

Episode 2-17: Anxiety and Panic Attacks

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Transcript:

Janet: I don't just need to feel better. I need the truth. And ultimately that will make me better.

Alexandra: I just want to make it as totally simple and no brainer as possible for ladies to see that the Bible is really applicable to their everyday life.

Jocelyn: When they understand theology, the application flows out of it quickly with joy.

Janet: It is a journey, but even the journey itself is joyful when I'm doing it, holding the hand of my savior and trusting him all along the way. This is the joyful journey podcast, a podcast to inspire and equip women to passionately pursue beautiful biblical truth on their journey as women of God. When you choose truth, you're choosing joy.

Janet: Well, welcome back. My name is Janet. I'm here once again with my lovely co-host Jocelyn.

Jocelyn: Hi, friends.

Janet: And I am excited, Jocelyn, to hear you talk to us about something that I understand you have dealt with personally, which always makes our teaching more than just theoretical.

Jocelyn: I know, isn't it funny? You can study something theoretically, all you want, and then when it hits, you personally are like, oh, oh, that's why it matters.

Janet: Yes. And as I was preparing for this, I was realizing I now have examples of my life, where I have had to work through this as well. So I am excited. And while everybody's going, but what is it? Jocelyn, what are we going to talk about today?

Jocelyn: Well, today we're going to talk about panic attacks. In part, we're also going to talk about anxiety. Because anxiety and panic attacks go hand in hand. But I want to talk more about the panic side of it and less about the anxiety side of it, because we've had a great podcast episode on anxiety. And this is kind of like a tweak of that topic. So today we're going to talk about panic attacks. And I'm really excited to talk about this topic because it's one that I really had to work through during a period of my adult life. And I would have, well, first of all, I would have never, ever had patience with anyone, if I hadn't worked through this, working through this same issue. And I'd never, ever wanted to learn about it. I had no desire to be especially compassionate to those people who are really fearful. And it's so funny because in our family, I've had to practice with my family members, a lot of what I learned. But there was a period of time in late 2001, 2002, where I really had to learn about this. I had been married for five years and was pregnant with my first baby and my husband and I did not get married because we loved the Lord and wanted to follow him all of our days. We were pretty messed up when we first got married and were pursuing lots and lots of wrong goals. And so we'd been married five years. We had gotten through the first four years, which were very difficult because I was a very big jerk and did not love the Lord. And he didn't either. And it was just a volcano waiting to erupt, but eventually we really started working on following Jesus. And by the time we'd been married five years, we were like, oh, my word, let's get pregnant.

Janet: Hey, that's what you do next.

Jocelyn: That's what you do. We had no plan. Like we just. That's what happened. And we'd never even babysat kids. We did not have any

Janet: I'm sure it'll come natural.

Jocelyn: experience with parenting. And I ended up with a life-threatening pregnancy and had to deliver our baby at 27 weeks with an emergency C-section. And so we went into an unprepared, it was a very, very life-threatening like I literally almost died having her. And she was born at 13 weeks early. And so she weighed one pound when she was born one pound 13 ounces, and she was in the NICU for almost three months. And so when you go through anyone who's gone through a life-threatening situation, especially life-threatening pregnancy and a pregnancy and delivery that doesn't go the way you had pictured it going in my viewpoint. I'm a bit of a hippie mama. And I had imagined it being extremely non-interventionist

Janet: Oh yes. Very natural.

Jocelyn: With no pain killers.

Janet: I was like give me anything.

Jocelyn: I wanted to nurse my babies till they were like three. So it was the opposite of that. Like a lots of medical intervention. So anyone who has gone through a situation that isn't quite like you dreamed, it's a bit shattering. And then around six months after she was born, I started developing a lot of anxiety. But I didn't know it was anxiety because it felt like when I actually was dying. So the physical feelings were so similar, I thought I was almost dying again. So it was really scary. And then there was just a lot going on and I ended up with some postpartum depression that lasted about 18 months. That was really, really rough. There was lots of anxiety, lots of really suicidal thinking, lots of panic attacks. And I was realizing like, I don't even know how to process life. I don't even know how to keep this baby alive. and my, you know, like my goal was to nurse my baby till they were toddlers. And like, I couldn't even make milk. It was just so defeating. And so that brought up some marriage difficulties. And at the same time in our extended family, there were some pretty bad stuff happening some marriages of the people in our family were really going badly. And it was just a lot of problems all at once. And you know, it's not like they all started then just got brought to a head then. And so I would have never, ever voluntarily subjected myself to that really rough period of time. But what I learned about living for Jesus then has shaped the rest of my life. And I really, I still use so many of the tools I learned then. And thankfully I haven't had to deal with that kind of like debilitating panic attack anytime lately. But I have had anxiety that creeps up behind me and taps me on the shoulder, like, Hey, I'm here. So I've had to learn how to use tools. And I think the reason that panic attacks haven't happened is only by the grace of God, and because I know what to do about them. So I've worked with enough people to know anxiety is not just about me. We all deal with it to some degree. So why don't you tell us Janet, what's the time that you felt anxious or fearful or worried about something?

Janet: That's such an interesting question. I would have told you up until probably I don't even know, four years ago that I'd never experienced anything like that. I've always said I'm a little claustrophobic. I think it's in part because I'm short, like wherever you are, like there's bodies all around you. I can't breathe. It's like, I'm not above any of them. So anyway, that's always been an issue, but not a huge thing. But it's a thing. And it was probably four years ago, ish, that I was speaking in Minnesota, got on the plane. I've traveled a lot. That's not any new thing, but I was in the very last row, the very end seat next to what would be a window, but there was no window. And then a large man sat next to me. So I felt so closed in. So the claustrophobia and here was my thought. I can't get off if I want off. And so now I want off. And I thought, oh my word, I don't think I can breathe. I think I'm not breathing. I feel like I'm not breathing. I have to be breathing right now. I'm sure I'm breathing. I don't know that I'm breathing. I feel like there's a weight on my chest and I need to tell them I have to get off. And then we start taxiing and I'm like,

Jocelyn: Then you're stuck.

