



Episode 6-11: Scrupulosity

Resources:

Podcasts/Sermons

Theology of Worship - Joyful Journey Podcast

[The Severe Results of Submitting to Works Righteousness Instead of Jesus - Faith Church Sermon](#)

[A Peculiar Power for Prayer - D. A. Carson](#)

[Scrupulosity - Truth in Love Podcast](#)

[A Biblical Response to Scrupulosity - Truth in Love Podcast](#)

Books/Articles

[Rescuing the Gospel - Erwin Lutzer](#)

[Scrupulosity - Brent Osterberg](#)

[Scrupulosity and One Distortion of Sanctification - BCC](#)

Websites

[Masters of Arts in Biblical Counseling](#)

Transcript:

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

Janet: I just want to make it as totally simple 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: Welcome back, listeners. This is Janet here once again, and this time I am sitting in the room with both of my adult children. My daughter, as usual, is producing us, and my son, Josh, has been on the podcast once before and did something for us on worship. I recommend that if you didn't get a chance to hear it. But I've asked him to come back today because last year he did a session at our counseling conference that I found really helpful and very encouraging. And I've asked him if he would come and share it with us today. So welcome back, Josh.

Josh: Yeah, it's good to be here. Dad was in charge of putting the pre-conference together last year on how the gospel applies to everyday life struggles, and he asked me to come 'cause obviously he knows my temptations and working with my heart all of growing up and in seeing



me grow. He asked me to do a session on specifically how the gospel has applied to my particular struggles. So I did that at the pre-conference last year and then did it again in one of our other tracks of the counseling conference this year, and I'm glad to get to share parts of that today.

Janet: Yes. So what are you up to now? Tell the listeners about you and your family.

Josh: Yeah, so my wife Noelle and I in July will have been married six years.

Janet: Wow.

Josh: Yeah, it goes fast. And then we have a two-and-a-half-year-old named Ari, short for Ariel, lion of God a little lady, and then we have a new baby girl, Elsie, who is 10 months old as of a couple days ago.

Janet: Love it. Love it.

Josh: And they love their safta. They love coming over to hang out with you.

Janet: And that's me. I'm safta.

Josh: Yeah, that's right.

Janet: Very fun. If you can just share with us, I asked Josh, instead of me really interviewing him, I really wanted him to be able to share what he shared at the conference. Tell me the topic is scrupulosity and why you did that.

Josh: Yeah, we all struggle with different sin. And at the root, all of it is the same sinful heart for each one of us.

Janet: Right

Josh: A desire for our own autonomy, a desire to worship the creation rather than the Creator. But in our sinfulness, each of us tends to have different manifestations that come more naturally.

Janet: Yep



Josh: Or like Hebrews 12:1 would say, "Different sins that easily entangle us." And Dad has mentioned in his sermons, I'm sure he's even mentioned on the podcast, that anxiety and worry tends to be one of the things he struggles with.

Janet: Yep.

Josh: And the apple doesn't fall far from the tree in my case. But for me, it's a specific type of anxiety with what could be called moral anxiety or what some could call religious OCD or scrupulosity. That's the big fancy word for it. I'm gonna give like.

Janet: It sounds really serious when you call it scrupulosity.

Josh: Scrupulosity. Yeah. Is that a medical condition or? But I'm gonna give a just a definition, having a tendency to become fixated on personal sins that are real or imagined, often minor questions that others wouldn't give a second thought to.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: So having a tendency to become fixated on personal sins. They could be real, could be imagined and other people, when they hear somebody talking that way, just think.

Janet: I never even thought about that.

Josh: Why on earth are you even thinking those things? Just sounds crazy. That's not a new thing, and I've been encouraged by Martin Luther sharing his testimony where he had some similar types of nagging doubts, moral anxiety. On Erwin Lutzer's book on the Reformation, he quotes a part of Luther's story, and I just wanna read a little part of it. He says, "Luther confessed his sins frequently for up to six hours on at least one occasion. He searched his soul and ransacked his memory to make sure that no sin was left unconfessed. His confessor was so exasperated with Luther's endless confession that on one occasion he said, 'If you expect Christ to forgive you, come in with something to forgive.'" "Parricide," which means killing one of your parents, "blasphemy, adultery, instead of all these peccadillos" Which is a fancy word for a little sin.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: So his confessor was basically like, "Until you actually commit a real sin like killing one of your parents or committing adultery, stop spending hours wasting my time confessing all this ridiculous small stuff." You can just see a fixation on moral purity, an anxiety over real or perceived moral faults that was dominating Luther's thinking at that point in his life.



Janet: And that's so confusing, though, because it seems you should make a big deal of your sin. But we know there's something wrong with this.

Josh: Yeah, that's not the way that a Christian should be operating, living in that kind of fear.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: And we're certainly gonna get there. There's something wrong with that approach.

Janet: Yep.

Josh: And I don't know how much this has been talked about in just some mainstream thinking. There has been some resources coming out. The Journal of Biblical Counseling has had an article on it. There's some booklets by ACBC, even one that came out a few years ago titled, "Scrupulosity". So it is being talked about a little bit more, but whatever you choose to call it, an obsession or anxiety over personal morality, that's not a new thing, and it's a real struggle that many people have. So as I gave this session, kinda what I did was I just described some of the ways it's looked in my life.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: Which I think can be hopeful for people as they hear that they're not alone. I share some of the things it has looked like in my life. And then I just drew six biblical observations, conclusions that help define the problem as well as how the gospel specifically applies to it. And ultimately, even if you're listening and you think, "Boy, that doesn't sound like me at all," ultimately a lot of the root is gonna come down to a self-righteousness and a pride that relies on your own ability to prove yourself before God and others. And all of us struggle with self-righteousness to some degree.

Janet: That's right.

Josh: There's gonna be principles here that apply to all of us in how we relate to whatever the predominant sin struggle is in your life. And perhaps if you're listening and you think, "Boy, this does sound like me," then I hope there's a lot of hope that you find even from this, think through some of these points.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: So I can just start sharing some of my story and some of the points.



Janet: Yeah, please do.

Josh: That I shared in the lecture. I was born into a loving Christian family as a pastor's kid, and if you would've asked me, I would've said that I loved being a pastor's kid and how awesome it was to have a dad with that kind of position. I didn't feel the pressure of being a pastor's kid. A lot of times you hear that from pastor's kids. There's a pressure they feel. I didn't really feel that because I already felt plenty of pressure just from myself to perform.

Janet: Yep.

Josh: And I didn't really connect that to being a pastor's kid. I just knew I wanted to be perfect.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: I do believe I was saved at an early age, around the age of five, when I could articulate the gospel, and I expressed my need for a savior, placed my faith in Jesus to save me. But from an early age, even right after becoming a Christian, from, what you've shared with me, from what Dad has shared with me, I remember parts of this. I don't remember every part, but even early on I struggled with what you could call an overdeveloped sense of responsibility or an anxiety over my moral performance.

Janet: Absolutely.

Josh: Yeah. You also can sometimes think of the stereotypical pastor's kid as a two-faced person with one face-

Janet: Yep ...

Josh: the public face in front of your parents and the rest of the church, and when you're off with your friends or the worldly friends, you're a different kind of a face. That wasn't me. I tried to be perfect- all the time.

Janet: Everywhere. Yeah.

Josh: I always wanted to do what was right, even when I was alone. And for example just to kinda show you what it was like in my life, early on once when you told me to clean my room and do my best, you came back later- ... to find me sitting on the floor of my room crying, picking crumbs and lint off the floor because you told me to do my best.



Janet: I learned early, best, I can't use those words with you.

Josh: Yeah, it wasn't something that I could internalize and think of appropriately. And when I felt like I'd crossed a rule in my actions, words, or my thoughts, I would increasingly become paralyzed by worry.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: I think that came up at the dinner table when I was like-

Janet: Oh, yes

Josh: at six. You, and you remember what that was like? With, when I would pause and pray for a moment in the middle of the meal, and you'd ask "What are you doing, Josh?" One of the house rules is don't talk with your mouth full," and I had just had a crumb of food in my mouth when I said something, so I need to pause and ask God's forgiveness before I move on to make sure

Janet: Yes

Josh: I've covered all my bases.

