



Steve Cuss: ([00:03](#))

Typically, what's going on in the workplace is something that somebody is saying or doing, or the way somebody is treating you is triggering an assumption you hold about yourself.

Joanna Meyer: ([00:19](#))

You're listening to The Faith and Work Podcast, where we explore what it means to serve God, neighbor, and society through our daily work. Hello, and welcome to The Faith and Work Podcast. I'm Joanna Meyer, Denver Institute's director of public engagement. And I'm joined today by Dustin Moody, our director of communications. Hi, Dustin.

Dustin Moody: ([00:37](#))

Hi, Joanna. Thanks for having me.

Joanna Meyer: ([00:39](#))

Oh, it's fun to get to be on the podcast with you. In case our listeners don't know, Dustin originated the podcast. You're our original host, and so it's always a treat for me to have you join us on the conversation. So I'm wondering what's been going on in your life lately, sir.

Dustin Moody: ([00:53](#))

Well, not much, actually. We talked about this before we started recording, so I knew the question was coming. But I think I've alluded to this on past podcast episodes, but this past December, my wife and I welcomed surprise triplets to our family, so we have a two year old, and now we have four month old, two girls and a boy triplets at our house. So that has been interesting for about the past year, if we're being honest.

Joanna Meyer: ([01:19](#))

Yeah. For those of us at the institute, we've journeyed with Dustin and Laura in this process of having triplets. And I appreciate your reticence in sharing that, Dustin, because I didn't realize this until today that you said having triplets actually kind of causes a spectacle and invites people to ask very invasive questions. Tell us a little bit more about what that's like.

Dustin Moody: ([01:39](#))

Yeah. Well, it's actually fairly relevant for our topic today on anxiety. But yeah, even walking into church with four young kids, three who are all the same age, just creates a stir. And I understand the curiosity, I understand that people are excited to kind of know more about our situation. But yeah, and we're fairly new in the process, where I will say a lot of the triplet parents that we've talked about, talked with, have had this a lot more prevalent than we have. But questions about: Were they all natural versus IVF? Or how's it going? Your hands are so full. Better you than me, all those sorts of things that are well meaning, but can be fairly invasive, particularly without the context of a community or a relationship. So it's been a journey, and will continue to be for a while.



Joanna Meyer: ([02:31](#))

This is a public service announcement for any of our listeners that might run into people who have multiples in public. So just show some grace and restraint. You don't need to know all the intimate details of those babies' lives. We're talking today about anxiety. And I know in journeying with Dustin and Laura through this process that there have definitely been some anxious moments, but the reality is anxiety's a part of anyone's life, and especially plays out in the dynamics of the workplace. And so I wondered a little bit, Dustin, when has work created anxiety in your life? And don't worry, I will share my own anxiety in a moment.

Dustin Moody: ([03:08](#))

Yeah. So part of my graduate school work was in identity and how we construct our identity and communicate it among interpersonally. At least for those of us in the West, a lot of our identity can be built around work and who we work for, the organizations that we're a part of, the ways that we're contributing to things like that. So work for me has been a huge source of anxiety over the years. And I think our guest today has a lot to say about anxiety in the workplace. But for me, this looks like anxiety around annual reviews, or places of tension or conflict when it comes to disagreements, or filling unknown gaps.

Dustin Moody: ([03:45](#))

For those of you that are listening, Denver Institute is navigating a really well thought out and a really well managed CEO transition. But just kind of that element of unknown. What does the future look like? Who's our future leader? That filling in the gaps with our own assumptions creates anxiety for me. So I think if we're looking for examples of anxiety, the workplace is one place to start.

Joanna Meyer: ([04:09](#))

Yeah. I've been surprised in my own life that often the issue is not the issue. I'll have a source of anxiety or reactivity, something sets me off. And it really is reflective of something much deeper in my heart that I've probably been fretting over or nursing for a few weeks, and all of a sudden something results in me responding with an emotional response that's disproportionate to what actually happened, or just visibly communicating anxiety. I know my team has commented that they can see that sometimes from me in meetings. So it's a journey that all of us face in many areas of life, but I think the workplace really brings it out, which is why I'm so excited by today's guest, Steve Cuss.

Joanna Meyer: ([04:49](#))

Listeners to the podcast may remember Steve. He's been a friend of Denver Institute for years. He has become a national expert after transitioning from a role in pastoral ministry. He's now a national expert in the area of anxiety and has so much to say for how we walk with God and relate to others, especially as it plays out in the workplace. So Dustin, introduce us with more detail to who Steve Cuss is.



Dustin Moody: ([05:11](#))

Sure, I'd be happy to. Steve was born and raised in Western Australia and moved to the US for his theological education. Before he wrote his acclaimed book, *Managing Leadership Anxiety, Yours and Theirs*, he worked as a hospital chaplain and a church leader, including time as lead pastor of Discovery Church in Broomfield, Colorado, just up the road from us in Denver. Based on the success of his book and the podcast of the same name, Steve recently transitioned out of church leadership and is now focusing full-time on his work as a speaker, educator, and a consultant through his Capable Life program and platform. Steve, welcome back to The Faith and Work Podcast.