Janet: Oh, my word, I can't get off. And that feeling, that's the first time I had ever felt that. And it's not rational. And so it's like, Janet, this is ridiculous, but get there, speak. And I say to my husband, could you pray for me? That's never happened to me before. Bizarre. I've got to get on a plane tomorrow. I'm sure it'll be fine. I've never had this happen.

Jocelyn: Probably a fluke.

Janet: I got the same seat.

Jocelyn: Oh, my word.

Janet: The same seat. And I don't remember who was next to me that time. Cause I think I was like, I can't believe this is happening. And I read an entire book. I prayed a lot. Like but it was it was terrible. And then I think it's funny because you're saying, you've worked through it and it happens to you less. I never had that when I was younger that I can remember, except not liking to be in crowded places, but not like I don't start screaming or anything. It's gotten worse and worse. I had an MRI where I literally

Jocelyn: Oh. That's kind of scary.

Janet: was beating on the thing to try and get them to get me out.

Jocelyn: Oh yikes.

Janet: Like how embarrassing? Cause I'm not really dying, but it felt like it.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: I was on a roller coaster where they push the seatbelt too tight. And so it was on my chest. I'm saying to Brent I have to get off. I can't breathe. He goes, you are breathing. I'm watching you. I'm like, no, I don't think I'm breathing. I have to get off. And it starts. And I scream.

Jocelyn: You're not getting off.

Janet: Yeah. I'm not getting off. So I understand that feeling.

Jocelyn: I think that what you're bringing up is such a so eloquently. It's such a great point because this is what happens. Often, people don't realize they have anxiety until one time something super scary happens. And then what happens after that is they become afraid of ever getting that afraid again. Because they realized what a horrible experience it was the first time. I think what you've just described is going to be helpful for our listeners because so many people are there. Like this came out of the blue. I don't know what's wrong with me. Now I'm afraid of being afraid all the time.

Janet: Yeah, it's crazy.

Jocelyn: So at the time that your fear, anxiety or worry was the most significant, what did you do about the problem, and was it resolved?

Janet: Well on the rollercoaster, it ended. And I got off, saying to Brent, I'm never getting on another rollercoaster. And I have gotten on one. So there's that. But seriously on the plane, I prayed more than I have prayed in a long time. And I thought, okay, I know this is not rational. I feel like I can't breathe. So I'm going to keep praying. And then on the way home, I read an entire book that was good material. It was edifying. So it was like, I'm going to pray. And here's my act of faith. I'm not going to think about all these other things my mind wants to race to. I'm just going to start reading something that's good. I also went on another ride at mission space and they closed the capsule and suddenly it's right in front of my face and I don't do claustrophobia. So I, again, I tell my poor husband, I want out now. And he's like, you can't get out now. And I'm like, I don't know that you heard me. I want out now and then the ride starts. And so I focused on one point and it was like, okay, if I'm focused on the ride, I was okay. So it was, pray, focus on something else that I can focus on, read, and on the rollercoaster scream. Those are the, my ways of dealing with things.

Jocelyn: Yeah. Because that's acceptable. You make me feel so normal. Because I also struggle with claustrophobia, and I sleepwalk when I am places where I am not comfortable, like hotel rooms. Like I've woken up, in the hallway of a hotel.

Janet: No way. Outside your room.

Jocelyn: Trying to figure out how to get to the bathroom. Or when we go tent camping, I'm like, I can't get out of here. One time-- this lives in infamy in our family-- I was in my living nativity costume and it was like zero degrees. It was so cold that year. And I had my huge jacket on.

Janet: Oh yeah, underneath the costume.

Jocelyn: Under my costume. And then I had my Bethlehem dress over it. And all of a sudden, the thought came to me, what, if you have to go to the bathroom, you're never getting out. You're going to pee your pants in front of everybody. My husband had to peel it off me, and my kids were staring at me like, what is wrong with her, in the middle of the gym with everyone watching.

Janet: I wish I could say I can't relate, but I can't say that.

Jocelyn: You can identify. Here's the deal. Panic attacks feel incapacitating.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: And I think those emotions of fear and panic, they're so real. And some times you've never ever experienced it before. That's why it's so scary. They're really strong. And whatever it is that you're struggling with, there's an impossibility to resolve it. So it's really bad. And you're stuck, which is like, claustrophobia. Panic attacks seem like they come out of nowhere. And that's one of the things that I've heard over and over as I counsel, is I don't know where they came from. It just came over me. You don't even realize what you're thinking about, and all of a sudden you find yourself panicking. And that's one of the reasons why I wanted to talk about this is there is a lot of logic into panic attacks. And if you can understand them, you have a leg up in not getting so far down the road, physically that then you become incapacitated for a couple hours or a day. And then you lose a bunch of good time that you could have been doing something, you know, fruitful with. If you become habituated to panic attacks, eventually, like I said, you're going to find yourself afraid of being afraid. And so after my daughter, Haley, was born, she's going to be turning 20 in April. So almost 20 years ago. After those first couple of panic attacks, they were so scary. What I became afraid of was ever getting that afraid again. And that is what would send me into a panic attack.

Janet: Well, think of how defeating that is. Because I can't make sure I never have one. It actually encourages one. So how defeating and discouraging to feel like there's nothing I can do.

Jocelyn: Exactly. So one of the most important things we need to remember about anxiety is that anxiety builds when you become fearful that you're not going to be able to resolve a problem. And I just want us to think about that word, problem. You could also fear that any potential resolution you come up with won't land in your favor. And I think, especially for Christians, that's one thing that I want us to think about is, it's not only that there are problems, it's that even if you can dream up solutions in our minds, sometimes we come to this place where there's no good solution that will be in my favor in the end. So even if I can solve it, I'm going to get hurt in some way. So let's think about this definition of anxiety. You know, we love definitions, and you shared a really cool definition in your anxiety episode previously. So here's a, just a different take on it. A state of intense apprehension, uncertainty, and fear resulting from the anticipation of a threatening event or situation, often to a degree that normal physical or psychological functioning is disrupted. So it's just saying you have apprehension, uncertainty, or fear that is formulating because you anticipate that something's going to go bad. Something's going to threaten you. And it's so built up in your mind that it messes up your physical or psychological functioning. So in reality, if you're to take a step back, we realize that most problems start little, and they're small. And if you think about them, and put some effort into them, you're probably going to be able to resolve them with a moderate amount of time or effort. But if you don't know that, or if you're not skilled at knowing how to solve problems, things can really get messed up. Because you don't realize that problems have solutions and you just need to figure out what the solution is. In anxious situations, a problem occurs, and you become so fearful or apprehensive of something bad happening that it affects you physically. So you'll start to breathe differently. Your heart will start to beat differently. And as anxious thoughts accumulate, and as you imagine

the bad results that are building up in your mind, you could start to feel paralyzed, not knowing what to do or handle the situations that you're in. And as your anxious thoughts get bigger and bigger, the possible negative results get more and more dangerous. And so you can see the spiral, you can see how a panic attack develops. Like you have a bunch of problems, the solutions can't be imagined. It incapacitates you, and that just spirals you out of control. And before long, you're going to find yourself panicking because there's no solution to every danger that your mind has created.