Janet: And I remember at the time, it took us a while to understand- it took us a long time and ultimately I think you understood it better even after you were not living in our home. But in our home, I remember thinking, "I don't wanna say to my son, 'It's not a big deal.'" It's sin. But I know this isn't right.

Josh: 'Cause we're not supposed- yeah, we're not supposed to belittle sin.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: That's not the right thing.

Janet: And I've, so I'm like, "And yet, I know this isn't right." It's paralyzing him. I know this is wrong, and I don't even know how to help him because I don't wanna say, "Don't worry about something as small as that," but something's wrong with this.

Josh: Yeah, and-

Janet: and I remember we had a long time of not really even knowing best how to help you.



Josh: Yeah. There's something off, absolutely. It's not Jesus-centered. This is not actually making you more holy.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: And I'd say the despair, anxiety, paralysis reached a climax about the age of 10-

Janet: Yep

Josh: when there were times I couldn't function normally because of anxious, worrying thoughts in my head over my-

Janet: Yep

Josh: performance, my righteousness, even over sinful thoughts that I feared I was having. And I don't even know if I've really asked your perspective on this even since giving the lecture, but I'm sure that was not always pleasant to be around when I was-

Janet: But again, for me it was, praying a lot of, "How do I help him to see we all sin, go to Jesus," but I don't wanna say, "It's not that big a deal." I really wrestled with that.

Josh: Attention.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: Yeah, and so my dad had to give me essentially formal biblical counseling at 10-

Janet: Yep.

Josh: Where we worked through the book *In The Arena of the Mind* where I had to learn how to take my thoughts captive. And I said when I gave the session, and I think Dad would agree with it, that he probably would counsel me even a little differently today-

Janet: I think he would

Josh: than he would back then.

Janet: If we understood it better, we wouldn't have gone straight to that, but yes.



Josh: And he's just more gospel-centered in his counseling today, period-

Janet: Yes.

Josh: As he's grown and as God has deepened him.

Janet: That's right.

Josh: But what I understood at that time is I have to think on what is true. That's the first command in Philippians 4:8, "Finally my brethren, think on what is true." You can't just let your thoughts be filled with false things. But I still didn't have a good understanding on how the gospel-

Janet: Yep.

Josh: The righteousness that clothes us as a result of our relationship with Jesus can free a person from the roots of what was causing this kind of, you could call it obsessive kind of behavior.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: So I'm just gonna fast-forward. I had good junior high school years. But it was after high school there was a period where I noticed the tendency coming back in a different way. I began to struggle with doubt about my faith-

Janet: Yep

Josh: as I went to Purdue for my college years. It really wasn't that there were other religions that were more compelling to me, like I feel like I believe this other thing more. It wasn't even that I wanted to go sin in a particular way. So I wanted to rebel and find a reason to doubt my faith, 'cause I think that's also pretty common in college-aged students.

Josh: I just wanna do something, so I'll find a reason to doubt. But really instead it was for me, I realized for the first time that there were questions about my faith I didn't know the answers to, or at least that I didn't have deep convictions about the answers that I did know.

Janet: Yep.



Josh: And then when I would come across a question I didn't know the answer to, or even if I knew the answer, I didn't feel confident that I believed that answer with conviction. And I started to become paralyzed by anxiety again.

Janet: And I wonder if that's... I don't know if that's common with people with this kind of moral anxiety.

Josh: Religious anxiety, yeah.

Janet: But you were always a thinker, and because of that I think that you believed you needed to understand everything and know exactly what was right and exactly what was true at all times.

Josh: And even feel a certain way about it. Ultimately-

Janet: Wow. Added to that.

Josh: Yeah, and It really wasn't, yeah, and it really wasn't even so much an intellectual reality, 'cause most of the time I could give you the answer of what was true about it or at least to some level, like I know what the right answer is. But even if I didn't feel convinced, like-

Janet: Interesting.

Josh: Like maybe a Christian should, or it became all about even my performance on what I believe.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: Like when a question would roll across my head, and again, silly questions. Where's electricity in the Bible? As I'm studying electrical engineering. Does God talk about this area? How can some of my non-believing classmates and professors be nice when they don't know the Lord? There's some nice ones. And I would know the answers to those. Those, like those are silly questions. But if I didn't feel confident in my ability to answer it, like I have a conviction.

Janet: Yeah

Josh: I'm standing strong on it, then that question could stay with me for hours, souring my spirit-

Janet: Wow



Josh: where I'd anxiously try to come up with a reason that I could answer that question until I felt enough conviction about the answer.

Janet: Wow, so you're trying to talk yourself into feeling something.

Josh: Yeah, it really was about, again, evaluating my response, evaluating my performance. Not really even about the intellectual question so much as evaluating my performance. And, during college, the thing that the Lord used to grow me the most spiritually was my mentor. You prayed for people like this to pour into me.

Janet: We did.

Josh: And he was just my small group leader at the time. He was the pastoral intern over the college ministry when I was in college. Eventually we married sisters, so now we're brothers-in-law. But that wasn't true at the time. But he was mentoring me, essentially counseling me that first year of my college year. And one of the questions he asked me at some point during my freshman year, he said, he asked something like, "Has there ever been a time when you didn't understand something the Bible said, and later you realized that the Bible was right all along?" And I answered No.

Janet: That's crazy.

Josh: Because I had, in my mind, I've always understood everything I've read. And now I'd, either I was incredibly wise- ... beyond all of humanity, and innately understood all the implications of truth.

Janet: You are my child. It's very possible.

Josh: Yeah, it must be. It must be. Or I was a proud boy who had never actually wrestled with hard questions and learned to submit humbly to what the Bible was teaching. But again I think it goes back to a pride, and I must know, and I must even be responding with conviction and have a certain status-

Janet: Yeah

Josh: of my soul that's showing what kind of a person I am as opposed to humbly just submitting to what God says and rejoicing in His truth and just not even thinking about myself.

Josh: And one time, again, just another story to help give hope-



Janet: Yep

Josh: and show kinda where it was for me. One time during my freshman year, I was agonizing over something like that, my doubts or anxiety over the fact that I was even having doubts. That all can spiral down.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: And I was in the library at the pharmacy building at Purdue, which I don't even think exists anymore, and my mental wrestling was so physically obvious that an older girl I had never met came over to me and said something like, "You seem to be in distress. Are you okay?"

Josh: That's embarrassing, right? It's "I'm fine. Yeah, just leave me alone. I'm fine." But it just shows-

Janet: I'm sure she thought it was a breakup.

Josh: Or maybe "There's this freshman boy, he must be homesick. Somebody needs to go be his friend." No, I live here. And so I don't know what she was thinking. But the point is that was the level- ... of wrestling, agonizing, ultimately not about beliefs or intellectual problems, but really over the evaluation of my own performance, of resulting in a kind of religious anxiety. And again, over the course of my college years, I had to learn that truth has to ground my life, rather than feelings.

Janet: Yep.

Josh: But I still don't think I understood why I was battling that kind of anxiety, what some of the roots were, and how the gospel can permeate to the level of the roots of my heart-

Janet: Yeah

Josh: to solve some of the bends in my soul, to help it be more Jesus-centered. So kinda fast-forward now to even more the beginning of my pastoring years to give just a couple more examples of what it looks like now.

Josh: I don't struggle with doubts in exactly that same way, at that same level as I did. But anxiety can come up in different ways.

Janet: Yep.



Josh: As my responsibilities have grown now that I'm a pastor and in my family, now that I'm a husband and a dad, where especially the consequences could be great, especially in the eyes of other people. I have noticed anxiety in those areas of my life and performance in those areas. So one of the things, especially even a couple of years ago I really could fear the shame that would take place if I were to disqualify myself from ministry.

Janet: Yeah. Yeah

Josh: or hurt my wife or daughter deeply in an irreparable way.

Josh: And you're supposed to have a level of healthy fear of going off the track, but it's a little different than that.

Janet: Yeah

Josh: even to a level that's not right. When I would notice an angry thought towards my wife or daughter, then there were times I could obsess over that thought. Did I really think that? And was I really angry? That wasn't anger, was it? Or, as I'm changing my daughter's diaper, did I hold her too hard? Am I hurting her? Oh, if I were to abuse her, that would be so awful, and so on. Just that level of anxious, running down the path kinda thinking that again, is not true, but evaluating my own performance to try to prove that I'm doing okay.