Steve Cuss: ([05:46](#))

Great to be with you guys. I was reflecting earlier, I think you were the very first podcast I was a guest on, so this is wonderful to come back and join you.

Joanna Meyer: ([05:53](#))

Holy cow.

Dustin Moody: ([05:54](#))

Yeah. And you were one of our first guests when we started back in 2018.

Steve Cuss: ([05:57](#))

Nice.

Dustin Moody: ([05:57](#))

So it's a full circle moment here.

Steve Cuss: ([05:59](#))

No kidding, yeah.

Dustin Moody: ([06:01](#))

So before we get started, I'm curious if you can just give us an update on what you're up to these days. I know you've made some professional transitions. How are things going?

Steve Cuss: ([06:09](#))

I know. It's crazy. My book came out in 2019, eight months, nine months before pandemic hit. And it had a very, as expected, a very mild response. And then the pandemic hit and suddenly people discovered my book. And so 2020 through 2021, my wife and I and elders at our church just had to spend time discerning. What are we going to do? Because I can't continue to serve the church and fulfill the requests coming in, so I either shut down the requests or pass on the church. So yeah, December 2021, handed over leadership of Discovery after 16 years to a young leader named Zach, fantastic young guy. And then now I'm full-time, mostly traveling and speaking and then doing some online resources for what's called



Capable Life, which is my new company. And Capable, C-A-P, the first three letters of capable, is about being calm, aware, and present. So a lot of my work now is helping people think emotionally and theologically through how to go from being reactive to calm, and it's a lot of fun.

Dustin Moody: ([07:16](#))

Yeah, that's awesome. And that's a great lead into our next question. So to kind of situate our conversation for today, give us your definition of anxiety that we'll explore in this podcast.

Steve Cuss: ([07:26](#))

Yeah, that's the great question. Anxiety is one word that covers a lot of territory, so there are a lot of good definitions for it. My field is chronic anxiety, which is a particular kind of anxiety. It's different than trauma. It's different than anxiety that requires psychiatric medicine. And I think it's best understood as reactivity. So the simple question is: Okay, what makes you reactive? How do you know when you're reactive? And people generally are reactive in two different ways. They either get bigger in a situation and try to take it over or dominate it, or shrink it down, or of course, then the opposite is they get smaller, which classically in a meeting might look like them getting very quiet, or kind of like a turtle in a shell.

Steve Cuss: ([08:11](#))

So when you first think of reactivity, you think of someone exploding. Sometimes reactivity is shrinking yourself down. So I help people figure out. Okay, when do I get reactive? And then the other interesting thing about chronic anxiety, it's the only kind of anxiety that's contagious, so trauma is not contagious. If you are in a room with a grieving person and you come away anxious, you haven't caught their grief. Your chronic anxiety has made assumptions about what you should do for someone who's grieving, and that's why you're anxious. So chronic anxiety is generated by assumptions and false belief. So of course as a pastor, that gets me really excited when I hear false belief. That's how I define anxiety. Someone else could come on the show and they could talk about, for example, anxiety that requires psychiatric medicine. That would have a whole different set of rules, for sure.

Dustin Moody: ([09:05](#))

Yeah. There's a quote that we came across for this podcast from Viktor Frankl that I think sums up kind of the aim of what we're talking about today. And he says, "Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In the space is the power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom." And it seems like the idea around the power to choose our response is really kind of the crux of your work that we're going to get into.

Steve Cuss: ([09:26](#))

Yeah, that's right. What's weird about chronic anxiety is it actually numbs your awareness. So what happens is you get reactive, you're not even aware that you're filled with anxiety. And next thing you know, you're on a metaphorical treadmill, running as fast as you can, getting nowhere. And so really, one



of the most powerful tools is to pause, get off that treadmill, and that's what Frankl's helping us do, is just to take stock before you jump in.

Steve Cuss: ([09:57](#))

I was doing a coaching call with some of my Capable Life members this morning. And one of the guys was talking about just how hard it is because he tends to want to get wrapped up in other people's anxiety. He likes to leap in and help, come to the rescue. And he was just saying it's so hard to deliberately consider whether that's God calling me to do that or my anxiety. And what he's learning about himself is when he's more deliberative, he feels like he's abandoning people. And there's anxiety. It actually puts you in a false reality. So yeah, the pause is really powerful, just learning. And then the other part of Frankl that I love is he's basically saying, "You can take responsibility. You have power to not jump in and react." So yeah, it's really helpful.

Joanna Meyer: ([10:44](#))

It feels very vulnerable to say this, but I can be very reactive at work. And Dustin has seen that when I'm in meetings. I get anxious, and ka-pow, I start looking anxious and acting anxious. And so I wanted to ask more about reactivity because maybe our listeners can relate to that as well. So it's a two part question. Let's talk a little bit about what types of reactivity look like, specifically as it relates to work. And then how can we kind of spot the triggers before that reaction happens?

