

Outgrowing Anxiety Part 2: Gospel Grace Turns Flaws Into Features

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Date: 25 September 2025

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

I have really enjoyed leaning into some of these themes related to this kind of assignment I've given myself called outgrowing anxiety.

I've enjoyed thinking through all the different ways that God has blessed me over the years to kind of get over myself and learn not to worry. And if you haven't listened to that particular podcast, I encourage you to do so.

I was tempted to sort of distill real decades worth of sanctification into one sermon that people could just listen to a few times and get much further ahead much more quickly than it took me.

[1 : 42] So, yeah, definitely, definitely listen to it. And then this one is super related, super related. The last time I've taught this particular concept was also in the Philippines.

It just seemed like that that culture, you know, the honor shame culture in Asia is, you know, if you think you have anxiety and so forth, I mean, it's just it's just more there.

Family expectations are much more extreme. Hardship is much more raw. It is pretty routine to meet the average person in one of the countries in Asia and to speak to them.

Once you get past all of the layers, of course, speak to them and find out that at some point in their life, they had been suicidal. The pressures to perform, the pressures to be a certain thing are extreme in that honor shame culture.

And, you know, there's there's there's plus there's there's positives to that culture. I think we could do with a little bit more of it in in America. But all that to say, you know, it just seemed like now, you know, and I definitely feel like the Lord just guided me to identify this topic.

[2 : 59] And so it was a it was an area of ministry throughout the trip and this idea about growing anxiety. And so that sermon that I preached and that's up there on the podcast, that's just about like realizing that most of your worries are actually just prayers that haven't been sent to the Lord.

I'm sort of prayers to yourself. And today I want to talk about another concept that layers on top of that. And it has a lot to do with what you might think of as just very specifically social anxiety, but also just more broadly worrying about what people think of you and so forth.

OK, so this is going to flow out of Second Corinthians, Chapter four. And there's a *inclusio*, which is a Latin term that just describes sort of a literary effect where the main theme is emphasized at the beginning and the end of a section of Scripture.

And this happens in the Psalms a lot with just the phrase praise the Lord. It'll start at the beginning of the Psalm and then at the end it'll be repeated. That's what an *inclusio* is.

Well, in Second Corinthians, Chapter four, the *inclusio* is the phrase, we do not lose heart. We do not lose heart. And it appears in verse one of Chapter four, therefore having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

[4 : 18] And then the *inclusio* comes back into play in verse 16. The *inclusio* here is Paul's explanation for, in spite of all of his hardships, for why, in spite of all of his hardships, in spite of all of the difficulties he's faced in life, he has not lost heart.

Now, what does it mean to lose heart? It's an extremely broad category. I'm trying to think of how to articulate a bunch of information really fast.

Yeah. So the visceral, I'll just go with the visceral. This is the image that's in the front of my head.

There is a, you can go Google shell shock, World War II or World War I shell shock.

And there's just a degree of trauma that can turn a person into almost a visible ghost.

It is as if they saw the death and despair and it imprinted on their face. And so like one of the deepest versions of losing heart would be something like just a, just a total reset and reconfiguration of your brain due to some horrific thing you've experienced.

[6 : 11] And it feels like, feels like, it seems like that, that is due in part to various other biological factors.

So if you are, if you haven't slept, if you're, you know, vitamin deficient or, or caloric deficient or protein deficient or fat deficient, it feels like that, that extreme label, layer of trauma happens kind of imprints on you when certain other preconditions exist, certain other biological preconditions exist. Because, you know, one of the things to think about with, with all, well, anyway, so let's, I could go in a thousand directions with, I've, I've walked in this lost heart world with people for decades. So I don't want to, you know, I don't want to fire hose you with everything, but like, I would say the extreme version of losing heart would be this shell shock. And you can Google World War I or World War II shell shock, and you could see these men who are just, they're just gone almost. And then you can go all the way kind of into numbness would be maybe on the other extreme of what losing heart means. There's just a, a lack of energy, a lack of drive, a lack of passion and zeal for life, for accomplishing good things, for, for experiencing good things.

[7 : 41] I think in modern parlance, we'd probably talk about this as depression. And, you know, there's almost a sense in which depression and anxiety are just numb version, depression is losing heart, the numb version in UMB, numbness, losing heart as numbness is depression.

