process to settle in at that point where you're not in the chaos and in the fray of trying to figure out what's happening.

Lindsay: That rings so true to me, that idea that grief surprises us. I've definitely been in situations where I'll just be having an innocuous conversation in the break room with someone at work, and suddenly some memory will come to mind.

My grandmother passed away a few months ago and I've been finding that as I'm continuing to deal with the grief of that, it'll just come in surprising times and I won't even know why necessarily. Can you talk a little bit more about why we're surprised and even what's going on in our minds, our emotions, our spirits? Where does that surprise come from, and what are some ways that we tend to respond in that moment?

Andrew: So if it's all right, I'll share a little bit about my story. Because I think it fits so textbook, at least in one version of how grief can be so surprising. I lost my father the summer after my freshman year at Baylor. I was 19 years old, and my father and my brother were really tight. And so my focus after losing my father was what does it look like for me to care for my brother to make sure he's okay.

We were in Waco at the time. Grew up in San Diego, so we go back for the funeral in San Diego. And when I get to San Diego, my full focus is around, *How do I care for the rest of my family?* Make sure they're okay. And so for me, that whole process of losing my father, I didn't experience really much grief.

It was more like I was in pure survival protection mode of I've got these things to get done. So post funeral, my brilliant 19 year old self made the decision of, I'm going to take my car, which was, for those who care, a 1959 Chevrolet Bel Air, red and white with Chrome Cragar SS wheels, Dynamat trunk with 10-inch subwoofers, beautiful sound system, classic car—no air conditioning, though.

So I made the decision of, I'm not going to drive through the day. I'm going to do all nighters and get it to Baylor. And so I hopped into my car post-funeral and I'm like, *Yeah, I'm just going to do this in one trip, 24 hours, get from San Diego to Waco, and I'll be fine.* And so I get in the car, and I'm driving through the hills of California out through the desert, cranking some music, and 15 minutes into the ride, sound system shorts out. And it's at that point, in that pure silence, I finally found grief. When I had nowhere else to turn, no one else to look to, no one else to protect, no one else to care for. And I bawled my way to El Paso. I remember pulling into a Micky D's parking lot, and I was just dehydrated to the extreme because I've been crying for the last eight hours.

But that's what it took for me. There's a sense in which we can bury that grief if we have enough other distractions. And I think why we do that, or at least I can speak for myself, 'cause there's nothing fun about feeling grief. It doesn't feel productive. If we sit there and like, okay, here's actually what grief does, here's the benefit to grief. I think we can have a hard time identifying any use to it. It just feels better to move on and be done with it. Whereas, with even some of the other negative emotions like anxiety or anger, they motivate an activity that feels like it can be productive, or it can get us something.

The emotional experience of grief is bear hugging the reality of no, there's not anything I can do. It's bear hugging that powerlessness of I actually can't fix it. I think everything in our human nature wants to push against that and say, "No, there, there must be another way. There must be a way to fix this. There must be a way to make it better, because I've come face-to-face with my impotence." That does not feel good. I'd rather do almost anything else than feel that sense of I can't fix it.

Shanda: I think being able to walk with God through that intricate balance of being candidly honest about the pain while also taking to heart the indestructible promises of hope in God's Word and His truth. It's a challenge to manage that. And none of us do it perfectly. There is no right way to grieve.

It's being able to look, again, to Christ who, knowing the resurrection to come for Lazarus, still weeps. There is the invitation of telling the truth about the pain while we are hooking our hearts to the promises of God, knowing that we lack the power to fix it. And there's a mystery behind how God writes the stories that involve loss.

There are scalable dynamics and differences in loss. Losing a game as a high school student is still a loss, and we get to feel that. But also losing a child or losing a spouse after 52 years of marriage. There are varying degrees of the felt experience of loss. And inviting people to tell their story and move toward the honest expression of what it's like to walk by faith in the midst of having to face excruciating pain at times.

The grief can feel debilitating. We know that there are some griefs that we can anticipate—caring for an elderly parent, a stage of life that in our minds might make sense, even though it's still difficult—versus a car accident or something that takes somebody at a young age or unexpectedly. And we're having to adjust or reconcile ourselves to the reality of life when we didn't see it coming.