Steve Cuss: ([11:12](#))

Yeah. That's the trick, is getting proactive without reactivity. It's really hard to do. So I think what you have to do, you do have to climb into your belief system and you have to test your assumptions. And this is deeper work. Sometimes you need help. Sometimes you need trusted friends to do this with. But typically what's going on in the workplace is something that somebody is saying, or doing, or the way somebody is treating you, is triggering an assumption you hold about yourself. And so I get reactive if for example, I'm misunderstood because usually at the end of misunderstanding is some kind of judgment about me. And then a belief I have about myself is I must explain myself to you so that you can understand me, so that then underneath that, the core is that you like me. That's kind of the foundational belief for me is everyone just has to like me all the time. If you don't like me, then obviously the world's about to crash.

Dustin Moody: ([12:17](#))

A tough spot for a former pastor.

Steve Cuss: ([12:19](#))

Oh, I tell you what, pastoring has probably done more to grow my trust in God than anything else, for sure. And COVID pastoring was that on steroids, for sure. And so then there are five core beliefs that we all think we need, so I'll name them. But I'll just say we don't all need all of them. We usually, most of us have two or three of these. So the first one's control. So it might be, Joanna, that when you are not in



control, or you're in a situation you can't control, you get very reactive. The second one is perfection. If you don't do it perfectly right, you then feel shame or something goes on in you. The third one is always having the answer. This is me. It's almost entertaining. Put me in a room, and for example, Dustin, if ask Joanna a question, and you're not asking me, I would feel compelled to answer it, even though you didn't ask me. You don't want to know what I think.

Steve Cuss: ([13:16](#))

But there's something in me that must have the answer. And then deeper than that is kind of my lifelong battle with feeling stupid, for example. The fourth thing is always being there for people. That's me as well. Some of us, to caricature it, somebody somewhere is hurting, I must bake a lasagna, that kind of idea. I must bake a lasagna and bring it over to them.

Joanna Meyer: ([13:37](#))

Will you make me a lasagna?

Steve Cuss: ([13:39](#))

Oh, absolutely. Yeah, I'd be happy to make you a lasagna.

Dustin Moody: ([13:41](#))

Joanna, you're the Enneagram two, you've brought food to my house. We all know where this one's going.

Steve Cuss: ([13:45](#))

That's right, yeah. And so my need to be needed, I think it's about helping you, but it's really about my incessant need to be needed. And then the fifth one is approval, and that's mine as well. So I have the bottom three. I have knowing the answer, being there for others, and approval. Someone else might have perfection, for example. So what you kind of have to do is it's very hard to stop your reactivity in the moment. You have to go away, be kind to yourself, and debrief. And usually, unfortunately, Joanna, you have to debrief with somebody else. It doesn't usually work to think your way into this. You have to be able to name it.

Steve Cuss: ([14:22](#))

And you don't have to do it with your work colleagues, but maybe a couple of friends, or sometimes it's a therapist. But if you can go back and debrief what happened and you're trying to figure out: What was going on in me? Why did I get so triggered? And it could be that the person's treating you terribly, and now you're ready to talk to them. But more often than not, you've made meaning out of this situation and that's what's made you reactive because chronic anxiety is built on false belief. And so you have a false belief, or the person you're working with has a false belief about you. So again, pastoring is a simple example. I'm pastoring a church. And somebody comes for the first Sunday and they come up to me after the service and they say, "My last pastor was the finest preacher I've ever heard in my life."



Steve Cuss: ([15:07](#))

Now that is putting an assumption on me. And if I catch that assumption, I'm going to get anxious. And if I learn to not catch it, I'll be able to celebrate with them how wonderful it was that they had God's gifts to pastors, and I'll be nothing but a let down. But hey, here we go.

Joanna Meyer: ([15:25](#))

I'm laughing, but I do not know what I would do in a situation like that, Steve. I'm not calm, aware, and present.

Steve Cuss: ([15:30](#))

I had someone, I was doing a workshop for pastors, it was literally last week or the week before. And a guy came up during the break and he said, "You can't believe what just happened." And that's what the guy, that was his situation. Their first Sunday, they were so excited to tell this poor young fellow, he's a church planter, that the previous pastor of however many years, they'd moved in from out of own, and what they're implying of course is that's what we need out of you. We need you to blow our minds with scripture or whatever. And he said to me, he's like, "What do I do?"

Steve Cuss: ([16:00](#))

And I said, "Just let them down as fast as you can. Just maybe preach worse next week. Do something." Because his only hope is to show them who he is as a human being, so that they can lower their assumptions and actually see him as human. And that is the way to get calm is when we're able to see each other as exactly human sized, and stop placing assumptions on each other. But really, the biggest challenge is not so much that others place assumptions on us, the biggest challenge is how quickly we catch them. And that's usually what makes us anxious.

Dustin Moody: ([16:35](#))

Steve, it seems like one of the keys to managing chronic anxiety is being able to see how it shows up in personal and interpersonal dynamics. You have a heuristic. You talk about the four spaces where anxiety shows up. And I'm wondering if you could walk us through each of those briefly.