Josh: Or if I noticed a thought that might've been lustful, did I just have that thought? What was it I thought again? Was it really sinful? How bad was it? Oh, disqualifying myself from ministry would be so bad. Do I have another job I could get, and so on.

Janet: Wow.

Josh: Just obviously, escalation.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: Zero to 100. That's not holiness. That's not righteousness. So there's something off. Again a sinful, obsessive, intrusive thoughts

Janet: Yeah

Josh: producing a level of anxiety, especially over areas where the consequences could potentially be so severe. So I feel like that gives a good enough picture.



Janet: Yes.

Josh: Of kinda what it could look like and what it has looked like in my life.

Josh: And I just wanna share, and maybe some of this relates with you as you're listening. Maybe it just gives you insight and you've talked with people who think similar to that. Regardless, I wanna bring it back now. Instead, how have I counseled myself over the years? Especially over the last couple of years, maybe three or so years, as I've tried to systemize some of this to, in order to think through carefully, how does the scriptures and especially the gospel help us understand and ultimately repent of what the sin problem is, producing that kind of a anxiety?

Janet: Which is fascinating, 'cause there was something you needed to repent of, but it probably wasn't what you were-

Josh: Exactly

Janet: trying to repent of.

Josh: And that's gonna be coming, but you're absolutely right. And I can't say that exactly what I'm gonna be describing of how I'm counseling myself is exactly how it looks in the life of every other person who maybe has

Janet: That's right

Josh: these types of anxiety. I can only speak for myself, but there are some general patterns, biblical truths that are applicable to all of us

Janet: Yes

Josh: at various levels. And then you can apply it to your own life or people you're talking to in a way that's specific to them. So I have six principles here that I'm gonna talk through.

Josh: But number one, the Christian life should not be characterized by fear and worry, but by joy and peace. Can I say that one more time? 'Cause it may

Janet: Yes



Josh: sound intuitive. But for a person who struggles with self-righteous anxiety, saying it out loud is important. The Christian life should not be characterized by fear and worry, but by joy and peace.

Janet: So at least it tells me if I don't know anything else, if I am not at least in general, not every minute of every day, characterized by a growing joy and peace, but instead there's enslaving fear and worry, I already know something's wrong.

Josh: Yeah, 'cause one of the biggest-

Janet: This is not godly.

Josh: That's right, because one of the biggest traps in this way of thinking is that it feels like it's the right thing to do.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: How could it be wrong for me to be considering what pleases God? And even sometimes I catch myself, the thought that my mind immediately goes to is what's pleasing to God, what's pleasing to God, what's pleasing to God? Which is, we teach that to people. That's what you should be thinking.

Janet: That, that's a good thing.

Josh: But that can quickly pivot into just, am I doing the right thing? Am I doing the right thing?

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: Am I doing the right thing? And again, one of the traps in this kind of self-righteous anxiety is believing or feeling like this is the right thing to do.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: And when I've given into anxiety, that belief that this is the right thing to do is what leads me to perpetuate into that cycle of anxiety and just poring over self-analysis

Janet: Yeah



Josh: and continuing to give in to that. But listen, let me just share a couple of scriptures on how, what the gospel should produce in our life. And there's two significant passages that I think are two of the most important, at least in my life and in dealing with this area, in Philippians 3 and Philippians 4.

Josh: But just listen to how, before we even get into the meat of those passages, the lead-off statement on what Paul says. Philippians 3:1, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." "Boast in Jesus. Rejoice in the Lord."

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: And the full section of Philippians 3 is gonna be so helpful in how our righteousness comes from Him and not ourselves, but just for right now, just consider how it starts. "Rejoice in the Lord."

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: Or again, Philippians 4, it's gonna go into, "Don't be anxious," but before it even gets there, the command is, "Rejoice in the Lord always." "Again, I say, rejoice. Let your gentle spirit or your reasonableness," like just a composure and reasonableness in your spirit, "be known to all men." That's not what moral anxiety looks like-

Janet: no

Josh: of a rejoicing in the Lord, a composure, a gentleness in spirit. In the very next verse we're gonna talk about later, it condemns anxiety, but first we're just noticing here the command is if we're living gospel, if we're relating to Jesus and His commands rightly with the Spirit, approaching the Lord in the correct way, and approaching our life with the help of the Spirit and the Word, it's gonna look like this: rejoicing, composure a peace.

Josh: Or another verse that's just been so helpful for me in 2 Timothy 1, "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity or fear, but the spirit He has given us is one of power, and love and discipline.

Josh: So it's power, the ability to do something. You can say what is it the power to do?" It's not to go do a miracle or to do all these crazy things. It's power defined by the next two words, the ability to genuinely love somebody else, and discipline, or ESV translates that word self-control, or one lexicon helps kinda explain that, to behave in a sensible manner with the implication of thoughtful awareness of what is best. Is that what moral anxiety looks like?



Janet: Not at all.

Josh: No. And God's not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, the ability to genuinely love and to have a thoughtful awareness of what's best. So here's the point. If my dominant experience is one of fear, anxiety, discouragement, walking on eggshells trying to avoid sin, then there's something wrong.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: That is not gospel.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: Because God says the gospel provides me the resources to walk a life of rejoicing, a life of power, which is characterized by love and sensible discipline. And I think that can be a good starting place, either into your own heart or if you're talking with somebody who just feels trapped in this kind of introspective, anxious thinking.

Josh: 'Cause if you come in saying, "Is there something wrong?" That either might, could feed into, "Of course there's something wrong. That's why I'm thinking about it," or, "It feels like the right thing to do, to have this kind of anxious thinking about my performance. It feels like the right thing to do," and they're gonna resist that.

Josh: But if you can come in instead by asking a question, something like, "Are you experiencing the joy and rest Jesus promises to His children?"

Josh: Jesus says those He sets free are truly free. Do you believe you're experiencing the joy and freedom that the gospel promises? No? It doesn't sound like that to me, either.

Josh: Are you open to considering that you may need to change some of the fundamental ways you're approaching the Christian life? And that kind of a compassionate starting place, that the gospel promises a better way could be a good way to kinda gain a hearing.

Janet: And I think that's so hopeful, because when you're stuck in it, you're like, "I'm trying to do the right thing, I think."

Josh: Right.



Janet: And I'm so stuck, and I'm so stuck," and for you to just say, "Here's what's promised, and if you're not experiencing that, then at a root level, fundamental level, maybe we can look at things differently," I think to me that would be like, I would love that.

Josh: And if somebody has the humility, then, to recognize something's wrong, I need to consider changing something-

Janet: Yeah

Josh: and then ultimately, then these next points will be, how do you get to a deeper level rather than the things that they're focused on?

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: And then they're gonna have to be willing to go there. But at least starting with something's wrong because the gospel should not be producing this-

Janet: Yeah

Josh: is at least a good start.

Josh: Okay, number two, and this goes to what you were talking about before, of the tension between I don't wanna tell them it's not a big deal-

Janet: Yes

Josh: but something definitely off. So number two, helping the scrupulous person, it involves broadening and refocusing their perspective, not dismissing or belittling.

Janet: I like that

Josh: So helping the scrupulous person, what are you supposed to do? It's broadening, refocusing their perspective. The point is not to just dismiss or belittle. So a morally anxious person, they're regularly gonna make mountains out of molehills. It's ridiculous for me to ask the question while I'm studying electrical engineering technology, "Where's electricity in the Bible?" Or wondering if I'm abusing my daughter while I'm changing her diaper. That's ridiculous.

Janet: It's just not reality.



Josh: Yeah, and if you're talking to somebody like that, then the temptation might be to just dismiss those concerns-

Janet: Yes

Josh: or to try to argue or convince your counselee that those aren't a big deal, that they're not significant.

Janet: And they may want to hear that. "I want you to help me to not worry about this, so if you tell me, 'No, I know you didn't do that. I know you wouldn't do that,' there's..." I don't know what that does to you, but I would think the tension of I want you to be right, but I'm not sure you are.