And there's no version of those that are easy, but there are different realities of how we might process or experience that caring for somebody with cancer for a long time, watching that slow fade, as opposed to having to wake up the next day to a harsh reality that our brains can't comprehend. [It] makes how we even enter into this process of grief, from our mental processing and our emotional ability, from the shock of it all, to a little more anticipatory understanding. And so just recognizing this broad spectrum of how we as humans might find ourselves in this process of grief.

Lindsay: Can you be grieving and not realize you're grieving?

Andrew: It's a fascinating question. So there's a sense in which your body is grieving, for sure. No matter what, if you've experienced loss, your body is holding on to the reality of that. And it's there, the conscious, felt experience of grief. And this is where I don't know, if we get really into the details of the definition of grief, do you have to be fully conscious of the grief for it to be grief?

And I think with most of the other emotions, we can feel them without being fully conscious of them. The emotion is still there. It feels like, in my mind, to properly grieve there has to be a conscious knowledge of what is being grieved. Again, with the loss of my father, my body's ability to defer the grief, at least to defer the felt congruence of the grief, tends me to believe—was I grieving in that season before the car ride? Maybe yes and no; there was at least a knowledge of it, but it wasn't fully felt, fully experienced.



And I think this is what's so wonderful and mysterious about John 11:35 and what Jesus does at the tomb of Lazarus. There is something to the actual moment of the feeling being experienced, both bodily and consciously, that makes grief, at least in my humble opinion, grief. And not just the idea of it. There's something to it. Then there's something in the human experience.

I think that's part of why Jesus models it at the tomb of Lazarus. There's something deeply being human in grief that we're invited into. That's part of the puzzle of living well in a broken world, of living well in a world where things do go away. And we feel the alienness of that, that we're not supposed to lose things.

We're not supposed to lose relationships, but it happens. I think grief gets us to a proper congruence of how things are. And yet as believers, the apostle Paul would say, we don't grieve as those who don't have hope. So the grief process is part of it. Grieving is part of it, yet where it leads us to eventually is that deep hope [that] still remains unshaken, that deep hope set in Christ, set in the reality that God will restore all things, set in the reality that God will bring justice and bring healing and remove all of that is sad, broken, and untrue. Our hope lands there, but to get there, grief is required. Grief is required to really grab onto what the hope is.

Brittany: I'm still working out in my head, too, as we're talking about it. The traditional stages of grief include an aspect of denial and this lack of recognition of what's been lost. And sometimes I think that can come more actively—denying the loss. And sometimes it's more mysterious than that, of maybe I haven't fully realized what it is that I've lost or where these other symptoms of that loss are coming out or coming from.

Because we can experience, *hey, something's missing*, and maybe compensate for it in other ways, without fully realizing it, what the thing is that is missing. And so I think it's a mystery to me right now about what that looks like, but I think there is a component of grief that realizes and brings into our awareness the reality of our human frailty.

If we're, as Andrew put it, bear hugging our powerlessness, that recognition [that] I didn't have the ability or don't have the ability to maintain everything that I love and to keep it. I think grief involves that truth telling of the situation. And so with that component, I think

in some ways it might be possible to be grieving and not be fully aware of what it is that's going on.

But to be grieved involves the reality of the loss and telling the truth about it and fully recognizing what's going on. And I think that's why it's so often described as a process. Because we don't really always arrive at exactly what it is that's been lost or recognize when it happened. One of the things that's coming to mind is when we lose some sense of innocence—I think that's a really hard thing to quantify or recognize in the moment that innocence was lost. But when you are older, sometimes you recognize that part of what I lost in that moment was a sense of loss of innocence.

And so I think this process of grieving throughout our lifetime is coming into that awareness over time. And I think that's required in grief. And then being able to bring that hope that all the sad things will come untrue eventually as the Lord rights every wrong and brings about His kingdom in full.

Shanda: You're talking about that loss of innocence that is revealed in grief. Again, it reminds us of our frailty, of our helplessness, our powerlessness, and the temptation that we all have, and some may even instinctively or intuitively begin to operate in that avoidance that would delay grief.

Even when we're denying the grief or avoiding it or delaying it, it's still actively impacting us in some way. Which I think part of the work that we're trying to do is to invite people into the safety of telling their story of grief and being honest about and candid about how difficult it is and how painful it is.