Steve Cuss: ([16:49](#))

Yeah. This has just been such a simple thing that people have found helpful because they can kind of see it. So the four spaces of chronic anxiety, the first one is the space inside me. I think we've probably covered that enough for now. The second one is the space between me and another person. So if you have any kind of relationship at all, friendship, workplace dynamics, it's just the anxiety that spreads so quickly between two people. The third space I find fascinating. It's the space inside the other person. And that's any time you're thinking about what someone else is thinking. So sometimes maybe if you're a chronic people pleaser like I am, you spend too much of your brain space thinking about what someone else thinks of you. It's like you've crossed into their brain.

Steve Cuss: ([17:33](#))

But sometimes it shows you when you're really frustrated at someone at work, and you're not so much worried about what they're thinking, you're angry at what they're thinking. You're like, "What were they thinking?" Or sometimes you'll say, "Why did they do it that way?" And what you're basically saying to yourself is, "Why don't they think like me? Life would be better if they were like me." It's quite egotistical, actually. And then the fourth space is the space between others, and this is the mood that's already going on before you showed up.

Steve Cuss: ([18:05](#))

I know in my life, it's quite mortifying to admit, I'm a six foot three white Aussie with a deep voice. And I've been told being aware of this when I was 24 as a chaplain, I just walked into every room and took it over. I just thought that's what the room required. And of course, it was extremely obnoxious. But that was me being oblivious to fourth space. And so if you can basically notice: Where's the anxiety coming from? It's just another way to calm yourself down rather than just blundering into all these spaces. And what's interesting is you can change three of the four spaces. But the one space that you spend so much time on, you can't change. That's third space. You can't actually change how another person thinks. All you can do is learn the difficult discipline of stopping yourself from crossing into their brain.

Steve Cuss: ([18:56](#))

But once you see the four spaces, what you can do is you can go into any staff meeting, any environment, and ask yourself the very simple question. Okay, where's the anxiety coming from? And then the second question is: Who's catching it? And just by observing that, you can really be a powerful, powerful presence. And it's very important in this work that you're never doing this to blame another person. There's no benefit to blaming. So even if you're saying, "Well, man, the anxiety is coming from Joanna," you're not doing that to say, "Well, thank God I'm not Joanna." You're actually now able to help maybe lower her anxiety, or have a conversation. But it's just locating it because anxiety spreads and it gets really tangled and we get confused. It's just an ability to say, "Okay, what's actually going on here? And what can I do about it?"

Joanna Meyer: ([19:41](#))

Yeah, we've done that a couple times at staff meetings at Denver Institute, and it's made a difference. It really does diffuse the situation and it just took the emotion out of it instead of keeping it wound up. I'm wondering. If we had seen you 10 years ago, Steve, what would be the difference in how you present or carry yourself between then and now?

Steve Cuss: ([20:00](#))

10 years ago, 2012, so if you'd asked me 15 years ago, I would've said, "A basket case of unaddressed chronic anxiety," is probably how I'd answer that question. 10 years ago, so what happened for me is I had been doing this training and this work informally from 1996 until 2005. So I'd been doing it for nine





years when I became a lead pastor. But it was kind of in the back of my brain, it wasn't an intentional set of tools I was using. And here's what's crazy, Joanna, I'd been a trauma chaplain by then. I had worked on a ranch for teens that got in trouble, kind of a crisis intervention ranch. And then I'd worked as a crisis interventionist in Las Vegas for four years. And these tools were incredibly helpful there.

Steve Cuss: ([20:51](#))

Then I show up and become a lead pastor and it wasn't working. I was filled with anxiety. I was not doing well. And so in 2008 or 2009, I kind of hit a wall. And I was like, "I need to dig deeper if I'm going to survive," and so that's when I really took these informal systems theory concepts and started to build a set of tools and a rule of life for myself, some of the things that are in my book like the life giving list, the universal sources. So then 10 years ago, 2012, I actually ... I hope this is funny to you. I find it funny. I grabbed my staff and I said, "Look, I learned this stuff in the context of death and cancer and trauma. I wonder if church leadership is traumatic enough for it to work," because you kind of have to get to the end of your rope and then you're ready for this stuff.

Steve Cuss: ([21:48](#))

And the good news is church leadership was traumatic enough, and so I then formed a class for my staff. So 10 years ago, I think because I was teaching it, I was doing much better. But 15 years ago, I think I was pretty close to burnout, waking up in the middle of the night, worrying my way to peace, obsessed with what people thought of me, performance anxiety when preaching, all of that. And then 10 years ago, because I had to teach others, I think that helped me to really sink it in for myself.

Jeff Haanen: ([22:29](#))

Hi, I'm Jeff Haanen, founder of Denver Institute for Faith and Work. And I would like to invite you to become a part of our new monthly partner community. Whether it's a monthly commitment of \$25, \$50, or any amount, your generosity will support Denver Institute's ongoing efforts to help men and women love God, their neighbors, and society through their daily work, including this podcast. To say thank you as a monthly partner, you will receive a welcome box. You'll have exclusive access to private digital content, personalized vocational coaching, and discounts for Denver Institute content and experiences. To become a monthly partner, simply visit [denverinstitute.org/give](http://denverinstitute.org/give) or see the show notes in today's episode. Thank you in advance for your generosity.