Josh: Yeah, it-

Janet: I think I could do it or whatever

Josh: Yeah, that's absolutely right. I have found a temptation in my accountability relationships to use it... you saw how Martin Luther used his confessional, as a place of-

Janet: Yes

Josh: self-justification.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: So there's a reality to where I face the temptation. A lot of people, you have to force them to be open in accountability relationships. That has not tended to be my struggle. I tend to want to use accountability relationship to say, be super open. "Here's where I'm at, and I want you to tell me that I'm okay and doing a-

Janet: Yes

Josh: good job with it." So if you're gonna try to convince me that my worry is not a big deal, actually, what are you doing? Feeding the self-righteousness.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: Because-



Janet: Yes

Josh: I'm wanting somebody to tell me, "You're doing fine. You're righteous. This is not a big deal."

Janet: Oh, good. Oh, good. Yes.

Josh: Oh, good. Okay, phew. I can take a breath then. But in reality, you're feeding the heart, which is gonna be one of our later points, of what the heart is of this kind of scrupulous anxiety.

Josh: But if you just dismiss it, if you just belittle it, you're validating their idolatry of wanting to feel justified in themselves. And that's not helpful in making them more holy.

Janet: Right.

Josh: Me using accountability relationships as a confessional is not helpful to actually making me more holy.

Janet: That's right.

Josh: So instead of just dismissing or belittling moral worries over little things- The counselor or the friend, the accountability partner, whoever it is, their job is to help broaden and refocus the counselee on the real issues that are truly there at that moment. Their heart's being revealed.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: So that becomes the issue to address, and you have to fight the tendency to stay focused on the scruples that the counselee is hyper-focused on, 'cause that's where they're gonna wanna bring you back to.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: 'Cause that is what is the bee in their bonnet making them not feel confident about themselves, and they wanna hear you say, "Yeah, you're doing just fine." And you have to fight that temptation to redirect them to the weightier matters that God cares more about. And there's one passage in particular that I think is so helpful for that. If you think about a group of people that you could say, "This is the self-righteous people of the New Testament," it'd pretty obviously be



Janet: the Pharisees

Josh: the Pharisees. And Jesus rebukes them actually for their scrupulosity at one point, and what it reveals-

Janet: Oh, wow

Josh: about their hearts. In Matthew 23:23-24, and I want you to hear how He then rebukes them, what He's actually rebuking them for, what He ties it back to, 'cause Jesus says, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

Josh: For you tithe mint and dill and cumin." You're taking the herbs that you put on your food and you tithe of them. That feels pretty scrupulous.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: But you've neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. But these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel."

Josh: Okay, so a couple just thoughts from here. Number one, Jesus didn't dismiss their preoccupation with little issues, like-

Janet: No, He actually says, "Without neglecting those things."

Josh: Yeah, it's like you actually should do that.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: So God cares about holiness in all areas of life.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: Jesus doesn't come in and say that's not a big deal. Don't worry about tithing on every little thing." No, He says you gotta care about holiness in every area of your life. So if our primary attitude towards moral issues is ever dismissive, I think we're not in the right place, 'cause God cares about every moral issue.



Josh: But second thought here from the verse, Jesus introduces the category of weightier matters that God cares about.

Janet: Not everything is of the same level with God.

Josh: God cares about everything, but He doesn't care about everything equally. Yeah, exactly.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: There's some things He cares more about. And if we want to be godly, like God, then we are gonna care more about the issues that God cares more about, and we will care less about the issues that are not as weighty. That makes sense?

Janet: Yep.

Josh: So then here's the third thought from this verse. Jesus calls them hypocrites. Those who hypocritically are hyper-focused on the lesser matters of the law, the small stuff, will inevitably start missing the big stuff.

Josh: You only have a finite amount of time, energy, thoughts to spend in a given day, and every moment that I spend worrying about a lesser matter, I'm not spending that moment considering a greater matter. I'm neglecting a weightier matter, which will inevitably result in me being a hypocrite, acting like I care about the things God cares about, when really I'm missing the point to begin with.

Josh: So just to give you an example, again, consider me changing my daughter's diaper, feeling some anger in my heart. You can call it frustration, which is really just another word for low-grade anger, because she's wiggling and not helping me, and I'm trying to change her diaper, and then I start to get overwhelmed by fear that I might be too rough with her as I'm changing her diaper. Oh, my goodness. Is my anger coming out?

Josh: Ah. Am I abusing my daughter? And one time I confessed that worry to my wife "Man, I'm just, I'm str- struggling with these thoughts," and she responded incredibly helpfully to me. She could have said, "Josh, that's ridiculous. Get over yourself. Just do it. You gotta be a dad." She could have said, "No, Josh, you're a great dad. You would never hurt our daughter. You're just wonderful. Thank you for doing that. Can you go do it again?" Or whatever. And both of those would be okay, but what she actually said, I don't even think she... I've told her she said this. She doesn't even remember saying it. But what she actually said was, "Josh, I can tell you you're not abusing our daughter, but if you have anger in your heart, you need to deal with it."



Josh: And that response answered my worry with truth. It's okay, you're, yeah, that's just not true. But then it redirected me to focus on what God actually cared about in that moment, which is the state of my heart. If I'm getting frustrated-

Janet: I just need to confess

Josh: yeah, I need to deal with that, and I needed to own that. "Yeah, Lord, please meet me in my moment of need here and help me even at a heart level respond rightly," rather than responding with anxiety over what may or may not be the case or whatever.

Janet: As if it's shocking that I could have anger in my heart, then that makes me-

Josh: Exactly. Exactly

Janet: instead of being just like here we are, and Lord, I need your help." Yeah.

Josh: Exactly. Redirecting to the weightier matters. 'Cause I think scrupulous counselees will resist going to the issues of the heart and instead stay hyper-focused on the things that they feel like they can control of certain actions or behaviors, and you have to push past that to what God actually cares about, the weightier matters.

Josh: As counselors, as friends, our job is to redirect to the weightier matters, 'cause that's actually where our neediness is gonna be exposed too

Janet: Yes

Josh: and the gospel becomes sweet 'cause we recognize I have heart issues every moment of every day, and that's where the gospel-

Janet: Yes

Josh: becomes sweet. I have to rely on grace.

Janet: And I can't fix it myself.

Josh: I have to rely on grace.

Janet: We're beyond my ability



Josh: Where if I stay focused on the little behaviors, I still actually am not in control, but I might have a greater misconception that I can control this-

Janet: Yes - There's an illusion of control. Yeah

Josh: and stay focused on my own abilities where there's no hope there, as if my moral effort could produce something. So number one, the gospel should produce freedom, not enslavement, joy, not anxiety. Number two, our job is to redirect and broaden perspective, not to dismiss or belittle. Number three, just kinda just diagnosing the problem still, moral anxiety is a sinful response to real or perceived sin, and can actually lead to further sin.

Janet: That's interesting. So there might be sin but the anxiety is a sinful response to my sin.

Josh: And it actually can lead to further sin.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: Which we'll get to, and I recognize that's a heavy sentence.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: If somebody comes to you and said, "I'm really struggling with concerns," I don't think you lead in by saying you're sinning even more."

Janet: It's probably worse than you think.

Josh: And now you might actually be getting more sinful because you're doing this with this anxiety. You might not start there, but you have to be able to recognize, what is the real issue I need to repent of? And it's actually my moral anxiety. So again let's kinda contrast here the right response to when we see sin in our life versus the sinful response-

Janet: Okay

Josh: sinfully anxious response, to kinda consider the differences. So again, if you go to Philippians 4 the command is, "Rejoice in the Lord always." In the very next verse it says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God, which will guard your hearts and your minds."



Josh: The Biblical response to life is to have joy, drawing near to the Lord through prayer over my concerns. When the morally anxious person perceives a sin in their life and begins to fixate on it, who are they talking to? When I'm struggling with my moral anxiety, am I having a genuine, thankful, humble conversation with my Savior? Definitely not.

Janet: Right.

Josh: From my experience, the answer is no. I'm talking to myself in those moments.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: Or even more accurately, I'm really just listening to myself and letting myself tell myself what might be the problem, and none of that has to do with the right response of joyful, prayerfully, thankfully running to the Lord with my concerns.

Josh: So you can start to see a little bit of the picture of the two correct responses to life, but let's push a little bit further. When you see genuine sin in your life, what's the right way to respond?

Janet: Scripture is clear. What is the right way to respond? I repent.

Josh: Repentance, yeah, exactly.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: That's the right response.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: A passage like Romans 8 would tell you that we're under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. If you're living according to the flesh, you must die, but if by the Spirit you're putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. If you see the deeds of the body in your life-

Janet: I kill it

Josh: You put it to death by the power of the Spirit.