I think oftentimes, people have the thought that if I move toward the grief, it'll overtake me. It's going to consume me. I won't be able to manage it. That's where we want to help people gently move toward it. It's facing that difficulty that is going to help us move toward the hope that we can find within it—through the help of other people who can labor alongside us and carry our burdens but also finding the hope that Jesus moves into the pain with us.

It's something that He is very acquainted with and familiar with. We want to help people say, “Okay, I don't know how to grieve,” and then feel okay with the messiness of it,

because there's not just a straight path of grief. It's often more like a roller coaster or a very winding road. Some people can hold onto grief as a way of holding onto their loved ones. They think, if I grieve, if I tell the truth, if I move through the grief, I'm going to lose connection with whatever or whoever it is that my grief is attached to.

And we want to honor that concern while also recognizing that there is a way of honoring that relationship and maintaining the integrity of love and honor and memory of that person, but being able to not stay stuck or paralyzed in that grief that is going to be disruptive and even harmful in that isolating reality of grief that can detach [us] from God and others. In the midst of avoiding grief it's taking something from us, that we can find a path forward through the grief. That's what the hope of the gospel is inviting us into.

Lindsay: It seems to be a common experience for the people of God—we see it in Scripture, we experience it today—that we feel a deeper need for or connection to God in times of grief or in times of suffering versus times when things seem to be going great. Why do you think that is? Why does grief specifically, at least eventually if not right away, lead us to crying out to God, to wanting His presence, to feeling a nearness to Him that we might not feel when daily life is just going through the same routines as we're used to?

Andrew: It might be helpful if we hold the traditional paradigm in terms of grief stages. Grief as the felt experience of loss, and that felt experience of loss is not a singular event. It's an ongoing progression of things, not necessarily linear, but these components are usually here.

And so, Elisabeth Kubler Ross in the 1950s cobbled together this paradigm to try and help make sense of what the grief process looks like, composed of five primary components that, again, are not sequential. They don't happen in order, but these generally tend to be a part of the process.

There's denial as a first component. I think generally speaking, we can all resonate with that. Our initial response to loss is usually, *No, that couldn't have happened. No, that's not possible. Nope. That's not what should have happened. That can't be what happened.*



The next stage she identified was bartering, and bartering is more of a, trying to negotiate with God or negotiate with a higher power to get back what's been lost. *I'll do these good things or I'll operate this way if you'll just give me back what I've lost.*

The next stage is anger, which is, I'd say, the beginning stages of acceptance where we start to move into acceptance and realize, *Okay, I can't change it with bartering. It is real. And now I'm just mad about it.*

And so in the grief process, I think that there is absolutely a healthy part. And even in John 11:35 when it talks about Jesus weeping, there's anger in that. It's not just the sadness. There's anger at what has happened. Angry at death, angry at the brokenness.

Depression, which I'd say [is] a little further into acceptance. Like, okay, I let my anger out. My anger did not change the equation. Now I'm starting to embrace this idea of depression where I can't go back and change it. I have to sit in [it] and realize this is really what's going on.

And then the last one is acceptance, the full acceptance. And they actually added another stage not too long ago that moves into weaving it back into your story, weaving it back into now. How do you make a new normal? How do you learn to live in the context where this person or this situation can't go back to being what it was?

That as a paradigm can help us think through, as we feel an experience, a grief in this life, that grief can include a multiplicity of emotions [with] the general theme and thread being the felt sense loss. It's the full experience of how do I feel the loss, walk through the loss, renormalize my life in light of that loss? As we think about grief in light of that structure, the end product is literally coming face-to-face again with our limitations and our weakness. It's coming to the end conclusion of, if all of this depends on me, I don't have control. I don't have the power to sustain or keep the things that I want to keep in life.

And I think that leads naturally into an invitation, into a higher power. An invitation into believing, okay, there's gotta be something bigger than what I can see. There's gotta be something more. And so I think in some cases, for sure, it leads us to a greater dependence on God, simply because it reminds us of what's actually true.



The truth is we don't have as much power as we think. The truth is we don't have as much control as we want to have or that we feel that we should have. And the reality is we need to have someone who sees, knows, and can do what we cannot. We need someone who has the power of resurrection. So it brings us to a natural concluding point of, okay, [it] can't be about me. It's gotta be about something bigger.