Joanna Meyer: ([23:16](#))

I always think, "How long will it take for me to internalize some of these concepts?" So that gives me hope. It takes time.

Steve Cuss: ([23:22](#))

It takes time. We usually tell people to set their stopwatch for three years, and to give themselves a one out of 10 expectation. And so if someone is listening to this podcast, then the expectation would be one out of 50 because listening is not going to lead you to change. You do have to embody a way of life. But if



you're trying some things, if you're intentionally in a community doing it, then three years, and then after three years, if you can do a three or four out of 10 times, that's a raging A plus.

Joanna Meyer: ([23:53](#))

I wanted to ask about ... This is a just give me Jesus question because I think sometimes in church circles, we think the gospel's the answer to everything. And I'd agree too, the gospel is the answer to everything. But I think it needs to be teased out a little bit. It's not a Band-Aid solution to just say, "If you believe harder in Jesus, your anxiety will go away." So tell us a little bit more about that. How does the gospel meet us in our anxiety?

Steve Cuss: ([24:18](#))

Yeah. I do think that is the question. I just think people shortchange the process. So the simplest answer is that if chronic anxiety is generated by false belief and assumptions, then knowing what's true does give you relief. And so a false belief I might have is the, I need to win over every critic. That's completely unreasonable. But what is true is that I can actually engage critics and love them and take care of them without needing anything from them. Now there's much better news than that. So I do think I really do think to the depth of my core, and I have bet my whole life on the truth that Jesus sets us free. But I think the problem when we use it sloppily is we're just not as free as we think we are. I don't know how to say it. We don't let the gospel sink into our thinking patterns, I think.

Steve Cuss: ([25:17](#))

So I think Paul invites us in Romans 12 to really let the gospel invade our deepest beliefs and our deepest thinking patterns. I think the problem is we talk about it a lot, but we don't know how to do it. So I've really worked hard to build pathways and tools, for example of: How do you let the gospel invade your inner critic, the voice of condemnation in your head? There is a way to actually let the truth of Jesus seep into your inner voice of condemnation and be free from it. But it's a journey of bravery, you have to sit in some pain for a while. And then I think there is the cliché a lot of people like to quote Philippians with anxiety. But what they don't ... They're very sloppy with it. The apostle, Paul, the Greek word he used for anxiety in Philippians when he says, "Do not be anxious about anything," it's the same Greek word he uses when he says, "Every day, I am anxious for the sake of the churches." "I face daily anxiety," Paul says. Same word, so we don't quote that one. That's not on our bumper stickers as much.

Steve Cuss: ([26:26](#))

But of course, Paul faced anxiety, and I think Philippians is more of an aspirational thing, like the psalms. When the psalmist says, "I will praise you all of my days," he's not lying. And we can sing that song with integrity even though seven out of 10 days, we don't praise God.

Dustin Moody: ([26:46](#))

I can't imagine we take verses out of context.



Steve Cuss: [\(26:48\)](#)

I know it's [inaudible 00:26:49].

Dustin Moody: [\(26:49\)](#)

Right?

Steve Cuss: [\(26:50\)](#)

Yeah. So I think you have to pick one aspect of your life where you're tired of running into yourself. Maybe it's your inner critic. Maybe it's the way you show up for work. And you have to then just slowly invite the gospel to seep into it. And until you've figured out your deepest core beliefs, I think you're not going to experience change. But I'll stop there and see maybe where we want to go from there.

Dustin Moody: [\(27:13\)](#)

Yeah, Steve, as I think about kind of that idea of how the gospel meets us in our anxiety, one thing that you said stands out. Knowing what's true gives us hope. I know for me, anxiety often shows up in the unknown, when I insert assumptions into situations that I'm waiting on, or situations that I'm trying to fill in the blank for, there's lots of unknowns that come in. But having that, to your point earlier, having that ability to pause and reflect and remind myself of what is true, just goes a long way at dispelling some of that.

Steve Cuss: [\(27:44\)](#)

Yeah. And anxiety gets pretty sophisticated. It actually numbs our soul to be aware of God, so we actually lose awareness of God's presence. And usually when we know God is with us, and then I think more powerfully, when we know God is already ahead of us in the thing we're anxious about, what you're saying, Dustin, is this unknown future, then we can viscerally and literally, physically relax into the grace of God. So yeah, as I hear you say that, that triggers for me out of those five things, it's probably a control thing or a perfection thing of needing to know what's coming up. And so then testing those assumptions and noticing when you're catastrophizing.

Dustin Moody: [\(28:27\)](#)

I'm sure that's surprising news to my colleague, Joanna Meyer.

Steve Cuss: [\(28:30\)](#)

[inaudible 00:28:30] catastrophize.