Janet: And just hearing you describe that is overwhelming, and it feels so out of control.

Jocelyn: So let's take a second and just think through what's happening to your body when you get anxious and it builds to the place where you experience what we would culturally call a panic attack. And I just want to say culturally, because we don't find the word panic attack in the scripture. We do find fear. We do find anxiety. We do find worry. But there is a culturally accepted experience that looks like something, and it's called a panic attack. And so much power is taken from that experience, if you just understand what's going on inside of you. So I want you to understand physically what happens, and then we're going to talk about some other components of it as well, okay. So when you begin to panic, some naturally occurring stress hormones are set into motion that influence physical processes in your body. And if you don't respond to them in a way that resolves that energy, you could end up feeling incapacitated. The cool thing is that God has equipped our bodies to assess dangerous situations and respond to them, like in a nanosecond. you, have the capacity, if a lion jumps out in front of you, to think in a millisecond, should I stay in fight this lion, or should I run away? The fight or flight response. So the average body can be stimulated by the nervous system to become ready to handle an emergency in just a second. you can think through a situation and make a decision very, very quickly. But when you're anxious and you're experiencing apprehension, your body begins to physically respond to those increased feelings of danger. So just imagine if you did have an actual lion in front of you, what all is going to be required for you to survive? You have to outrun the lion, or out climb the lion or something to get away from it. That's going to require a great expenditure of physical strength. You need a lot of energy to do that thing. So with anxiety, your mind concludes that there is a real threat and it has to be avoided, but your body can't figure out what it is that it's supposed to be fighting, because there's actually nothing in front of you that needs attention.

Janet: So there's nothing to do with all that energy.

Jocelyn: Right. So your body's all revved up to escape this threat, but there's like, you're looking around and you're like, what's the threat? I don't understand. your mind believes you're in some huge danger, but your body can't figure out how to handle it. So basically it shuts down and experiences the normal physical reaction of a well functioning nervous system. Like praise God, you have a nervous system that functions. It's been prepped and primed to get out of a dangerous

situation, but there's nothing to escape. So in those cases, that full body response is called a panic attack. And this is the definition and we're going to go through a couple of different symptoms of a panic attack. Panic attack is defined as a discrete period of time of intense fear or discomfort in which four or more of the following symptoms develop abruptly, and they reach a peak within 10 minutes. So you could experience palpitations or a pounding heart or an accelerated heart rate because your body's pumping oxygen for you. So you can get away from the threat. You have sweating, trembling or shaking, sensations of shortness of breath, or smothering, feelings of choking, chest pain, or discomfort, nausea, or abdominal distress, feeling dizzy, unsteady, lightheaded, or faint, derealization, which just means like, you feel like you're not living in reality, or depersonalization, which means kind of like, you feel like you're floating above yourself, or you're not attached to reality, you're not attached to yourself. Fear of losing control or going crazy. Fear of dying, paresthesias, which means numbness and tingling sensations, usually like in your extremities and then chills or hot flashes. So I wanted to make sure that we talked about the actual physical symptoms of a panic attack, because like, in my case, when this happened to me, the first couple of times, it felt very similar to when I was in the hospital, having my baby and close to death.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: So, so many of the symptoms were the same. I thought, wow, I'm my body is shutting down again. So as I studied what a panic attack was, I remember the first time I read this list feeling like, are you kidding me? This is normal. This is normally what happens when you're having a panic attack. And as you research the symptoms, there's a reason for all of them. So if you have to run away from an animal that can kill you, what your body wants to do is survive. You can live without a limb. So all of your blood flow stays in your vital organ area. And you start to have tingling in your hands and feet. Not because you're having a heart attack, but because your body is redirecting its blood flow, you don't need to have fingers that are functioning well to run away. And sometimes you, your tummy hurts and you might even throw up or have diarrhea because your autonomic nervous system is shutting down organs that don't need blood flow and redirecting them to like big muscles that can run you out of there. So there's reasons that you feel dizzy especially one of the big things about a panic attack is when you start to panic, you breathe very shallowly and you're not receiving enough oxygen flowing through your body to keep your different cells operating at an optimal level. So what happens is your heart has to beat faster, to get more oxygen in through you, which feels like your heart is going to beat out of your chest.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: And at the same time, you're lightheaded because you don't have enough oxygen. So all of the physical symptoms of a panic attack, there are reasons for them. And if you take a little time to understand them, it's a little bit less scary.

Janet: Oh yeah. Cause if you don't know why these things are happening, just the responses themselves are so scary.

Jocelyn: Yeah. Yeah. That's the physical reality of a panic attack. Let's talk about how God says to cure anxiety. Anxiety causes us to feel weighed down, heavy, oppressive, incomprehensible, and unmanageable like Proverbs 12:25 says, and quite honestly, without a relationship with God, every single problem feels that way. If I don't live for the Lord, if he's not my master and I don't, you know, relish his sovereignty, there is no one for me to trust, and every problem could possibly kill me.

Janet: And they are out of my control.

Jocelyn: They absolutely are out of our control. Without God, our lives are scary and out of control because we actually live in a world where bad things, they do happen and they often happen. So panic and anxiety often develops because in my heart I've concluded that either God is not good enough or powerful enough to stop something from happening that I believe will ultimately harm me. And so from a spiritual point of view, the things that I'm thinking about have reached this conclusion where I can't trust God, because he can't fix it. Or if he can, he doesn't care about me enough in order to fix it.