And losing heart as this sort of high cortisol response to trauma as the anxiety that we talk about. So when we talk about depression and anxiety, these categories have existed forever. They've just been, they've just gone by different names. And the, the, the term lose heart is a classical, you know, uh, Greek philosophical ancient world kind of way of talking about that whole, that whole situation.

And then, you know, in the middle, you've got, um, you've got kind of just the general sort of like passive. I, I, I'm still, I still show up for the job, but I don't, I don't have any energy anymore or I don't have any passion for this.

Um, a lot of people that you can think of this as just sort of apathy and mailing it in. A lack of courage is the literal, uh, the, the literal word is just lack, lack, lack of courage.

[8 : 58] We do not lose heart is just lose heart is just one word in the Greek. And it's just this idea of I've lost courage, but it, it, it was always thought of as more expansive than just simple courage.

Anyway, so Paul is explaining how he has dodged the trauma bullet, I guess, or something like that. And how he, he hasn't lost heart.

Um, and it's, it's obviously not because his circumstances were perfectly curated or because they were perfectly controlled. He was a man who suffered.

There's this visceral picture of Paul. Getting surrounded by a mob. I don't know the text for this. I'm sorry.

Surrounded by a mob and beaten within an inch of his life. They think he's dead because they've beaten him so badly. And, but he's not quite dead.

[9 : 55] You know, he's only mostly dead. And he gets back up and goes back into the city. Anyway, so, so there's this whole sense of Paul just being a great sufferer.

And yet he hasn't lost heart. He hasn't lost heart. Okay. I am mostly interested in asking where that level of ruggedness of emotional and intellectual and spiritual ruggedness comes from.

Because I see people experience far less. And they're essentially permanently derailed from the fight.

It would be the equivalent of, you know, so Paul is like a D-Day guy. You know, he's, he's storming the beaches of Normandy. And he's actually shot, you know, but also he sees everybody else dead. Like he's, he is peak. He's the worst version. His life has been the worst possible version in terms of trauma. And he hasn't lost heart. And then you've got someone, I'm just using, because I'm 50 years old and this is the way that dads like me think.

[11 : 11] Is thinking, we think in World War II analogies mostly. Anyway, you know, you've got Paul there and, and then you've got like the equivalent of that would be, you know, there were these soldiers, you know, that didn't ever see actual combat.

They were in charge of like propaganda for the United States or whatever. And, and, and you can imagine like one of them getting like a paper cut as they're holding, you know, a script to do a, you

know, a pro war bond film or something.

And that person just becomes a shell of themselves and they're just out of the fight entirely. And to be honest, because of the historical reading that I do, I would say that a lot of the anxiety and depression we see today is sort of the, in terms of all the possible bad that could happen, it's sort of the paper cut version.

And it, the outcome is really severe, but the, the, the input is so light. And I'm just like, well, what's going on here? Why is this happening? And, you know, like also I don't think I've had an especially hard life, maybe a little harder than most, but why have I struggled to not lose heart in particular seasons?

Anyway, all that to say, I zeroed in on this passage because I really wanted to understand why is it that, what accounts for this sort of spiritual, emotional resiliency, right?

[12:38] Okay. Okay. So here's what I came up with. And I'm going to give you a story to begin with that illustrates some of this, and then I'll go to the text.

Okay. So the story would be something like this. Suppose you had a very expensive vase, we'll use the proper term, vase, full of herbs.

No, it is extremely nice vase. And you've got this thing and it's, you know, it's one of the more expensive versions of that thing that exists, you know, something pretty fancy schmancy.

And, you know, the whole idea is for people to look at this thing and say, well, that's beautiful. It's painted beautifully. It's sculpted beautifully.

Or it was, you know, it was thrown, you know, on a wheel. It was shaped beautifully, whatever. And, you know, you're showing the externality of the thing and you're like, look at this great thing.

[13:49] Well, that's good. That's cool. Vases are cool. But suppose I saw something, I think it was today, actually.

This man, this man who has developed, I'm part of all these groups on Facebook that are just like what they call dull men groups.

They're just groups full of men doing exceedingly ordinary things, finding all the little spectacular elements of ordinary life. And there was a guy who got into uranium glass blowing.

So uranium glass is a thing. It actually does include some of those isotopes. It actually does kind of glow and so forth. And so he was bragging because he went to Poland and he found somebody that had access to a ton of uranium glass.

And he had all these things made and shipped them to the United States. Of course, that's a whole complicated deal because of the uranium factor and had to get special customs agents involved and so on and so forth.