And yet, for some people that will just naturally also lead them to stay in the anger phase of grief, which is, okay, God could have prevented this. God could have kept this from happening. And He did not. In other words, there are some cases in which I think [anger] actually will put a wedge between people and God, because they can't reconcile how could God be good? How could God be loving? And He still took this away.

Shanda: Grief moves us toward the beauty but the difficulty of God's providence and His divine will that writes some stories that are really difficult. We see in the book of Ecclesiastes that life on this earth is not fair. There are things that don't make sense. Why do we see evil prospering, and why do we see people who seek to do good suffering? And there will be mysteries that are revealed or that emerge in the midst of our grief.

And so the heart that was made with eternity set within it is going to move somewhere in the midst of grief. And our hope is that it would move people toward God, even in the wrestling with Him. I think the concern is that people would move away from God, because of the difficulty to reconcile His goodness in the midst of unwanted realities that force us into accepting a life in a broken world and banking our hopes on the finished work of Christ and the future glory, where all of these sad things will become untrue.

Lindsay: There are several places in Scripture we see Jesus grieving. Andrew, you mentioned the death of Lazarus. The garden of Gethsemane we've talked about a couple of times. What can we learn from Jesus' response that we can use in our own response to grief?

Andrew: I'm just getting real personal on this one, I don't know why. Maybe I need to do some grief work. For me personally, one of the most soothing things to my soul is that Jesus doesn't think grieving is a waste of time.



He models it over and over again, weeping over Jerusalem, weeping at the tomb of Lazarus. It's not a waste of time to go through that process and to feel congruently the depth of what's been broken and what's been lost. And so if anything, [for] my own soul it helps me give grace to the part of me that wants to say it's a waste of time. The part of me that wants to say no, it's just not worth it. I've got other things to do.

That's just not what Jesus did. And so I feel a freedom and a little bit of trepidation in that invitation to be like, okay, so, Lord, it's actually all right and perhaps most necessary for me to pause in life and actually weep, just weep, without looking for a product or looking for it to accomplish something, but just feel congruently the brokenness of reality. Something happens there that is significant, that's helpful for humanity. That's one of the things that just sticks with me in how Jesus modeled, living in this life for us, that it was not a waste of time to Him.

Brittany: When I look at Jesus, for me personally, when I'm looking at Him weeping or grieving over loss, I also see that there's value in the thing that's lost. And it's good to have love and affection for things. 'Cause I think the temptation for me sometimes is to just numb out and not connect in a really healthy way.

I had something that I loved. And if I didn't love it and I lost it, I probably wouldn't feel anything. I wouldn't even recognize that it was gone. But the grief also is so intertwined with the love of [losing] something that was significant to me. I think we can also grieve things that maybe have less value in our own minds. But it still echoes of loss and a recognition that things aren't permanent.

The Lord is valuing this thing that was lost, taking the time to acknowledge that it's been lost. And doing [that] with others. He's sharing that grief. He's entering into grief with other people. He's allowing them to enter it into it with Him, even inviting them to enter into it, as we see in the garden. And so I see all of those things being modeled for me. It's good for you to have loved something.

And hopefully that lines up with the things that the Lord loves. And it's good to acknowledge the pain of that loss, because it helps [me] acknowledge my limitations again. And also the comfort that I can receive, which then I can offer to others. And I can also be a recipient of the comfort that others offer me.



Shanda: I love that the Bible is not shy about sorrow. Lament is a big portion of the Bible. Even of the 150 psalms, over a third of them are categorized in this posture of lament. We like to worship God with a smile on our face and might categorize that as joy, but we also get to worship the Lord through expressing sadness over loss and over just the brokenness of the world—that creation sings and creation groans. And we will sing and we will groan, and we were made for that. There's a connection to God in both of those things. And though we might prefer the more sunshine and pleasantries of joy, there is an invitation of connecting to the heart of God through grief and lament and sorrow.

And our Savior has made a way for that. We see in the book of Lamentations, “My tears have been my food. I'm bereft of peace.” And of course we move into yet I call to mind His steadfast love [that] never ceases and great is His mercies that are new every morning. That there is hope in the midst of being honest about the pain.

We see even in the book of Job where there's suffering and there's sorrow and there's grief that is not attached to sin. And I think in the church, we can often jump to looking at somebody who's experiencing sorrow and make the mistake that Job's friends did. Not to say that there may not be some times that our sin brings about our sorrow, but we can't always say that. And I think it would be wise and good and caring to slow down and sit in the ashes with people. And believe that God is present and active and be slow to try to discern exactly where that pain is coming from.