Janet: Yep.



Josh: And that's actually true whether it's genuine sin already in your life, which would be like Romans 8, you see the deeds of the body in your life, or even if it's just a temptation towards sin, the response is the same.

Josh: And you could go to a place like 1 Corinthians 10:13 and 14 to talk about that. That's talking about external temptations to sin, where God says you never have to give in, and the right response in verse 14, "Therefore, flee from idolatry."

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: Referring to right in the context of external temptations to sin from verse 13, the right response is flee. Run from it.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: So whether it's seeing real deeds of the flesh in your life that you're actually already starting to participate in sin, the right response is repent. Or whether it's just a temptation to sin that you're experiencing, the response is the same. You flee. You turn from it. And I think that helps answer one of the questions people can have, and that I've had, about the idea of, quote-unquote, "intrusive thoughts," thoughts that just spring into my mind that seem to have no direct connection to either what I'm wanting or my conscious decisions.

Josh: And I have had the thought, and I know that scrupulous counselees will just wanna fixate on was that sinful? Did I sin?

Janet: Yes. Cause I need to know, do I need to repent, or was that something I'm not responsible for? Yes.

Josh: Yes. Am I culpable for that?

Janet: Am I wrong? Yep.

Josh: And there's a reality in which that's an important question to know, do I need to repent of this?

Josh: So I recognize how there's some merit to asking that. But in the context of sinful anxiety over my moral performance, I don't think that's the most important question to answer because of what we've already talked about. If it was genuine sin, then I repent.



Janet: Yes.

Josh: If it was not genuine sin and it was just a temptation, then I turn from it and run the other way.

Janet: Which is repent.

Josh: Which is basically repent. Even if I'm not there yet, I'm still repenting. I'm still turning from it.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: But a scrupulous person, because they long to be justified in themselves, then they have to know, was that sinful or am I good?

Janet: That's so interesting 'cause I have had to say to some people that I work with, I really have no idea." There's some complicated situations that people have brought to me that I would have to tell you, even in thinking it through, I don't know. Were they responsible? I don't know. And if- there's this. There's that. Were you even... Yeah. And we've said, "You know what? Here's the good news. Whatever God shows you that you know is sin, you confess. You acknowledge that this was wrong, whether it was yours-

Josh: Yeah

Janet: or not, and you turn from it," and I don't know the answer to that. And I didn't put it in the context of this, but that's the same thing. It's like-

Josh: Absolutely.

Janet: I don't know, but I'm gonna just turn from it and I'm gonna say, "Lord, This is it. I don't even know."

Josh: But if your heart is longing to rest in your own ability to be right-

Janet: Then that's not okay ...

Josh: then you can't get there. Yeah. Yeah, because you have to know I'm right, I'm okay. Or if I'm not okay, what do I do to get okay?



Janet: Yes.

Josh: But if I'm just resting on-

Janet: Fascinating ...

Josh: and this is gonna be future points I talk about in just a couple minutes, but if I'm just resting on the beauty of what Jesus did for me, then I don't have to know all the answers to all of that,

Janet: that's right.

Josh: 'cause whatever I was culpable for, Jesus is gonna forgive it. And I repent of what I know, but I'm not resting even on my own ability to confess everything appropriately.

Janet: Oh, there's so much I don't even know about my own heart.

Josh: Exactly. We sin every day in ways we don't know. And whatever I'm not culpable for, praise God, and I just get to move on in the grace and strength he gives me, but I don't have to know the answer to that.

Josh: But if I'm longing to rest in my own moral effort and ability to be right before God on my own standing, self-righteously, then I'm gonna have to know, I'm gonna wanna know, was that sinful or not?

Janet: Yes.

Josh: So that I show that I'm okay, or if I'm not okay, how do I get okay with God?

Josh: There's a saying attributed all the way back to even Martin Luther, and one of our former senior pastors used to say it, too, "You can't stop a bird from flying over your head, but you can stop it from making a nest in your hair." And the-

Janet: Yes

Josh: practical point, I don't know whether that initial thought was sinful or not, but I'm gonna turn from it and-

Janet: We're not making a nest



Josh: not worry about it now. Exactly. But so contrast that. That's biblical repentance: turning from it, repent asking forgiveness if I know I did something wrong, and then moving forward, putting on the new man, turning from it. Contrast that with instead the sinful worry approach. When I perceive a sin in my life, if I'm not turning from it with biblical repentance, what does sinful worry do in respond instead?

Josh: You mentioned it, but it can respond with surprise and shock. "I can't believe I would think something like that."

Janet: Yes. Yes.

Josh: "I can't believe I'd want that. What does that say about me as a person?" Or maybe it responds with anxiety about the potential consequences- of people finding out about the sin, or about the potential consequences if I don't handle it rightly. What if that thought were to be found out? What if I didn't handle it right and it escalated? What if," and insert your worst fear there. That's not repentance. Or maybe a sinful anxiety, it responds with comparing my sin to other people.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: To see if it's reasonable or if I'm just some kind of moral monster. Other people say they struggle like this. I've heard somebody else say they have had that thought before, so I guess I'm okay."

Janet: Must not be a big deal.

Josh: Must be okay. Yeah. "Oh, my goodness, I'm worse than everybody I know. How could I be so wicked? I've never heard anybody say that thought before."

Josh: None of those responses of being anxious over consequences, comparing myself to other people, being shocked about my sin or potential to sin, none of that is genuine repentance. None of that is flowing from the gospel of grace that owns how wicked I am and that I have the ability through Jesus to turn from and walk in newness of life.

Josh: That is all sinful, self-focused attempts at self-justification. That becomes what I need to repent of, is this anxious response- rather than perhaps what I'm focused on in the first place and anxious over. The anxiety itself becomes what I need to turn from. And it helps when you can draw out those lines and see the distinction between what anxiety looks like versus what genuine repentance looks like, so you can honestly look at it and say, "Boy, anxiety itself is sin.



Josh: That becomes my enemy. My enemy is not messing up in all these little areas. My enemy now, to my soul, is this anxiety that I need to rely on God's grace to turn from."

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: And just one other kind of insight, the response, when I'm responding that way to real or perceived sins with moral anxiety, it actually can lead me deeper into sin, not into holiness.

Janet: In which way?

Josh: Which might be obvious, but... So just think about that quote again. You can't stop a bird from flying over your head, but you can stop it from making a nest in your hair. When I'm worrying about my sinful thoughts, desires, and actions, what am I doing? I'm allowing it to build a nest in my hair. It's sticking there.

Janet: Now I am sinning. Whether I was before, I don't know. Now I am.

Josh: It becomes a lot more clear.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: I may not be able to be judged with absolute certainty whether or not a random thought qualifies as a culpable, lustful thought that I have. I might not know for sure. But I can have a whole lot more certainty about the purity of the following thoughts if I d-

Janet: Excellent

Josh: if I dwell on and just keep evaluating that initial one over and over again. It just becomes a lot clearer. Yeah. This is not helping me be more holy. Or again, I might not be able to give the final verdict on how bad my initial angry impulse was towards my wife or daughter, but I can tell you that I get a lot more irritable towards them in general when I'm allowing worry and anxiety to dominate my mind.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: Then I am becoming more and more irritable and angry because I'm just worrying in my mind. Self-centered, gospel-devoid responses, they can't produce God's righteousness. Man's effort cannot produce God's righteousness. They're only gonna lead to further sin. And Paul actually makes this super clear in Colossians 2:20-23.



Josh: He shows the emptiness of just man-centered effort, self-justifying approaches like, "I can just make myself more holy. If I just put enough effort in, if I just am anxious enough about it I can do it." Paul says, "If you've died with Christ to the elemental principles of the world, why as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees like, 'Don't handle, don't taste, don't touch,' in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?"

Josh: If you're already been set free from that in, in Jesus, why do you go back to all these rules of all these moral effort ways that this is how you can make yourself right with God? And Paul says, "These are matters which have to be sure the appearance of wisdom." And I think scrupulous people get that. It feels right when I'm-

Janet: Yes

Josh: living this rule-centered way.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: It feels right. In self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body. And I even think sometimes moral anxiety can even be a form of penance that I do to myself after I think I may have sinned in a particular way.