[14:50] But anyway, he was showing the picture of the thing that he brought in and it was just all of these really cool orbs that are made out of uranium glass. You can Google this. And they just look really unique.

They kind of glow. They actually just take up the smallest amount of light and just kind of glow. So anyway, so suppose instead of having this amazing vase that was meant to showcase the externality, the external glories of the vase, imagine that you had one that had like a light source inside.

And the whole point of the vase isn't to show the externality. It's actually just to hold the light source. Well, then, you know, your vase is going to be designed differently.

It's not going to be as sleek and smooth and so forth. It's going to have a bunch of holes in it, right? Because the point isn't to showcase the externality of the vase itself or the vase itself at all, really. It's really to showcase the light that's inside the vase. And so it's a completely different approach. And so what I think is going on when people struggle with social anxiety is the world presents identity and self and reputation and appearance as the sum of self.

[16:16] And therefore, you're like that expensive vase. And you've got to handle that thing very carefully and precious and protect it because you definitely don't want anything to happen to the outside of it because the outside of it is the point, right?

Well, the Bible says that, you know, from the very beginning that we were made in the image of God. And all of this imagery and symbolism that comes through the Bible is always about, like, temple and glory and outer courts, inner courts, holy of holies, this progression inside.

God doesn't look at the external. He looks at the soul. He looks at the heart. You know, there's all these themes that work together. He was a man of no appearance that anyone should have any

regard for him.

That's Isaiah 53. There's always this sort of idea of the thing that's inside the thing. That's what matters, right? Well, that's the key to outgrowing anxiety and especially social anxiety is to understand what kind of vase you are.

You're not the kind that's supposed to look on a shelf, stand on a shelf, and, you know, just people admire for all the, you know, obvious external reasons.

[17 : 37] That's actually not like you're made the way you are. You don't even exist to be that thing. You're actually the kind of vase that exists to reveal a light source inside of the vase.

And that's actually what you exist to do. And now what's crazy about this is that, and this is the brain-twisting part.

Again, you might want to listen to this. I'm giving you decades of stuff here, folks. You know, you can pay me later. But this is insane.

Okay, so you've built, before you were even aware of Christ, even if you were saved when you were young, the whole world exists for this external vase sort of way of thinking.

And that's the way the world's set up is for all the vases to compare each other, you know, to look as good as we can. And this shows up in, you know, how we appear and how we sound and our achievements and our money and the kind of car we drive and our reputation and our education level and so on and so forth, our job title.

[18 : 52] It's all this. That's kind of the way the world is designed to appreciate at the external beauties of the vase. Well, that's where your mind is before you are sanctified.

I won't even say saved. I think this is a lesson down the road from justification. And you live this kind of way where those are things that matter. Well, the absolute, you know, revolution of the gospel is that, no, actually mankind was always made to show the light inside of him, which is the divine light, God, not him, right?

And mankind was always supposed to be sort of perforated. You think of a vase. It's not a vase. It's more like a lantern. And it's got this particular design to show like the candle inside to show the light.

And the externalities do actually matter. There's an aesthetic quality to all of this that winds up being important. But the whole goal is to show the light you have inside of you.

And so the basic pivot from the social anxiety, worried about what people think of you kind of version to the I don't lose heart.

[20 : 10] I just enjoy like life is good. I am grateful. No matter how hard it gets, God has been better to me than I deserve. A joy, a resilience, a not losing heart. The key to all that is to understand that you were designed so that you to show the light of Jesus in your life, in your soul, in your person.

Not just your behaviors, but your actual person. And the problem is that because of the way that the fallen world is, we started as these vases, you know.

And we thought that the outside and our reputation and what people thought of us, like that was the point. And then when God teaches us this lesson, which I hope he teaches all of us this lesson, is we get to this point where we realize, well, hold on a second.

I'm not the point. The thing inside of me is the point. Now, how does God choose to show his internal, his glory through us?

And the answer is, is, you know, cracks in the vase. Chips in the vase. You can think about it this way. If you have a good enough imagination, you know, you've got a vase and say it's an inch thick, you know, and, and there's a light inside of it.

[21 : 26] But, you know, you drop this vase a couple times and some, it doesn't, it doesn't break in half or anything like that. It just chips like to where that inch thick material becomes a quarter inch thick.

You take a big old gash out of it. Well, that gash now is a glow with a translucent beauty. Right? And this is the whole trick to getting older and not losing heart and still doing hard things is you begin to realize, like, I'm going to get chipped. I'm going to get cracked.