Joanna Meyer: [\(28:30\)](#)

Oh, my goodness. I catastrophize all the time.

Dustin Moody: [\(28:33\)](#)

Spoiler alert.



Joanna Meyer: ([28:33](#))

Can I share my latest catastrophe with you?

Steve Cuss: ([28:36](#))

Yeah. What is it?

Joanna Meyer: ([28:37](#))

Oh, what was the recent catastrophe? There's so many of them. My brother-in-law has an adopted phrase for me. He said, "Joanna, what is the worst that could happen?" And the answer to that is always, you can move into our basement. So I know the answer to any dilemma in life, if the bottom falls out, I can move in with my sister and brother-in-law. So that's his antidote. And he just often says that. What's the worst that could happen? It can't be that bad.

Dustin Moody: ([29:05](#))

Steve, I want to talk a little bit about some of the cycles you identify in your work and in your book. And you've written and talked about before that when anxiety gets the upper hand, we get stuck in cycles of self reliance and condemnation and shame. And this tends to lead us to try to make efforts on our own or solve things through our own efforts. And I'm just curious if you could talk about that a little bit and what sort of lies that fuels in each of us.

Steve Cuss: ([29:31](#))

That's such a powerful tool to learn how to notice recurring patterns of thinking and behavior in yourself. And once you notice them, you've got two choices. You can drive yourself crazy in a hurry because you can't eliminate them. That's one path is, oh, man, here I go again. But instead, if you practice curiosity and self kindness, man, it's powerful how often you can break that pattern. And so what anxiety does is it shows up, it puts us on a path or a treadmill, and then it just does more of the same, more of the same, more of the same. So once I identified that I'm a chronic people pleaser, what happened is I never thought that was an option to be anything else.

Steve Cuss: ([30:19](#))

I'd just assumed that's the way to live properly. And what I do as a person of faith is I take my faith and I infect my faith with people pleasing, and I start using language like, "Well, Jesus wants me to love my neighbor." I struggle to de-tangle. What's my anxiety? And what's actually my call from the Lord. So just learning to think about the way you think is such a simple, powerful thing. And it is difficult. I say it's simple, it's not complex. But it isn't easy. It's just simple. So once I think about the way I think, then I can see it. It shows up in every facet of my life. Now at that point, what am I going to do? Am I going to get fed up with myself? Or am I going to move into self kindness and start to explore other ways?



Steve Cuss: ([31:07](#))

And until you're willing to risk what you're most afraid of, you'll never change. And so for control freaks who catastrophize, you have to intentionally put yourself in situations where you're out of control and something bad might happen. I don't recommend danger. Dustin, you're a dad of young kids. I wouldn't throw them out on the street to see what happens, but putting yourself in a work environment where you actually, where something could go wrong, you won't change until you get through the other side of that. So yeah, these thinking patterns, and then the next level is you start to notice patterns of behavior in your relationships, not just that you have patterns, so does everyone in your life. And so it's the ability to break those patterns just a few times and see what happens where you can really experience some freedom.

Joanna Meyer: ([31:59](#))

One thing I really appreciate, Steve, is that you allow room for people to grow and kind of fail in their battle with anxiety. This isn't a matter of maintaining perfection or a journey towards calmness. It really is something we figure out over time. I wonder if we could, as we're talking about the hard aspects of anxiety, if we could also talk about positive growth steps people could take. I want to make sure we're ending our conversation on a positive note. What would be some practical first steps for a listener that might be thinking, okay, I know this is true? I even got a little anxious during our conversation because I realized this is part of my life. So what does movement in a positive direction look like?

Steve Cuss: ([32:38](#))

Yeah. That's such a great question. So what we've covered right now is two simple steps of learning to pause when you're anxious, rather than continuing on because anxiety puts you on treadmill that goes nowhere. And the gospel actually has a path to freedom. So pausing is number one. And then the second power tool is curiosity. Once you've paused and you're off the treadmill, then you're like, "What's going on in me right now? Why am I so stirred up? Why did I get so angry in my head at what he said?" And I don't stop with curiosity until I know. And I think the truth is such that we know it when we run into it. So I'm getting help, maybe I'm going to a coach or a counselor. Maybe I'm asking my friends to help me figure it out because oftentimes, our friends do know us better than we know ourselves in this area when we're anxious.

Steve Cuss: ([33:33](#))

So pausing is first, curiosity is second. And then you do have to test your assumptions and try to show up a different way. And then a very simple anxiety management tool is just to increase the fun in your life. I know this is ... But playfulness is a powerful anxiety diffuser. It's just very difficult to be anxious when you're laughing and it's very difficult to be anxious when you're feeling loved by somebody. And so for many people, particularly posts COVID employment situations, the fact is that COVID has lowered our productivity. It's increased our tiredness. And so what we do is we think we have to work harder and push through, but the counterintuitive move is actually to play more, be more frivolous. And so that's



where I offer the life giving list. It's just a very simple ... Anyone can make one. Make your own list. Just make a list of people, places, and activities that give you life.