Janet: I don't have a guarantee that he will.

Jocelyn: Right. And, and all I can conclude is I will probably get hurt in the process. So in lots of cases, when we're anxious, we've decided that we are the only person we can trust to keep ourselves safe. Which is ridiculous because we can't.

Janet: No. We can't.

Jocelyn: I know way down inside of myself, all the hundreds of times I failed at lots of stuff, especially at keeping myself safe, like car accidents or, you know, freak failures. Like there's all sorts of weird stuff that prove I am not a trustworthy person. I can't keep myself safe, much less anyone else around me. So those thoughts about God, they frame him as someone who is very disconnected from me and is ultimately not working for my good.

Janet: And I love how that really ties back to the episode we did on anxiety, which we'll link in the show notes as well, because one of the causes of anxiety is unbelief. And what you're believing about God is not true there, and it's, feeding your anxiety.

Jocelyn: Absolutely. So the cure for anxiety and the cure for panic attacks is learning to trust a God who actually does care for you. The Bible tells us that God is all powerful. He's all knowing. And he's also able to give us the grace we need to handle any problem, like Hebrews 4:16 says. And if we really believe that we're dearly, loved children of God, like Ephesians 5:1 says, then that means we're heirs to a ton of promises in scripture about how God not only

comforts us and helps us, but protects us. And sometimes what's happening is our understanding of God is wrong. And our understanding needs to be shaped by God. Not our thoughts. I often worry because I, fear that God doesn't really love me. Like if he really loved me, he would make it work out this certain way.

Janet: He would do what I would do to love me.

Jocelyn: Right. Right. And I think what I would do to love me is to not make me go through that hard thing.

Janet: Absolutely.

Jocelyn: First Peter five tells me to cast my anxieties on God for this reason, because he cares for me. So part of my reorienting, my belief system is not saying I will believe that God cares for me when I don't feel anxious. It's saying, I believe God cares for me, period, because the Bible teaches me that. And because the Bible says, God cares for me, I will throw my anxiety onto him and allow him to solve the anxiety the way that he believes his best, because he knows everything and he is powerful enough to bring the best thing out to happen.

Janet: And it makes the goal move from, I don't want to feel anxious anymore and I don't want a panic attack to, I just want to honor the Lord.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: So even when the feelings are there, I can honor the Lord.

Jocelyn: Absolutely. We can honor the Lord, even when we're full of anxiety.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: We have lots of examples of how that happens. Psalm 91 says that God is our refuge and fortress. He saves us from our enemies. He shelters us under his wing and he helps us not to fear because he's with us when we call on him. Hebrews 7:25 says, God is able to save those who draw near to him. And Isaiah 40:11 we loved this verse when we had just first had Haley, God takes care of us, like a loving shepherd, gathering us in his arms, carrying us close to his heart and gently leading us. And we all love Psalm 23, but Psalm 23:4, especially says, even though valleys of the shadow of death we're walking through them, we're not to fear because God is with us in those valleys. It's not that he takes the valleys away. It's that he walks with us through those valleys. Sometimes you also fear that God isn't powerful enough. And Isaiah 40 is a really cool chapter that illustrates how huge God is.

Janet: I love that chapter.

Jocelyn: And it describes him as holding the whole world in his hand, calling the stars by his name, giving strength to the weary. And here's the key, the most important thing I can share with you and our listeners about this topic is this, the cure for anxiety is to learn to trust this God who is good enough to care about your most intricate fear and also great enough to deliver you from any evil that might harm you. And it's a belief thing. Do you actually believe that God is good enough to care? And do you actually believe that he will deliver you from something that's not good for you?

Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: And one thing that I really struggled with is like, are you kidding me? If that is true, then it means God could have stopped this from happening.

Janet: That's right.

Jocelyn: And he chose not to. And my first thought was like, what a jerk? How unkind and mean to make me suffer like this? And so it was a very big theological battle to work through the questions I had about God. I just want to encourage our listeners to do that. Work through the questions that come up in your brain about God.

Janet: Yes. Don't ignore them.

Jocelyn: He's not going to be all offended.

Janet: He already knows.

Jocelyn: Yeah. He's not going to be offended when you acknowledge to him that you have big questions about how he functions. He can handle those questions. So it doesn't mean that nothing bad is ever going to happen to you, but in Jesus Christ, God has already taken care of our biggest and most real danger. And we have to realize that. What's our biggest danger? Separation from him, according to Romans 6:23. But also when Jesus was willing to suffer, he redeemed our suffering. Deuteronomy 8:2 and 3 says God plans to use our suffering, to help us experience his love in even more personal ways while we're growing to be more like Jesus. And I really believe that that often takes some repentance, because that is not how I want to be close to God. I want to be close to God when life is all good. I don't want to have to go through suffering in order to love him more. And so part of my struggle with anxiety is saying, I am willing to repent of wanting my life to go in a way other than what you designed it should look like.

Janet: Yeah. Because what it means is I have to now value what God values. So if my highest value is, I don't want to hurt, I don't want the people I love to hurt. If I want a guarantee of no suffering, I have a lot of reason to panic.

Jocelyn: Oh, absolutely. You're going to suffer.

Janet: So it's, how can I learn? And like you said, to repent. I'm wrong. I'm wrong to believe that the highest love would mean no suffering. Yeah. And I have to know that when I look at the cross. The highest love was the highest suffering. So how in the world can I say, the highest love.

Jocelyn: Yeah, I deserve something different than that.

Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: So here's what I would encourage our listeners to think about. Seek God first. Matthew 6:25 through 34 says God's care for things like flowers and birds, is nothing compared to how well he takes care of us. And often when we're overwhelmed by anxiety, we're trying to figure out how we can be in charge because we've pretty much figured out what it is we need. And we don't trust that God is going to give that thing to us. We don't believe that he's going to give us what's best for us. So we are really scrambling, trying to figure out how to take care of ourselves because we're convinced we know what's best. So let's talk about a couple of questions. You can ask yourself when you begin feeling anxious. First of all, ask yourself what is making me anxious? What are the thoughts I just had when I began feeling nervous? And really tried to identify what specifically is going on, and where that anxiety began. What's the actual problem I'm facing? So I like to think about this and I teach this when I counsel someone on this topic like this. You're just at the grocery store, walking down the aisle and all of a sudden you start feeling super panicky. Well, that didn't come out of nowhere.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: But it might feel like it came out of nowhere, but here's what happens. We're always thinking about stuff and something that you were just thinking about, snuck up behind you and tapped you on the shoulder and was like, Hey, remember me, we were thinking about this earlier. And all of a sudden you start feeling a really afraid feeling like a panicky feeling. The best thing to do is to say, okay, I'm not afraid of you. I am willing to turn around and look at you. What was that thought that I was just thinking? Instead of being like, get out of my mind, get out of my mind. I'm not thinking scary thoughts.