There might even be holes punched in my appearance, my reputation. My, I might just sin and just really screw things up and look like an idiot to people. What you realize is that, like, actually every single fissure, crack, chip, whether you inflicted on yourself or someone else did, what it's doing because you are God's.

What's happening is, is that the glory of God is shining through all of that. And you begin to realize, oh my goodness, I don't have to worry so much about the external of what people think, of my reputation, this or that.

[22 : 49] Because whatever comes off of my external shell, I don't, my mission is not to be a good looking vase.

Because my mission is to be a functional lantern. And because I grew up in a world that was emphasizing the external vase, like, the only way to make me into a lantern is to chip away and cause cracks and punch holes.

Not, you know, not, you know, not, not willingly per se, but just trusting that what God is doing is he's making me into the thing I was made to be all the time. I was never meant to be a vase on the shelf.

I was meant to be a lantern in a hand pointing people to the light within, the glory within. And so if you want to figure out how to engage in self-forgetfulness and just get over yourself and stop being so fragile and prone to losing heart over, honestly, whether it's big or small things, this lesson is key.

And that's what Paul's teaching, amongst many other things, in 2 Corinthians 4. So I've given you sort of the crisp version analogy of that.

[24 : 09] Now let me read the passage to you. Verse 1 of chapter 4. Therefore, having this mercy by the mercy of God, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

And we've renounced disgraceful and unhanding way, underhanded ways. This is all vase protection moves. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word.

But by the open statement of the truth, we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing.

Here's where our key word shows up. To keep them from seeing the light of the gospel, of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus.

[25 : 22] Verse 7. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. Here comes all the cracks, guys.

Here comes all the cracks. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed. Perplexed, but not driven to despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Struck down, but not destroyed.

Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our mortal flesh.

So death is at work in us, but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what was written, I believed and so I spoke, we also believe and so we speak, knowing that he who raised Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

For it is all for your sake so that as grace extends to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart.

[26 : 30] Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. As we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen.

Or the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. Again, super rich passage. I just read you the whole chapter.

Chapter four is quite short. But do you understand now how to overcome social anxiety and worrying about what people think of you? Do you understand how to let go of the need to, you know, protect your reputation at all costs or to worry so much about how people are evaluating the outer vase?

Do you understand now how to fail publicly like the man in the arena and get back up again? Do you understand where Christian resiliency comes from and how not to lose heart in hard times?

The answer is simple. I don't exist to impress people with the outside of me. I don't even exist to impress people with the inside of me.

[27 : 51] I am a vessel, a jar of clay, holding the eternal light that spoke all other light into existence. The light that spoke every other sun into existence.

The light that spoke all things into existence. And I am holding that light. And the only way it gets exposed, verse 7, We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

The only way to expose the light of Christ in my life is through weakness. Weakness that is inflicted upon me by God's providence, i.e. sickness or poverty.

Weakness that's inflicted upon me by my own sin, even. And weakness that's inflicted upon me by others who are doing bad things to me. In each case, the one thing I know I can do and trust in is to let the chips fall where they may, let the cracks land where they must, let the little puncture holes in my stupid little jar of clay pierce through here or there.

And I know, I know that all things work together. Romans 8, 28. That all things work together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

[29 : 15] And so, every time I get cracked, every time I get chipped, every time I chip myself, I think, well, so long as I respond to this in faith, there's just more Jesus to see in me now.

There's just more Jesus to glorify. There's just more Jesus to celebrate. At the end of the day, the social anxiety game, the losing heart game, is about someone trying to bubble wrap their little jar. They don't understand that if you would just stop doing that and let the painful things happen, man, you know what's going to happen is that Christ is going to be more visible.

And what's the kind of consequence of that? Well, first of all, you've found actual joy. You've walked away from fear. But secondly, you know, this nastiness of this world and the hardships that come, that only produces goodness in other people.

Like, you know, Paul says it this way, the death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. God's glory is evident through someone who has gotten over the need to preserve their own pot.

[30 : 30] So that's installment two of the outgrowing anxiety passage. And once again, like, this is all stuff that, you know, this is distilled stuff from decades of trying to figure it out.

But this one has helped me a great deal as well. Well, I hope that not only that you'll listen to this, but that you'll listen to it again. Because I know you, I love you, and I know each one of you, I'm thinking of you, you know, as a congregation.

Nobody's arrived here, including myself. This is something that we all need to think about multiple times. All right, God bless. All right.