Steve Cuss: ([34:36](#))

And the challenge with a list is when I say places, everyone ends up on the beach somewhere. That's great. Put the beach down. But is there a place in your house? And is there a place in your neighborhood? My life giving list is now up to 160 items.

Joanna Meyer: ([34:52](#))

Yeah. Tell us some.

Steve Cuss: ([34:53](#))

Yeah. So you have to make a list of things that take two minutes, as well as the things that take a week, and the things that cost no money at all, as well as the things that you have to budget money for. So right before this podcast, my dog is on the couch, all stretched out, living his best life. And I just went over and gave him a good rub for about a minute. And people are like, "How does that work?" Well, I just say, "Okay, Lord, you gave me this dog as a gift. And I can't manipulate this dog into work." I can't, in my case, twist this dog into ministry. But his ears are about one inch longer than they should be. They're just a little bit long. And there's something incredibly whimsical about rubbing his fluffy ears. It gives me great joy and it diffuses my anxiety. And I intentionally use it, this may sound funny, but I intentionally use it as a prayer practice.

Steve Cuss: ([35:49](#))

Another simple thing is, we're all on camera together, just off to the right here is my guitar. And it takes me 30 seconds to pull it off the shelf and play it. I can play my guitar for five minutes and just the power of music diffuses. I think music, I think humans are moved by beauty, and God made us that way. So when I'm playing music or listening to music, I'm saying, "Lord, you gave us the gift of music, and thank you for that." It's very hard to connect with God and be in anxiety's grip. So those would be some of the simple, whimsical things. One piece of Lindt chocolate on my tongue, now a whole bar of Lindt chocolate, that's stress eating, but one piece slowly, that deliciousness.

Steve Cuss: ([36:37](#))

But then, more sophisticated things like one of the things on my list is chanting Gregorian chant at St. Walburg Monastery. It's an hour up the road. They offer silent retreats. It's \$70 a night. Okay, I have to budget money and time for that. But there's something powerful about Gregorian chant. So you'll be surprised if you actually intentionally make a list. And I encourage people to actually spend three months making their list. Go on the hunt for the love of God. You'll be blown away by all the things God has given you in your life, that you can put on a list. And what's great about it is when you're anxious, you don't have to think of what to do. You just pull out your list and you've already done the hard work, you can just do some things on your list.



Joanna Meyer: ([37:20](#))

Tell us about scented candles because I know that's been an ongoing journey for you.

Steve Cuss: ([37:25](#))

My scented candle journey, I didn't expect it to be such a battle. Joanna, you and I are both in a spiritual direction community right now in [inaudible 00:37:35] direction. And the first thing they did is they gave us a candle. The light when we either wanted to remember God was with us or when we were aware that God is with us. And so I burned through my candles. I was on candle number four in February when I found a pumpkin spice candle in my house. Obviously, it's my wife Lisa's. I would never willingly bring that into the house. And so what's going on is I've now disposed of the pumpkin spice candle, and now I have this is water, mint, and eucalyptus. And you can see it's lit right now.

Joanna Meyer: ([38:08](#))

You got it at Target, if our listeners want to buy a similar candle, they can find that, water, mint and eucalyptus at Target.

Steve Cuss: ([38:13](#))

I actually got it from my wife's candle supply in our closet, but she probably got it from Target.

Joanna Meyer: ([38:18](#))

I recognize the brand.

Steve Cuss: ([38:20](#))

I've not cultivated the habit of buying candles in public, so that's a new thing for me. But the last time I was in North Carolina and I was speaking, and the host very kindly gave me this great little local honey and a local candle. So yeah, I light a candle as a practice that's on my life giving list. Just seeing the light reminds me that God is as close as the candle, just some hacks, because we forget. Anxiety makes us forget that God's with us, and everything feels on our shoulders, we feel kind of this heavy weight. So I'm just always trying to stub my toe on the presence of God with these very simple mundane things. It's changed my life. Even when you said earlier, 10 years ago, I was thinking to myself, "Well, there's a few years into my life giving list by then," so I was tripping over the love of God more often back then.

Dustin Moody: ([39:09](#))

So for those of our listeners who may be hearing Steve for the first time, Steve's been a longtime friend of Denver Institute, past event speaker. You've connected with our fellows. And we recently partnered on an online course in partnership with Right Now Media and Right Now Media at Work called Managing Anxiety, Yours and Theirs. If your church or your organization has access to either of those platforms, you can find Steve's course on Right Now Media, Right Now Media at Work. You can also find it on the Faith and Work classroom, which we'll link to from our show notes page. Steve, I'm just wondering if you could



talk a little bit about our course project, and then also, the journal that you're working on that's coming up as well.

Steve Cuss: ([39:44](#))

Yeah, wonderful. The course project was so fun. It's between six and eight videos, depending on which course you want. So it's basically the same material for people who want a faith informed and faith overt course, and then people who because of your workplace, you really can't do a faith informed work. So there's six to eight videos. They're all about 15 minutes long. And it's just a very simple set of weekly tools. So we'd recommend probably watching a video a week, or sharing them with your team. And then in August, you can pre-order when this podcast is live, you can just go to [stevecusswords.com](http://stevecusswords.com) to pre-order the journal. But they'll be deliverable in August. And the journal's designed to go along with these videos, so it's a 12 week journal where the first eight weeks go along with the video content, and then the last four weeks is you putting it all into practice.