Janet: Distract. Distract.

Jocelyn: Yeah. I actually want to turn around and I want to look at that thought and I want to see what was it, what was making me anxious? Secondly now, ask yourself, what am I worried is going to happen? What's my worst case scenario? What are the what if questions that are immediately popping into my mind right here at this moment? And then next, take a minute to think through those worst case scenarios you imagined. Are they logical? Are they truly threats that you should consider and wisely deal with? Or are they vain imaginations that are totally not logical and super unlikely to be an actual threat.

Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: And so next step would be to brainstorm. Okay. Here's my list of problems. What is the wisest and most loving way to resolve the actual, true, real problem, using the Bible as my source of truth, and authorities and wise friends to help me think through this. And then fifthly, are there any ways I'm trying to manipulate or control the outcome to get what I think is the best resolution?

Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: So I actually put this together in a worksheet that will be included in the show notes so that you can have it to use if that would be a handy tool for you. It's just five steps. And if you use those five steps when you start feeling panicky, it will really help you assess what's going on to sort through of the fears that you're thinking through. Are they logical? Is this ridiculous? Should you just quit thinking about it? Cause it's not likely. Or is it a real true problem that you should put some effort into solving?

Janet: Well, and just to do a real quick, cause I know I'm going to ask you to go through an example in your life, but as you were doing that, I'm like, okay, just real quickly, when I'm on the plane, what are the thoughts I just began having? It's I can't get out, even if I want to. Like, I didn't want to, till I knew I couldn't. You know, so now it's like, I can't get out. That's when the anxiety started. What am I worried is going to happen? I'm worried I will never get out of here. I have lost control of even my physical body. I can't go where I want. What's my worst case scenario? You know? And then to say, is that vain imagination? What do I actually think is gonna happen? We're never going to get off the plane? Like, do I actually think the man next to me is gonna say,

Jocelyn: swallow up all the oxygen and you won't to be able to breathe..

Janet: Exactly. You're never gonna be able to breathe. I'll never let you have food and you will die on this plane. So if I think it through, I can go. Okay.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: And honestly, this may sound silly, but this is where I have to go. If God wants me off this plane, I'm getting off the plane.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: So since he's in control, It's okay. It's okay that I can't control physically my body right now. I don't have the freedom to go where I want.

Jocelyn: But what's interesting, when you were experiencing it. My assumption is only because I've lived it. God was really not a part of your thoughts when you were initially freaking out.

Janet: The initial. That's right. And then I'm praying about, okay, why am I feeling this way, God, but, that's right.

Jocelyn: It was all about like, I am not in control of the situation. I don't know how to resolve it.

Janet: I can't move. Yeah.

Jocelyn: I can't get out of here.

Janet: But then thinking, okay, if God wants me off the plane, I'll be off. And as long as God wants me to have oxygen, I will have it. So my act of faith is now I don't need to sit and think about it anymore. But I did need to think about it.

Jocelyn: And you know, there might be lots of different potential solutions to that situation. Like it's not wrong to ask too, like if there's an empty seat to move to an empty seat, that's more comfortable. So it's not like the only solution is trust God and try harder. There are a lot of real solutions to real problems.

Janet: Right When you can think.

Jocelyn: Right. When you can think, but when you're having a panic attack, the blood flow is not resting in your brain.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: It's trying to keep your body alive. And so you're not thinking logical thoughts.

Janet: No. All I'm saying is, Brent, I want off now.

Jocelyn: Exactly. And that's

Janet: Which is not logical.

Jocelyn: And one of the reasons I shared physical side effects is because if you don't control what happens in a panic attack, you will become debilitated and you won't be able to think or function for several hours. Anyone who has had a panic attack knows like it just takes a toll on your body. And then no matter how hard you want to try to think, your brain is just exhausted from the battle. And so there's a lot of things that you can do to think through a situation logically, and we're going to talk about this more in a second, but one of the very best things you can do is to breathe, like breathe on purpose.

Janet: Which is very practical. And we can all do that

Jocelyn: Deeply breathe. Like when I counsel somebody that has panic attacks, I even breathe with them. Like when you're panic breathing, it's like this. When you're normally breathing, it's like this long intakes, long breaths out. Cause you need oxygen to be able to think and function. And so you have to have your physical symptoms somewhat in order for you to be able to think logically. But when you can think logically, you think. What is it that's making me nervous? What am I worried is going to happen? What is the worst case scenario? In those with worst case scenarios, is it logical or is it a vain imagination? And then what are some practical things I could do? And then, is it possible that I'm trying to manipulate or control this situation?

Janet: So talk us through, cause I know for most of us, it's one thing to go, alright. I kind of get those steps. Now walk me through an example.

Jocelyn: So I told you some examples of my earlier life, like 20-ish years ago when I first had my baby just being incapacitated by panic attacks that were physically out of control. But I have an unfortunate, real life example. I mean, and it's interesting because I get a lot of anxiety through my life that I have to think through. It never turns into a panic attack because I think through it, but here's an example. I've been talking actually on our podcast about our big 25th anniversary celebration. And we were so excited about it. We had all invested thousands of dollars prepping for it and buying plane tickets and making reservations. It was the culmination of this long weekend, a family reunion. Which we hadn't seen each other in a long time. And then COVID was part of that. Like, you know, we were separated for lots of different reasons, as well as being all over the country. So we had a big Thanksgiving dinner. It was lovely. We had family photos, which was so cool. We went shopping, we were hanging out. We were meeting our new baby cousin, which we hadn't gotten to meet yet. And we were going to be having this really beautiful Indian feast that my husband and I had been planning for and saving for, for over a year. We had planned it. And it was supposed to start at 5:00 PM. And so my husband, Brian, and my brother who was his best friend, they were on their way to pick up the Indian feast in a different city from the restaurant that was catering it for us. And around 3:00 PM, I started feeling super anxious. So I thought through it, I thought, you know what? I feel super panicky sitting here waiting for Brian to get here with our anniversary food. Like, this is weird. What's wrong. I know where that panicky feeling leads me. If I'm not careful, I know. I'm familiar with this feeling. So I don't distract. I've learned that I cannot distract. I have to think through it.