Janet: Yes

Josh: It's almost gotta do my time with-

Janet: I'm gonna make up for it

Josh: with worrying about it. And I don't know that most moral anxious people would think directly that way, but it becomes like a form of penance. Severe treatment of the body.

Janet: And I feel like it can be a form of this is how I acknowledge that sin is serious. If I just-

Josh: I'm gonna prove it by doing this.

Janet: Yeah by being upset-

Josh: Yep.

Janet: And anxious. That means, Yes, I do take sin seriously.



Josh: Yes. That's right. And sometimes even when I've experienced freedom, like I've repented, turned from it, and I just feel a lightness, and I think, "Oh, something must be wrong. I must not be, like, doing this rightly 'cause I feel free."

Janet: Yes. Yes.

Josh: So anxiety, self-made religion, severe treatment of the body. It has the appearance of wisdom, but listen to how Paul ends that verse. But all of that is of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Janet: Wow.

Josh: It doesn't make me more holy. It doesn't make me more righteous. Man-centered ways cannot produce God's righteousness. It appears wise, but it actually is of no value against fleshly indulgence. It actually contributes towards further sinfulness.

Josh: So that was number three of moral anxiety is sin. It's a simple response, and it can lead to further sin.

Josh: So number four, like, why do we even do it in the first place? We've been talking about it already, but just to be super clear, number four, moral anxiety grows in the soil of self-righteousness and the desire for self-justification before men. That's what produces it.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: So it grows in the soil of self-righteousness, which is really the desire for self-justification before men.

Josh: We can't stop in the land of actions and words. As good biblical counselors, you have to push all the way back into the idols and desires of the heart.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: And Jesus does that with the Pharisees in another passage that really stuck out to me when I studied it, even as I was preparing this lecture, whatever that was, a year and a half ago. Came across this verse and thought, "Wow, Jesus really diagnoses some of the heart problem of the Pharisees." In Luke 16, when Jesus says to the Pharisees, it's at verse 15, "You are those," talking to the Pharisees, "who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts." "For that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God."



Josh: The Pharisees sought to justify themselves, which that word just really means show, demonstrate that they were righteous, morally excellent, good people. They wanted to prove that.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: And they wanted to do it in the sight of men. They wanted to show other people that they were worthy.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: And that's even goes into comparing themselves with other people.

Josh: So just a couple thoughts here, again, as I draw some implications even from this verse. First, as I dig into my sinful worries when I'm agonizing over my morality, every sinful worry can pretty easily be traced back to a desire to justify myself, to feel confident in my own goodness, my own righteousness.

Josh: So examples, why would I have to know whether or not a thought was sinful? Because I wanna be able to justify myself. Why would I obsess over how bad a particular sin is? Because I wanna be able to justify myself and know how bad it really was and how bad I'm not. Why would worry become a form of penance where I force myself to go through mental discomfort after I think I may have perceived sin in my life?

Josh: Because I wanna be able to justify myself, and that desire is inherently anti-gospel. That's pride, and that's where I have to counsel myself to, to get past the actual thoughts or actions I'm worried about, to get to the root of sinful anxiety, to recognize my heart right now is longing to be justified before God and others that I'm a good person. That's what I have to recognize is going on.

Janet: And what I think is, as you're saying that, and I'm like, wow, and it's... I believe God designed us to have that longing.

Josh: For justification. Yeah.

Janet: Yes. Yes. And so it's yes I do long for that, and I'm saying, "I will not just accept that Jesus did it for me." I will not. I must do it."



Josh: Because And this was even preached, Pastor Greg just a couple days ago at our sermon at Faith East, that being justified according to the flesh, like that self-righteousness, thinking there's something I can do, that's attractive to every single one of us.

Janet: Yes, absolutely it is. It appeals.

Josh: It appeals to our pride. And if we think, "I'm not tempted by that," then you're not seeing it in your life.

Janet: Mine just looks different.

Josh: Yeah. Not everybody's gonna be like-

Janet: Yep.

Josh: Scrupulous, morally anxious. But self-righteousness, a desire to prove yourself or to add to or contribute to your own salvation in some way, that's attractive and appealing to all of us.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: And if you get stuck in the things that a scrupulous person is anxious about, and you don't get to that level of right now your heart is longing to be clothed in your own righteousness- you're longing to be seen as good and worthy in and of your own moral effort, and that's what you can be free from and repent of.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: And if you can't get to that level, you're gonna miss the root of why you're there in the first place.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: And just a second observation, again, the justification is in the sight of men. For a long time I didn't believe that fear of man was closely related to my moral anxiety. I even said it in the beginning of my testimony where I would act the same way regardless of who was around.

Janet: That's right.



Josh: It wasn't like I was trying to impress a certain person. That almost feels more like fear of man, if I'm two-faced, it depends on who's around me. So how could fear of man be related? But it was around, six years ago now, five, five or six years ago, where I was meeting with my accountability partner, who's now a pastor on staff with me, but we were just interns at the time. And he was pressing me, how do you come up with the standards that you hold yourself to?" Because you could be anxious about literally any decision you make in your life, but there's certain ones that I was anxious about, only certain ones.

Janet: Interesting.

Josh: Like, how are you getting those standards? And I think that can be a helpful question, too, of asking, like, why is that the thing you're anxious about?

Janet: Yes.

Josh: 'Cause it could be anything. There's so many things in your life you could be anxious about. We make hundreds of decisions every day, but why is that the thing you're anxious about? And eventually I realized I was comparing myself with the people around me to come up with those standards.

Josh: If someone else I esteem would admit that they were struggling with something, then I don't worry as much about that one.

Josh: But if a particular struggle could lead to public shame, like people would see something wrong in me, then I'd struggle with worry a lot in that area. So just to summarize that maybe helpful point, you show me a scrupulous Christian, and I'll show you a Christian who habitually cares more about men's opinion than God's opinion.

Janet: And they don't see that.

Josh: No.

Janet: 'Cause it seems spiritual-

Josh: Yes

Janet: what you're doing. Fascinating.



Josh: But if you were to really focus on God's opinion and you were to allow the Spirit to help broaden your perspective on really how God views you- Then that really would force you to run for refuge in the only place you got. You'd either be in-

Janet: 'Cause I have nothing.

Josh: Yeah, and you'd be able to see, yeah, your own moral bankruptcy and your own moral heart-level issues in every decision you make.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: And you'd be having to run for refuge to the gospel to find the joy in there, 'cause you couldn't depend on yourself for it.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: It would lead you to despair if you were to truly see God's perspective. Scrupulous people habitually care more about men's perspective than God's opinion.

Josh: So we can get into some of the solutions now, then. That's a lot of negativity, a lot of- ... problem.

Janet: I'm depressed.

Josh: Yeah. Point number five, the scrupulous counselee must believe that knowing Jesus is better than confidence in the flesh. You have to believe. How do you become free of it? You must believe that knowing Jesus is better than having confidence in the flesh.

Janet: Than even knowing that I have beat my body and I'm so whatever, I'm so self-controlled.

Josh: Yeah, the confidence-

Janet: Jesus is better.

Josh: Exactly, the confidence that if I think there's some confidence in my flesh I can have knowing Jesus is better than that. And if you don't taste and see and believe it by faith, and taste and see over time that's true, then you're not gonna be free from it.



Josh: The scripture that probably would produce the greatest Christlikeness in me if it were to become fully true of me I think would be Philippians 3, which we referenced the beginning part of it earlier.

Janet: Yep.

Josh: Re- rejoice in Jesus. But I wanna kinda walk through it as Paul talks about in his own life how he grew to see and chooses to see how knowing Jesus is better. So again, he starts, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." And I don't think the in the Lord part there is meaningless.

Josh: It's just rejoice, be happy, and I guess 'cause you're a Christian, it's in Jesus. No, No. Exult in Jesus- rejoice in the Lord. Boast in Jesus. That's the command, rejoice in the Lord. Then he goes to the what is one of the threats to our joy? "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision."

Josh: So again, who are those people? Those are people who are saying there's a certain action you can take, or there's something you can contribute that's gonna make you right before the Lord.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: Which that was circumcision back in that day. That's not what we tend to believe is gonna be on our resumes. But that was the threat. Beware of that, for we are the true circumcision. We're the true people of God and what characterizes us? We worship in the Spirit, we glory in Christ Jesus. Which I think is parallel to verse one, rejoice in the Lord. We glory in Christ Jesus. And we put no confidence in the flesh.