Steve Cuss: ([40:35](#))

So it's a daily journal where you can reflect each day. There's a midweek reflection. There's a new tool every week. Because what I find with anxiety management is people want everything all at once. So we've made the journal and the videos just to ease you in and give you a different tool each week. The videos build on the previous week, so it's a very intentional path that we're making for you. So yeah, the videos on their own are fantastic. The videos with the journal is just another way to reinforce it. If you're doing the videos now, if you want to, you can jump on the Steve Cuss Words website to pre-order a journal. And just for COVID, shipping is much slower from China, so it'll be August before the journals come.

Dustin Moody: ([41:13](#))

Sure. It was great working together on that.

Steve Cuss: ([41:15](#))

That was a really fun project.

Joanna Meyer: ([41:17](#))

I appreciate what you're saying about spreading out the journey because you could become anxious about not managing your anxiety soon enough.

Steve Cuss: ([41:24](#))

Anxiety's very sophisticated. It can condemn you with anything. So we encourage slow progress for sure. And in fact, when people have breakthroughs, we actually say, "Hey, you're going to regress. Don't worry about it. It's just all part of the journey."





Joanna Meyer: ([41:38](#))

Yeah. Invest in a large store of candles and just keep them burning.

Steve Cuss: ([41:42](#))

Yes. I'm on candle number five.

Joanna Meyer: ([41:45](#))

You've burned more than I have in the program. I think that's a-

Steve Cuss: ([41:48](#))

Probably more anxious, probably.

Joanna Meyer: ([41:49](#))

Well, I should be more anxious about my lack of candle burning probably. So Steve, we're going to call upon your skills as a former pastor to close our podcast. I would love to give you a chance to give our listeners a charge, just a final word that would call them towards maybe stepping into this journey of learning how to manage anxiety in their life. So how would you encourage our listeners to move forward in this?

Steve Cuss: ([42:15](#))

I would just say particularly for your listeners who are leading a team in the workplace, this work will actually help you lead in a whole other gear. If most of your focus is on productivity, agenda, if you start noticing anxiety in your people, and noticing it in yourself, and work on calming yourself down, you can be so much more productive. This work really isn't about everyone sitting around talking about their feelings and getting nothing done. It's actually the opposite. It's helping your team get further, get faster. This work, it lowers turnover because people don't leave jobs, they leave managers. People normally resign because of who they're working for more than what they're doing. So if you can work on yourself, you'll actually save your company money. So that would be my argument.

Steve Cuss: ([43:07](#))

And the second thing is if anyone's listening to this and saying, "Man, this sounds really hard," I would just remind them that the way you're living now is very hard, you've just gotten so used to it, you're not aware of how hard it is. So what I'm encouraging you to do is just a different kind of hard that actually leads you to freedom. That would be my closing word.

Joanna Meyer: ([43:28](#))

Steve, thanks for the gift that you are as both a friend to us, as individuals, and also a friend to Denver Institute. I just pray that your influence will continue to expand and that our listeners would be blessed in a deeper journey into the gospel through what they've heard today.



Steve Cuss: ([43:43](#))

Yeah. Joanna and Dustin, you guys are a delight. I love Denver Faith and Work. It's called Denver, but you guys have an incredible national service to people in the workplace. I'm just thrilled to be part of it.

Joanna Meyer: ([43:58](#))

Gosh, I could listen to Steve Cuss all day. I hope that you are as motivated as I am to begin to press into areas of anxiety in all of life but especially as it relates to our work, and trust the Lord that the gospel can meet us in that process of growth. To begin that process, I want to point you to two resources that we will provide in our show notes. The first is a link to Steve's website, [stevecusswords.com](http://stevecusswords.com), where you can sign up for his email. You can learn about more of his books, and you can also get access to the journal that he had referred to in today's conversation. And secondly, I want to direct you to the Faith and Work Classroom, where we are offering for a small amount of money, Steve's course on managing anxiety.

Joanna Meyer: ([44:42](#))

And a little plug, if you become a monthly partner of Denver Institute for Faith and Work, you get access to that course for free. It's \$150 value. It's pretty amazing. So you will find resources to both of those in your show notes. Thanks for joining us today. I pray that the gospel meets you in all of life, but especially in your work in the coming weeks.

Joanna Meyer: ([45:05](#))

If you've enjoyed this episode of The Faith and Work Podcast, please subscribe, leave a review, or share it with a friend. Your support is critical to helping other listeners discover this vital resource. The Faith and Work Podcast is produced by Denver Institute for Faith and Work, where we believe that work is a way to love God and serve our neighbors. To learn more, or to make a financial contribution, visit [denverinstitute.org](http://denverinstitute.org).