Janet: And you don't get mad at yourself for feeling it.

Jocelyn: No. Right.

Janet: Because I think that's what we do sometimes. I thought I was beyond this. I can't believe. And now I'm still not dealing with it.

Jocelyn: So I investigated, I thought, okay, maybe I'm hot. I had like two layers of clothes. It was very cold that week. So I took off my second layer of clothes. Oh, maybe I'm dehydrated. So I drank a bunch of water. Maybe I'm just nervous about the feast tonight. We had planned so much for it and I was really nervous about it. So like I did something to get busy. Maybe I'm sinfully anxious. Like maybe I'm just worrying. So I told my sister-in-law, who is my friend, and we prayed together. She read me some scripture and I was like, okay, I've thought through it. I've identified different potential problems. I've applied solutions. And I'm like, it is not going away. maybe I am getting sicker. And I had been like, kind of like sick with a cold all week long. And so I was starting to get chills. And then I was thinking, oh my word, I think I have a fever and I was getting shaky, and I was wondering, oh my goodness, what if I pass out? What if this is COVID again? The first time I had COVID it was terrible. My mom is in a really vulnerable health population. And so all this stuff was swirling around in my mind while my husband was already gone, getting the food coming back, and I was supposed to be setting up. So I said, what am I worried is going to happen? What's my worst case scenario. What are all the, what ifs that are going through my head right now? So I just, thought about them. Okay. I'm worried I'm going to pass out in front of everyone. Which would be embarrassing, and also scary for them. And I don't want to scare them.

Janet: Right. Distracting.

Jocelyn: Yeah. That's not why we're together. I'm worried. I'm getting sicker. I'm worried I have a fever, which that means I'm contagious. Oh my goodness. What if it's COVID what if I get my mom sick? I got really sick when I had COVID back in March of 2020, and I ended up in the emergency room and I was just thinking, not again, are you kidding me? Not again. So my worst case scenario, what if I leave and miss my own party that I've worked on all of this year to prep for. And we saved so much money for it, but what if I stay and get people sick? What if I go home and I'm not even really sick and I just made a big deal out of nothing.

Janet: Yeah. And it's so common. Those what ifs, but if I stay, but what if I go? And what if I'm an idiot, right now?

Jocelyn: Yeah. What if I'm making all this up. So I just, I did the third step. I examined my worst case scenarios and I thought, you know what, These are all logical. None of them are vain imaginations. They were all real problems. They were potential problems. I needed to know how to handle them. So I brainstormed, I thought, what is the wisest and most loving way to resolve this actual real problem using the Bible as my source of truth. And wise authorities and my wise companion? So, I did a couple of things. I asked my sister-in-law to pray with me. She read me scripture and she actually brainstormed some really healthy solutions, like, okay. Maybe if you do have a fever, you should take some Tylenol. That'll lower your fever. And then you won't feel so weird. So we drank water, had ibuprofen. When Brian finally got there and we got the feast all

set up and started, I just pulled him aside, quietly and privately. And I said, I think that I'm getting sicker and we were all very afraid of giving my mom COVID.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: So we prayed together in the little bathroom where we were. We talked. We asked ourselves, okay, we don't know what's going on. We cannot believe that this is how God is designing this day is going to go for us. But here we are. And what would be the wisest and most loving thing for us to do? So we decided that the most loving thing would be to just share with my family what was going on, and ask their input and like drawing attention to us is very low on our list of priorities. We hate that. And so they all urged me to say at the party, which I did for a little while, and we were both really, really sad. We had planned a really spectacular evening and it was really going differently than we had planned. And ultimately we decided the wisest and most loving option was for Brian to take me home in the middle of our party for me to go do a COVID test and then to go to bed. And so. I asked myself then, are there any ways I'm trying to manipulate or control this? I thought, well, I could power through it. I could stay at the party and not tell anyone, but what would happen if something went wrong and no one knew, or I passed out, which that would have freaked everybody out.

Janet: Not loving.

Jocelyn: Yeah. That would have not been loving. And I thought about hiding our concern, because what if I actually did have COVID and then everybody else got it. And so I called Janet a couple of days after it, or actually the next day. And I just was so sad. There was just so much sadness to deal with. And I was really grieving because we had really wanted to celebrate God's redemption of our marriage. It was our marriage has been redeemed and we wanted to celebrate that. So we talked about it a lot as a family, we let ourselves be sad, cause it was sad. We worked through it and then we landed in this place where God chose how he wanted that very special day to go. And that's how it went. And in talking about it, we ended up being able to see lots of amazing, wonderful things that God had done for our family all weekend and not just focus on the sad way it ended. We still had so many wonderful gifts from God, and me getting sick at the very, very, very end didn't take away from those blessings.

Janet: That's right.

Jocelyn: And so my husband helped me remember that our deciding factors had been to our solutions, what is wise and what is loving. And we genuinely believed that we had made the wisest most loving decision, and we didn't know what God was up to, but we knew that he was great and that he was good.

Janet: You know, what I love about that example is, as you're talking and your desire was to celebrate God's redemption in your marriage, and you did, but you just did it differently. Hearing

that Brian and you prayed about it. think of all the things you could have been thinking: this makes me so mad. I can't believe this is happening. Brian could've gotten kinda mad at you, which is irrational, but we do those things.

Jocelyn: It could have happened. Yeah.

Janet: You know, and you can be mad at him. And then-- but instead together it was, how do we love other people together? That is the redemption of your marriage. And then you got to model that by talking about it publicly and letting them know we're working together on this. And then him taking you back, your whole family saw the redemption of your marriage by how you handled that.