And in the midst of all of the things that we see God offering us in the midst of grief, we do know that He can turn our ashes into beauty. We do know that over time we can learn to dance again even as those who mourn. And I think in the Bible, at least in the history of the Old Testament, and other places in the world today, I think, cultures are better at grieving than we are here in the West, where we put on sackcloth and ashes or we take a time away from the normalities of life. There is an indication that grief has come to the household, and the community comes alongside and honors that journey of adjusting to and accepting the realities of life.

I think here in our very busy culture where we try to take just a small time away, have a memorial service, great opportunity to have flowers and casseroles. And then we get thrust back into the swell of life. We have to learn how to not resist the reality of where our culture is still gonna invite us into this path that might lead away from grief, but



prioritizing worshiping God in the grief so that we orient our lives to God, to one another, and give ourselves permission to slow down and walk with God through the discomfort, through the questions, through the doubts, and find His grace sufficient to meet us there. He can handle all of the questions that come up in grief. And hopefully we won't try to move through that too quickly.

Lindsay: Shanda and Brittany, you both mentioned something that's sometimes called the ministry of presence. Can you talk a little bit more about what that is, and how that can be so comforting to someone who's grieving?

Brittany: Sometimes when we're confronted with a loss, it can be really isolating. Because part of that is also the reconciliation of my inability to have prevented that loss. And so that creates a sense of aloneness that I couldn't have prevented. And no one around me could have prevented [that] loss. And so suddenly I feel very weak and frail and alone.

And I think the Lord offers us a really sweet gift of having experienced loss in ways that we will never have experienced. He experienced the separation between Him and the Father. That's something I don't have to experience in that way. He took that on my behalf. And so He has an ability to enter into what it's like to be alone like no one else can. But when we get to do that for one another, we get to be Jesus to each other and enter into that aloneness of grieving the loss, of the recognition, and echoing back with them that yeah, there are things that we can't do, and that's difficult and hard and painful.

And there are losses that we have that we won't get back in this life, that we might grieve the rest of our life. And so I think that ministry of being with somebody, which Jesus models so well. Even the fact that He was incarnated into a body to walk on this earth shows that He values the ministry of presence, to come to us as Emmanuel. That we get to also then take that on and embody, in our day to day of being with one another, in the midst of our grief and sorrow. Which I think just helps us remember that we're not alone in our sorrow, which can help lift the burden a little bit, and over time, be easier to move through it, knowing that there's someone walking alongside, even if you don't have words—we can be slow in that process.

Andrew: With grief, I think the ministry of presence is so particularly helpful. Because the grief process, again, is acknowledging something that has been lost, that can't be regained in the here and now. Our presence is to be witnesses and to do honor, along with someone else, to the thing that has been lost. And so just being there.

And Job's friends get this right when they dwell with Job in the ashes. That was the best thing they did. And everything else that followed was whoops, not so helpful, because they tried to fix the unfixable. This is, I think, part of the danger—moving beyond the ministry of presence too quickly, of just being, in trying to offer any sort of fix to grief. No, there's not a Band-Aid for that. The loss is actual, the loss is not replaceable. What has to happen is renormalization, refiguring out now, for that individual, how do I do life without this thing, this person, this reality? That's just different. That's a different thing to have to walk through, and it's ongoing. Grief is not a singular event. It's an ongoing process. On the anniversary of the loss and moving forward for years, grief will be re-experienced, because it's the experience of, oh, I thought I'd be celebrating this again with that person. And so now I got to relive, once again, the reality that that's not what I thought it would be.

And so grief will bubble up again and really give us congruence to the truth that, yeah, a lot of things we didn't think would happen, happened. A lot of things that we would have rather avoided, we can't avoid them. And now we have to learn. And so having somebody who walks alongside us in that is so helpful. That can just bear testimony to the hardship while also shouldering up and saying, “Hey, I'm with you in this. I know it's still hard. It's, in many ways, right that it still feels hard.” And yet we can keep walking together into whatever the Lord has for us in this.