Josh: Here's the danger the thief of your joy. We are all gonna be tempted to value certain behaviors that will give you what you think is grounds to have confidence in yourself, or what Paul says, "Confidence in the flesh." Now it's the literal flesh in his immediate context, circumcision, but then he broadens it in his life into eventually anything you can put on your resume of saying, "Here's what makes me right with God."

Janet: Yes.

Josh: That is really what confidence in the flesh means. Not just the physical flesh, any part of what I can contribute to the table. And that way of living, that attitude, puts you at direct odds with true Christian living, worshipping by the Spirit, exalting in Jesus, and putting no confidence in the flesh.



Josh: Here's how Paul broadens it. Paul says, "I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else thinks they can do it, I can do it more."

Janet: Yep.

Josh: I was circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews." In other words, his pedigree of who his family was, which we don't tend to value in our culture as much as-

Janet: But they sure did

Josh: previous cultures did. Absolutely, they sure did. Yeah. In certain ways, we might now. If I was raised by Christians, and they taught me how to be a Christian, so I must be a Christian. We can do that a little bit today, but not as much. But still, pedigree, we can put our confidence there, saying, "This is what makes me right before God."

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: And Paul could do it better than we could. He keeps going. "As to the law, a Pharisee." So as to God's standard of righteousness, I was a teacher of it. I wasn't ignorant. I studied it. So as to my knowledge, I knew it. So a lot of times we can put confidence, like that would probably-

Janet: Yes

Josh: be in some ways the equivalent of my college years of wanting to put confidence in my knowledge or my ability to teach and feel confident in something.

Josh: Paul could do it better. "As to zeal," he keeps going, "a persecutor of the church." I think this one we especially can focus on our culture today. Are you passionate about it? Do you have this drive? Are you responding a certain way? Do you have passion? Paul had more. He was so zealous that he was a persecutor of the church.

Josh: "As to righteousness, which is in the law," Paul says he was found blameless. Is that a morally bad thing, to be found blameless according to the law?

Janet: I don't think so.

Josh: God's law's a good thing. That's not a trick question. No, that's not a trick question. But God's law is a good thing. God's law is things like honor your parents, don't commit adultery,



don't steal. Those are good things. And even all of those good things, the passion you can have for the Lord, the knowledge of the Lord and His ways, doing the things God says to do, my pedigree, my family, my relationships, all of that, even morally good things,

Josh: Paul puts on this list of here's what could be on my resume giving me confidence before the Lord, and then he summarizes it this way: "Whatever things were gain to me" Just think about that. Whatever things used to give me something, used to give me a sense of importance before God and other people, used to contribute to my self-identity, my self-worth, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Josh: My own knowledge of God and His ways, my zeal for the Lord, my ability to obey and do the things God says, when I'm doing it in order to prove myself to God as a resume before Him, I count it as nothing compared to the value of knowing Jesus.

Josh: And Paul broadens it one more time. "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things," those things used to give me something, I've suffered the loss of them. I don't count them anymore. I don't put it on my resume anymore. I intentionally lose it from my life and in my counting of my own identity and self-worth anymore. I've lost it, and I count it as useless or rubbish or dung so that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ.

Josh: Ultimately, the solution to attempts at self-justification, like my moral anxiety, my worrying over my performance, the solution has to be seeing, tasting, believing by faith the surpassing value of knowing Jesus, and the right standing that comes from just knowing Him and being found in Him. If I'm living that way, if I really believe that, if my heart is being trained to value that day by day, moral anxiety can't grow in that kind of soil.

Josh: When I'm really thankful for the gospel, I'm living in the joy of knowing Jesus and what He's done for me, moral anxiety just, it just doesn't flow from that. It can't grow there.

Janet: As you're saying that, and I'm sitting here thinking, what would that look like? So now, if that's where I'm living, and I become aware of a way that I'm sinning, I'm angry or whatever. I run to Jesus With that, I'm not surprised-

Josh: Absolutely

Janet: that I could do it. I don't say it's not a big deal. I just care about Jesus. Absolutely. I just run to him, and then there is joy because, oh, my word, you covered that, too.



Josh: Yeah.

Janet: Oh, my word, look how great you are.

Josh: And that even, if I'm living that way, that even go back to Jesus' parable of the two debtors, one person who owed a lot, one person who owed a little. And when the money lender forgave them both, Jesus' question is, who would love him more? And the kind of one of the takeaways is when you're forgiven much, then you love much.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: So actually, my instance is God can use them. If I'm living in a Jesus-centered, gospel-centered way, and I can ask this to counselees sometimes or help them understand, how did you respond after you sinned?

Josh: Because do you really believe that 'cause of the power of the gospel, God can actually use you giving into sin, which is never a good thing, so it's not like we rationalize that and say, "It must be a good thing." No.

Janet: No.

Josh: But God can use that to actually then help you love him more as a result of it because now I get to taste God's forgiveness at a deeper level. I get to taste God's grace at a deeper level.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: That's what valuing knowing Jesus more means, and then walking in the freedom and joy afterwards, rather than beating myself up or being anxious as a result. I cannot simultaneously be thinking, "Jesus, thank you for seeing the depth of my wickedness, my inability to justify myself, and my neediness, and for loving me by declaring me righteous and adopting me into your family. Thank you for promising that you will hold me fast to the end." And I can't think at the same time, "Was that thought sinful? Oh my goodness, how bad was it? What if other people find out? What might the consequences be? What do I have to do to fix this?" Those attitudes are incompatible.

Janet: And as you say that, I feel like that second one now sounds very horizontal to me.

Josh: Absolutely. I'm talking to myself. I'm listening to myself.



Janet: But, when you said it before- it's oh yeah, I get, yeah, that's the battle. Now I'm like, when you compare that to what you just said-

Josh: Absolutely.

Janet: You see how horizontal that is.

Josh: And shallow.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: We have to pray that God would show us, and anybody in our life that we're helping, the surpassing value of knowing Jesus.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: All the ways I used to justify myself, they're useless. They don't give me anything.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: I wanna know Jesus and be found in him. The gospel has to shape our hearts so that our chief desire is not to do something, is not to accomplish something, but it's to know Jesus, and then certainly live to please him and become like him.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: But it's out of the joy of knowing him because I'm his. And I just want you to think about even how that desire sometimes isn't, even in our Christian way of living I described it before, of sometimes my thoughts and my natural patterns of thinking is this pleasing to Jesus? Is this pleasing to Jesus? Is this pleasing to Jesus? Which really sometimes actually in practice is devoid of thinking about Jesus-

Janet: Yes

Josh: and actually just thinking about, am I doing-

Janet: Me. What am I doing?



Josh: Am I doing the right thing? Am I doing the right thing? Am I doing the right thing? And I was really struck last summer by a sermon from D.A. Carson that I listened to on Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3, where, it's a climax point in the book, where the first three chapters are the gospel indicatives, here's what's true about the gospel. He's about to get into the gospel imperatives, chapters four, five, and six, here's how you live as a result.

Josh: But there's a prayer in the middle of it this is what Paul prays for. And at the end it's a part of the passage we often quote at the end of the prayer, "Now to him who's able to do far more abundantly beyond all we ask or think. But I don't know that we often think about what Paul is actually praying for God's mighty power to do in us.

Josh: And if we think through what we often pray for God's power to do, God accomplish these big things, show this big fruit in our life, our ministries. A scrupulous, morally anxious person will probably pray things like, "Lord, help me not sin today. Lord, protect me from this."

Janet: Yep. Help me do the right thing.

Josh: Help me do the right thing. May your power do greatly beyond all I ask or think so that I can do these things. Protect me from consequences. Even change my heart and help me be more holy, help me do these things. And that's not wrong. We should pray for things like that, but if that's the extent of what we're praying for, I think it can show I've shifted I've lost my first love even to why I should be seeking to live to please Jesus in the first place.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: What does Paul actually pray for that God's power is able to do? Ephesians 3:16, "That God would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power." Oh, my goodness, he's just layering up point after point of, "God, according to the riches of His glory, to strengthen us with power through His Spirit in your inner man."

Josh: What's he gonna do with all this power? "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And that you, being rooted and grounded in love," here's the second request, "may be able to comprehend with all the saints what can't be comprehended, the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know what surpasses knowledge, to know the love of Christ, that you may be filled up to the fullness of God."