Jocelyn: And one of the cool things that happened was as we were discussing the fact that I was sick and we needed to decide what to do, if everyone was going to be exposed to me or not, we actually told the testimony of how God had changed us in our marriage, as in the process of talking through it. And I wouldn't have shared that.

Janet: Isn't that cool?

Jocelyn: Isn't that so cool?

Janet: So it's like, God answered the prayer of your heart. To be able to show the redemption of your marriage. He just did it in a different, and we'll have to say a better way.

Jocelyn: A better way. Yeah. And we, in part of talking through that with my family, we read Psalm one and two together, and said, like, we are a people who delight in the Lord and he is our king and we bow to him and we will do what he wants us to do. And then we are able to, talk about, you know, how God has structured our marriage to be about him, which is so different than it was 25 years ago when we got married, when we were very not focused on that. So it was amazing. And as it ties to anxiety, The reason I wanted to talk about it is what initially made me start thinking about it was how anxious I was feeling and how I know what a panic attack feels like. And I know my body when it's headed toward one, I just know what it feels like. And so I did a lot of things initially to keep my breathing under control and to think. But ultimately I was able to work through it because I had a plan. And if you don't have a plan, you're going to end up just trying to handle it as best as you can. And possibly not doing a very good job, and not honoring God in the middle of it. So the key to really dealing with anxiety like we've been talking about is just allowing God to be in control.

Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: This is his world. He made us for him. And so Peter urges us to cast our anxiety on God, who cares for us. But he calls us to humble ourself and allow God to be in control. That's what first Peter 5:6 says. And if I know how good God is, and that he's able to work out the

perfect plan for our life, that's puts me in a place where I'm more willing to throw my anxiety on him instead of trying to just bear it myself. So if I trust that he loves me and he will only do what's best for me, then I'm not going to be like proudly perceiving myself and my plans and my thoughts as superior to whatever God has planned. One of the things that's been helpful for me to understand over time is that Satan's goal is to try to convince me that God is a hoarder. He doesn't like to share. And he keeps all the good things for himself. And Peter really urges us to push against that agenda from Satan by humbling ourself. So I'm want to be willing to receive God's plan for me, even when that includes suffering. And first Peter 5:10 really reminds us that God is powerful. He has the ability to do anything he wants. And what he does do is what he has determined is best.

Janet: Which is amazing. and we use that phrase a lot that we need to allow God to be in control. And what I know you already know, he already is. We need to acknowledge it, but I'm not going to want to, if I think he's a hoarder. And then when I think about that, logically, if he was a hoarder, why would he even come to earth? Like he didn't have to come. And when I know his character. It just makes all the difference.

Jocelyn: So let's get to the heart of this topic. Let's think about what we think about. That's really the key to fighting against panic attacks. You're really going to have to examine your thoughts. You're going to have to examine your beliefs. And you're going to have to examine your desires. Because that really underlies your anxiety. It sometimes feels scary to turn around and look at what you were thinking about right before you became anxious. But that is the key thing to do. You've really got to do that. Romans 8:15 says that God doesn't set his kids up to be enslaved to fear. And second Corinthians 10:5 says we're able to take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ. So we really have to take our thoughts and bring them under the microscope of God's word and examine them. You're not going to find anything there, anything that God does not make a provision for through Christ and his word. And I think one of the things that we're most commonly confronted with anxiety and panic is that there may be something that there is no solution to.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: And you know, you and I are both counselors. We deal with a lot of heavy stuff and there are a lot of big problems in the world. And

Janet: that I don't have answers for.

Jocelyn: There are solutions from God's word, but those solutions do not always, and I will even make this disclaimer. They will not often mean no suffering.

Janet: That's right.

Jocelyn: And so I'm taking my thoughts and putting them under the microscope of God's word and saying, what I want is what you want. I want my thoughts to be in line with what you say is good. Even if it means it doesn't turn out the way I want it to turn out. So here's a couple of things just to ponder. Anxiety and panic can really help you. First of all, it can help you know what you desire. Like what do you want? If you look at the things you're most fearful of, you can start to pinpoint the things that you've been believing you have to possess. So like, I have to be in control of this situation. I have to have security to know it's going to turn out the way I want. I have to have the approval of others. What are the things that you have to have, or you start panicking? Sinful desires and even godly desires that you want too much. They take center stage and they'll help you to see that you've turned your trust from God into something else that it doesn't belong to. And you sometimes want something more than you want God, even if you say, I want God, I want God. I want God, but you're really saying, I want God plus this thing. I want something in addition to God, he's not enough.

Janet: And your anxiety helps you see that even so you don't deceive yourself.

Jocelyn: Right? And that's good. We want to see where our thoughts and our desires are not in line with what God says. Secondly, anxiety points out what you actually believe. You can tell yourself, you believe all sorts of things. You're going to know what you believe when it's about to be taken away from you.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: No matter what you say, you believe about God and his care for you, anxiety is going to highlight what you actually believe about a lot of things, but especially what you believe about God.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: Anxiety. This is like the most important sentence I'll say this whole time. Anxiety is always tied to the belief that something will turn out badly. We have to know that. When we feel anxious, it's because we have concluded something bad is about to go down. And that is not what God says about himself or the way he works in the world. He says he's using even suffering to bring about good. And he wants our faithfulness in the middle of it. So anxiety is really assuming the worst. It's projecting a future where God is not sovereign. He's not good. And ultimately that is unbelief. And that has to be repented of. We're not going to find blessing if we keep on trying to function in God's world, believing something about God that he does not say is true. It also really points to what you actually think. So it's really crucial that you learn to think in a way that reflects the fact that everything about you has been made new through your relationship with Jesus. And as believers, we're supposed to be training ourselves to think more and more the things that God says are good and acceptable. And just quite honestly, many of the things that I'm consumed with when I'm worrying, they are not good and they are not acceptable. They're

worries. They're fears. They're based on some assumption that God is not powerful enough to intervene. He doesn't love me. He's not in control. So it's really crucial that you train your mind to think scripturally. And you've got to learn to think about thinking. When I had panic attacks, this was part of the beginning of when I learned to think about thinking.

Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: So that's, I mean, that has been a gift over the rest of the 20 years since then. I would have never seen the importance of that unless God had allowed this to happen.