Lindsay: That's really helpful. I want to talk a little bit more about processing grief in community, and particularly when we get caught in the trap of comparing our griefs. I know for me, there have been times where I've gone to community group with something on my mind that I want to share, whether I need prayer, I just need to process it with someone, maybe something like losing an opportunity at work. So I'm going into my group, and then we sit around and we're sharing, and someone shares something like they lost a child, had a miscarriage.



Of course, that's very sad. That's a big loss. And I'll be sitting there then debating, *Do I share my grief that seems like such a smaller loss? Or would that feel strange to do when we're all focusing on something that feels like a much bigger loss?*

Yet, even if I think mine in comparison is smaller, it's still a grief to me. It's still something that I need to process on some level. So does Scripture provide any wisdom for navigating a situation like that, when we might get caught in that trap of comparing our griefs, or is that just me?

Andrew: Lindsay, one of the things I think that's so helpful that you're putting your finger on here is, again, the experience of grief and the impact of grief can be quite radically different. And I'd say even in the examples that you used, or the example of let's say the death of an individual or the loss of a job, most of us would look at that and say, "Well, obviously the loss of a friend or family member would feel more significant."

But I'd offer that's not always the case. This is what's so fascinating in many ways about grief, and how much it impacts us. It's actually the narrative around the grief that will shape how much it impacts us.

So my grandma, who passed away a number of years ago, had been suffering from Parkinson's. Had had multiple strokes, loved Jesus—deeply loved Jesus—prayer warrior of a woman.

Now when she passed away, it was a bittersweet grief. It was not something that overwhelmed me. But there was a beautiful sense of, *Okay, her pain is done. Her suffering is done.*

I'm sad my kids won't get to know her as I did. And yet I'm also just—there's a certain relief of oh, but she's finished. She's getting to walk in freedom now that she hadn't experienced in years.

If you stack that up in comparison to something like, well, my neighbor lost their job. But for them, that job was their whole identity: I thought I was going to do this the rest of my life. Now I'm terrified that I won't be able to stay in my home because I can't afford it anymore. I don't know how to care for my family. And their grief amplifies beyond mine.

So how do we compare those two griefs? Well, I think the narrative is what starts to make sense of it. But I'd say in general, though, comparing grief is more often than not, not going to be very productive. It's rather recognizing, if I've got a friend who has really strong grief about something that seems not so bad to me, it means there's a story there for me to learn. There's something behind that, a narrative behind that, that's getting triggered. If I want to grieve well with them, if I want to exhibit a ministry of presence in that moment, I need to actually try and labor to understand what is that narrative instead of saying, "Hey, it's just a job. Get over it. There's millions of jobs out there. Just find another one."

For me to respond that way is to completely misunderstand the loss that's being felt. So I think somebody experiences tragedy or a traumatic loss, my goodness, any person is going to have a really hard time dealing with that. And somebody else in the room is dealing with something that we might generally consider a small loss.

The body of Christ—the hope is [we] all can coexist together. It's not one-upmanship. It's not one is worse than the other. It's no, God's sovereignly entrusted us with these griefs right now. Now, how as a community [can] we actually care for each person here? How do we together share this grief and allow Christ to teach us to walk with it together? As opposed to being like, oh, the person with the small grief, just don't talk later. I don't think that's going to be a helpful methodology moving forward.

Shanda: In community, if we can give space to recognizing the backdrop of everybody's story, that there's some degree of grief at play most of the time. But I think if we practiced bringing our grief to one another more often, it wouldn't feel so juxtaposed in that moment that we would hesitate to bring any kind of grief to the people that we're living life with most closely. We're all tempted toward despair or denial. And it's in bringing our experiences to one another, where we can help carry each other's load and point each other to Christ and bear each other's burdens and normalize worshiping God together in grief and lament so that we could have the humble, caring, meaningful, and wise ministry to one another, which does connect us to Jesus more frequently.

Brittany: I think sometimes when we are hesitant to share, there's some fear of how people are going to respond. And so back to the comparison of my friend is going through something that is very obviously to other people, difficult and tragic and [a] loss.

And if I share this thing, what will people think about me? Maybe they'll think that I'm somehow weak, just because I'm grieved over this thing.

When we get to bring those things to others, we get to also navigate that feeling of not being accepted for what's going on. And so, cultivating that habit of sharing all along the way can make it easier when those moments come up of, *I'm afraid here*.