Josh: And the analogy that D.A. Carson used isn't Jesus already dwelling in our hearts? Yeah, there's dwelling but then there's dwelling. Noelle and I have lived in the house that we're in for



two years now. We legally lived there as soon as we signed the papers and we closed on the house. But you couldn't really look at the house and say, "Oh, they've dwelled there."

Janet: This looks like them.

Josh: It looks like them. There's a dwelling. We've made memories there. We've changed it the way we like. I just spent a lot of hours over this past weekend putting in a new sink. This is the one my wife wants to have. This actually looks like her now. As we live there, over time, little by little, it begins to look like us, smell like us, for good or for bad. Become like us. We've made memories there. So somebody could look and say, "They've dwelled there." Does Jesus dwell in us day one, as soon as we become Christians?

Josh: Absolutely. But day one, a person really couldn't look at us and say Oh my goodness Jesus is dwelling there. That person smells like Jesus. He looks like Jesus. He thinks like Jesus. He's just oozing Jesus off of him 'cause he spent so much time with him. He's dwelling in his heart so richly and so fully that it's producing something.

Josh: And that, I just don't think is often our burning desire in the Christian life and what we're praying for. Lord, help me experience tangibly your love for me, and come and dwell in me as I encounter you through your Word, through the Church, through spiritual disciplines. Help me encounter you, and may you dwell in me so richly that it's like people would just look at me and say, "Jesus is dwelling in that person."

Josh: And then as a result, I'm gonna live to please him, I'm gonna look like him.

Janet: 'Cause that's part of him dwelling in you.

Josh: Yeah. But it keeps the focus. That's what Paul's praying for. May we know his love. May Jesus dwell in us with ever-increasing richness.

Josh: Then we get to, Lord, then help me live in a way that's more holy. But if we miss that first part, then it's just so shallow if I'm just praying, "Lord, help me do this. Help me be more like this," and it misses the whole point of communing with God, dwelling with God, fellowshiping with God.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: Again, it goes back to the surpassing value of knowing Jesus. Not doing something, but knowing Jesus.



Janet: Yep.

Josh: Okay, that's five thoughts. One more thought. I know we're coming up on time here, but just one more thought here that I've found helpful as we go all the way around, then what is the put on, as I've worked on what I need to put off, what I'm repenting of, moral anxiety. I've thought through what my heart needs to be, the value of knowing Jesus. Now, one more passage that helps me live in such a way where I'm seeking to just only live out of fear of the Lord, not fearing other people. Sixth point, the Christian has only one judge, and it's not myself, as I tend to evaluate myself with moral anxiety. It's not other people. It's Jesus.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: And again, a passage that I found helpful for that, 1 Corinthians 4, where Paul says, "It's a very small thing to me that I may be examined by you or by any human court." And that's just not the world that a morally anxious person lives in. I feel like I'm constantly evaluating myself.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: Feel like I'm constantly being examined by other people, either in my mind, or I'm examining myself. And Paul, he says, "I don't even examine myself." That doesn't mean he didn't follow his conscience. He says, "For I'm conscious of nothing against myself." Yeah, that doesn't make me acquitted. I'm not the judge.

Josh: He has a lower view of himself. I'm not the judge. "The one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore, don't go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the things hidden in darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts." God is a better judge than we are.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: He sees all the way down. "And then each man's praise will come to him from God." It'd be fair to say that morally anxious people tend to function as though they're constantly in a human court, constantly evaluating-

Janet: Yes.

Josh: Constantly considering what others' judgments would be or what my judgments are. But when I do that, I have far too big a view of myself and other people, and I'm taking the place of the one true judge, the only one whose opinion truly matters, the only one who sees all things, all



actions, all thoughts, all motives. But the hope is that judge has already declared me righteous because of my faith in Jesus.

Josh: He's already justified me, and now that judge stands as my loving Father, being for me. He certainly offers corrective discipline, but all of that is for my good, standing ready to reward my weak acts of faithfulness. So the solution then, as I'm valuing knowing Jesus and seeking to walk in obedience, now I just gotta get out of the human courtroom. I gotta stop seeking to justify myself to myself or to anybody else. There's only one judge.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: And there's been several times when I've started to feel a weight of panic over some anxiety related to other people's opinion of me, whether it's a specific person or just, people in general, and I stopped and just thought about the day when I stand before Jesus, giving an account of my actions. And I just thought to myself, "Where is that person gonna be whose opinion really feels like it matters a lot to me right now? On that day, when I'm standing before Jesus, where is that person gonna be?" And the answer is, I don't know, and I'm not gonna care.

Janet: Yeah, you won't care at all then.

Josh: I'm not gonna care where they are. It's gonna be me and Jesus on that day. They're gonna be part of the crowd somewhere. Their opinion is gonna be irrelevant when I'm standing before Jesus, and that helps me right now refocus on just seeking to please my Savior, believing His promise that He's given me His Spirit of power, love, and sensible discipline.

Josh: So now I have the ability to truly please Him. I don't have the ability to please Him perfectly, but I have the ability to truly please Him because He's promised to provide all I need to do

Janet: I love that. And even thinking about, that moves me from I need to figure out everything that I'm doing wrong to if it's all about Him, and I know that He's a good Father as well as my Savior, I can even just go to Him. 'Cause I could think, "Oh, my word, if I think about judgment day, that's totally paralyzing," 'cause there's probably even more that I don't know, and then it'll come out, and I'm not ready, and I think... but I have a good Father.

Josh: Yes.

Janet: I can just say, if there's something He wants me to know about my heart, He'll show me.



Josh: When I'm ready for it.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: And at the right timing, in the way he disciplines-

Janet: And praise God He doesn't show me all of it at once-

Josh: Yes

Janet: because He's so kind.

Josh: And He knows we can't handle it.

Janet: But I can ask Him And be humble and say, "I wanna look more like you," and then I can know that He'll show me what He wants to show me, and He'll help me change the way He wants me to change. It's all about Him.

Josh: Oh, that's right.

Janet: Even that.

Josh: Yes. And even, you know, what you're saying is there gonna be fear on that day? There is a level to which, we might lose rewards as we stand before the Lord and we give an account for every action. But I think there's a reason why 1 Corinthians 4 uses the word, "Each man's praise will come to him from God." It doesn't say, "Each man's praise and condemnation," because when we're-

Janet: That's interesting.

Josh: When we're standing before Jesus, I think I read that in a commentary somewhere, and I think, yeah, I thought, "Yeah, that's true." 'Cause when we're standing before Jesus as a Christian, there's no condemnation left.

Janet: There is no-- We know that in Romans 8.

Josh: There might be a level of a lack of rewards or recognizing "Boy -"



Janet: And we'll see that was just.

Josh: "I could've been more faithful," but there's not gonna be any condemnation. Jesus is standing ready to praise my weak acts of faithfulness to the degree that I'm walking forward in faith.

Janet: Which is even more amazing.

Josh: Yeah, because He stands as my loving Father, and my judge, and He's the one who's a better judge than I can be of myself. So I've gotta release and let go of my clinging to, "I get to be the judge of my own life." No. Release that. Release that control. I think there's even a level of a desire for control over my own justification that leads to that desire for self-justification.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: Release that. I'm not the judge. Jesus is the judge, and He's justified me, and He's told me I have the ability to walk in obedience today.

Janet: Yeah.

Josh: So hopefully that's just, one example of how Jesus' powerful gospel can invade our hearts. One example of invade my heart and provide real answers and hope.

Josh: If this is a struggle of yours as you're listening, hopefully this gives you hope of how the gospel has answers for it. And if it's not, if this is a little bit of a different struggle than what you tend to have, I hope there's at least some principles. We all struggle to be self-righteous.

Janet: Yes.

Josh: And I hope you've been encouraged to see just knowing Jesus is better than justifying yourself and how that frees us from the courtroom that we tend to live in every day.

Janet: So you mentioned that there were a couple of articles that were helpful to you. We will have links for those in the show notes 'cause I think some people may be going, "I want more." They have to remember, there is a transcript of this as well, that they can go back and look at this again, any of you who are listening. We will also link some of the resources that Josh mentioned along the way, too, if you want to dig more deeply into this.

Josh: Thanks for having me again.



Janet: Yes, thank you so much for coming.

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