Janet: I love the idea that we can now use our anxious moments to deepen our walk with God? So even those have purpose. The goal is not don't ever have an anxious moment. It's in your anxious times, if I'm willing to say, what does this mean I really desire? What does this mean I really believe? What does this mean I really think? Wow, that's not consistent with the word. And I can work hard at repenting. My anxiety has drawn me closer to the Lord.

Jocelyn: it makes me think about your return flight home. Okay. So we say, what we want is closeness to God. Well, you got closeness to God.

Janet: I sure did. Both times.

Jocelyn: But you didn't want that package necessarily.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: So it's really cool to see what we ultimately want, closeness to God is often going to be given to us because of working through anxiety.

Janet: He knows the best way to draw me close.

Jocelyn: He does.

Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: So here are just a couple of practical things that I want to land this plane on. Anxiety and panic are really, really practical problems. You worry about real problems in your real life. So first of all, keep a short account. Proverbs 28:1 says that you could possibly be full of anxiety because you have unconfessed sin. I'm not going to say that all anxiety is from that route.

Janet: Of course not.

Jocelyn: But the Bible does make it clear, sometimes we're anxious because we have sins that we have not been real with God about. Secondly, give control to God. Really carefully examine and evaluate where you're trying to keep things under your control and make them fit into your

agenda. We all do it. It's endemic to being a human. People tend to get anxious when they think their agenda is in danger of not being fulfilled. So really pay attention to ways where you're trying to manipulate situations or manipulate outcomes. And every single one of us does that. So we're not surprised that it happens. I also want to encourage you to pay attention to your internal questions. The anxious mind is full of "what if" questions. So, many times, a "what if" question it does not lead us to the place where we believe God is in control. His grace and mercy is on display. Instead. It's like this hopeless future where God is not there. I will not survive. All of my worst fears come true. And just be really conscious of habituated stair-step thinking. And what I mean by that is, generally, we think one step at a time. But if you become habituated to fearful thinking, you can kind of push yourself down the steps

Janet: pretty fast

Jocelyn: and skip all the steps of logical thinking, and end up like at the bottom step super easily. When I was really struggling after Haley was born, my worst case scenario was that I would end up completely alone in a mental ward with everyone that I had loved dying. I would be crazy rocking back and forth, sucking my thumb for the rest of my life.

Janet: Wow. That's pretty extreme.

Jocelyn: It was extreme. And at first it took me a while to get to that place where first my husband died, then my mom died, then my baby died, then I lost my house and I, you know. And eventually every fear, I could get to that place really quick. Cause I just short, cut all those, steps.

Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: So just be careful about "what if" questions, because they'll show you what you're afraid of losing. And "what if" questions generally are worry. Focus on growth during the calm moments. Keep it that journal to trace what might trigger you, or habits that you're seeing. And just look at deep habits that you can work on because those are things that you can work on even when life is great. And then lastly, take care of yourself physically. It's really helpful to understand the physical process of a panic attack. It's also helpful to know that if you can control your breathing, when you first start feeling anxious, you're very much less likely to get sucked into a whole panic attack.

Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: Breathe deeply don't deprive yourself of oxygen. And then other things like you probably should consider getting a physical, because there are some thyroid dysfunctions that mimic a panic disorder, and you could just say, oh, I just need to trust Jesus more when really you actually need to go get your thyroid fixed.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: So consider a physical. And also consider things that stimulate your nervous system like caffeine or energy drinks, or sugar. If you already tend to be a kind of an anxious panicky person, you're going to feel even more panicky if those substances are influencing your nervous system.

Janet: That is so practical. And what I love is these are steps we can all take. And I think a lot of times some of these steps we can overlook, especially caring for ourselves physically. That doesn't sound spiritual. So I know I need to pray. I know I need to trust God. But to realize I am a body as well.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: And if I'm not taking care of myself, physically, that can actually encourage a panic attack. That's very helpful.

Jocelyn: Especially, things like sleep. Like if you're not sleeping, your body's already functioning at a heightened state of awareness because it's stressed out.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: So there's just, there's a lot of things that go into panic and anxiety. I'm also including on the worksheet in our show notes just a four question list of ways that you can evaluate a past difficult anxious situation just to think through. So how can I see that God was in control and sovereignly unfolding that situation? What have I been learning about my thinking, desires, and beliefs, and my "what if" questions? What has been the outcome of this thing that caused me anxiety? What did I learn about God in that process? And is it resolved? Do I still need to go back and work through some of it? There's just a lot of work that goes into resolving anxiety and resolving panic, and it's worth working through.

Janet: I love that, because the temptation would be I'm out of that situation. I don't think about it again. But you're asking us go back. Oh yeah. Look at it again. Because the hope that comes from going, oh my word, just what you've said, I learned the importance of my thinking. Oh, my word, look what the Lord did through this. And so again, those moments are not things that we want to, hope never happen again and just ignore. They can be the means of my growth.

Jocelyn: Absolutely. God actually allowed me to put this content into a little booklet that I use a lot in counseling. It's called Anxiety and Panic Attacks, and that's going to be linked in our show notes. Feel free to get that and read it if it would be helpful for you. My daughters and I actually read through this material together as they struggled with their own different kinds of worry. And there's also a book that I read, oh, so many times: Overcoming Fear, Worry and Anxiety by Elise Fitzpatrick. We're going to link that in the show notes. And I'm also going to link Trusting God by Jerry Bridges. When I was really struggling at my worst, those two books are like so

highlighted and bent up because I read them so many times over and over. Why can I trust God? He's so trustworthy. And Trusting God by Jerry Bridges really explores that.

Janet: The other things that we will link is two of our past podcasts, the antidote to anxiety we'll link that. So you can get more on not the panic attack part, but just how do I deal with anxiety if I'm not having a panic attack? And also the podcast that Jocelyn led us on with thinking and theology? I mean, you mentioned, we've got to think about what we're thinking, and that was an excellent podcast on that. So if someone's thinking that's the area, I really need to work on, we'll have a link for that as well. Well, thank you, Jocelyn, for sharing that. That was a real, vulnerable, but I hope as hopeful to others as it was to me. So thank you for joining us today and join us for our next episode as we go on the journey together.

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