Scripture tells us perfect love casts out fear. And so as we walk in community over time, some of that fear can start to dissipate. As we watch people lovingly enter in, giving us that ministry of presence in the moments that are small—or seemingly small to us or to others—to the moments that are more crisis-oriented.

There's room for that in the community, the body of Christ. And we can't always be in crisis. That's not sustainable for anybody or for our communities. And so I think that creates space for both types of losses, of obviously crisis and traumatic to the losses that may not have obvious impact but have more nuance.

Lindsay: Brittany, I love that idea of making room for others. And as we think about grief together, slowing down as I think we've mentioned every episode, and creating space to process whatever grief we need to.

So as we wrap up our conversation on grief, what are some other ways that might be helpful for us to either minister to people who are grieving? Or to ask for help, if we need help or we need someone to sit with us, to grieve with us?

Andrew: So I think Job's friends are good models. Be available, be present. I'd say in terms of community, we have to have space for when grief is going to come, space for when crisis is going to come, because it doesn't come on an expected schedule. And so one of the more practical things I think we can do that might seem a little ancillary is have margin.

Have space, have availability. Plan, in essence, that the unexpected will come, that people will need help, and people will tend to reach out if they perceive you as the type of person that has availability, that does care, that is connected, that has space. Then you become a more likely person for them to reach out to, for them to be open with.



Andrew: Because, again, one of the fears that's often experienced in a burden like loss and with grief is, you just don't want to become that annoying person who's dumping something on everybody else. Who's just slowing them down or becoming a burden to them. And so there's a felt, *Oh, gosh, I've got this huge weight I'm carrying, who around me even has bandwidth or capacity to handle it?*

And so if you model yourself as a person who's available and asks intentional, thoughtful, caring questions about life and what's going on and invite the burden-sharing, I think it makes it more likely to happen in healthy ways in community and to become more normal. It's just something that you do as a group.

Shanda: I'll add to that what we've hit on indirectly but to say it pretty explicitly of what not to do. Our hope is absolutely anchored in Christ, and our theology is helpful to drive our grief and to frame it and give [it] this road that we can walk down.

But when somebody is grieving, we need to be wise and patient and careful in how we bring about the truth. Sometimes we want to alleviate our own discomfort, and we will download beautiful truth, but poorly timed. And so the discernment of bearing with [another] in the sadness and connecting with God ourselves in those moments where oftentimes we don't understand why.

We don't have words that are going to alleviate the pain; it is truly just moving toward one another in that, but we don't want to add burden to the sorrow with an untimely word. And I think we can get better at that. But then, sorrow also is not a roundabout or a cul-de-sac that we want to get stuck in. We don't want to get consumed by the sorrow. And so I think we learn to sing the songs of joy. And we learn to sing [songs] of sorrow together.

We can look at the movie *Inside Out* and remember together that joy really doesn't have its fullness and the whole reality without sadness. They work together to help us be human, help us tell the truth and experience this broad array of emotions that we know are leading us into the heart of God. And so to not be afraid of that sorrow, when it comes. And to know that it is helping us know the heart of Christ and helping us care for each other better.

Lindsay: And it's so comforting that we have community to walk alongside us as we go through these things. Shanda, Andrew, Brittany, thank you so much for walking us through grief.

Listeners, thank you so much for joining us for this episode. We encourage you to process what you've learned in community. And to that end, if you go to the episode webpage, we've provided a group guide for you that includes Scripture and reflection questions to help you start processing grief.

We've also provided a short liturgy reading for you, if you stick around to the end of this episode, that will help you respond in worship or in prayer toward God. We hope you join us next time as we talk about jealousy, and we'll see you then!

Alex: *A Liturgy for Grieving*

The mystery of grief—how empty and full
The same life can feel—
How thick and dark
The persistent storm of loss
That swirls me through swells of chaos.

My soul searches for solace, a North Star,
The howling winds of despair
Screaming at my back.

Amid waves of salty sorrow
My eyes seek You,

My beacon,
Jesus in the Garden,

Shouldering pain I cannot fathom,
Looking down into that costly cup—

Drinking deeply—



That the grief that steals my breath
Might each moment be borne anew
By You, my hope and harbor.

Grant me mercy, O God.
Lead me to prayer
Like the steadfast Son.
He is my peace and North Star.

