

Knowing Me, Knowing You: Interview with Phil, Ellen & James - 26th June 2022

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Preachers: Ellen Nicholls, James Edmonds, Phil Tennant

[0 : 00] Morning, everyone. Morning. Good to see you. If you don't know me, my name's Matt. I'm the vicar here. And as Ruth was saying, who's our curate here, what we were wondering this morning was do something a little bit different. If you've been with us over recent weeks, you'll know we've been doing a series called Knowing Me, Knowing You. Ah, yes. Come on.

Which is all about our awareness and our knowledge of ourselves, of each other, and of God. And we thought this morning, as part of our journey, individually, corporately, and in our faith, obviously worship means a whole lot for that particular journey. And one aspect of worship is the sung worship, which we participate in and enjoy on a Sunday in particular, but also perhaps in our own time as well. And so trying to get to know each other a bit better and where different people are coming from with their own understandings and how they engage with God through sung worship in particular. We thought this morning it would be great to hear from a representative sample of the worship bands that we have. We have about 15 musicians, I suppose, over different Sundays who all help to lead our sung worship together. But we thought we'd have these three up today as a representation of the mass. So would you give it up, please, for Phil, James, and Ellen. Great stuff, great stuff. And the plan is, I've got some questions here in a sort of Graham Norton kind of style. I think that's where the similarities end, but I'll be the question guy. There'll also be a chance, if we want, perhaps at the end, for us to ask our own questions or have our own comments and stuff. And equally, if there's things that other members of the band, other musicians in particular, want to chip in with some of their takes, perhaps, on some of the things that we'll be thinking about, that would be most welcome as well.

So don't be shy on that. But we haven't practiced this, have we? So we'll just see how things go. They do know the kind of rough questions we're going to be tackling. But I'm very grateful to you three for being in the hot seats today. Now, some folks will know you very well. Others may not so much. So just as we start, could you maybe just tell us a tiny bit about yourself, what you do midweek, and perhaps a little bit of your sort of musical slash worship music history, a little bit. Start with you, Phil, if that's okay.

Okay. Well, I'm Phil. I've been here far too many years. How many? Getting on for 50, I think. Wowzer. Is it 50, nearly? So you started when you were five years old?

That's right. Yeah, yeah. I love you, Matt. It is 50, isn't it? Yeah. My introduction to the old St. John's that was then was that on a Sunday evening, I used to go and pick my wife up out of church when she'd finished the service.

[2 : 48] You were my girlfriend then? No, you weren't, but you were my girlfriend then, sorry. I used to pick my girlfriend up in the car on a Sunday evening, and we'd go out for a drive on a Sunday evening, and I'd dare set foot into church. It was just taboo, you know.

And gradually, over a period of weeks and months, and even might be a year or so, people popped out of the church to have a little chat with me in the car, you know, or through the window. You know, how are you? Are you okay?

And one week, eventually, they asked me, would you like to come and sing in the choir sometime? Because they knew I was into music and that. Yeah, I don't mind. So, I set foot in the church once and became part of the choir. And I really hadn't got a faith.

I just enjoyed the music, really, and singing parts. We sang four-part harmonies. Best of all, there was a beautiful young lady that I used to come and sing with.

That was my reason for being there. Over the years, that sort of changed. No, no, no. She got more beautiful.

[3 : 56] I gradually became more part of the church.

And to cut a long story short, I think I was probably the first person to ever play a chorus rather than a hymn on a piano in the old St. John's. And that was very, very early days.

I think the choruses then used to be about three lines long. And you had to repeat them about at least ten times to get anything out of them, you know. But it's been a really special journey to have been part of the church.

And that's how I came initially, through music. My joy and wanting to be involved in music. And I suppose because my mother-in-law, who was eventually my mother-in-law, played the organ, and it was all very traditional and wonderful, but it just, you know.

And as soon as the piano was introduced and this more relaxed style came into the church, the Holy Spirit began to work and things happened. So that was me in the church, basically, yeah.

[5 : 02] That's how I came to be here in the first place. And they can't kick me out yet, so. It's great having a feel. I mean, you can hear, it's kind of the godfather in some ways of what we do.

I don't mean that in a patronising way. So I'm very grateful for all that he brings today but has brought in the past. And where we're at today is in large part thanks to this guy. So very grateful for you. Thank you.

Well, it's thanks to God because, you know, I mean, we all try and be relevant, don't we, in our lives. And we're all at different stages in our lives. And I'm just about feeling the pinch now on stage.

I'm feeling, you know, sometimes. But we try and keep relevant, don't we? And I think if we're aware of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit's working within a church, then we'll listen to that still small voice and we'll try and follow the workings of the Spirit and where they're leading the whole congregation.

And our job is not as worship leaders. It's more enablers, just to enable you guys to be able to come to God on a Sunday. Great, great. Thanks, Phil. That's our job.

[6 : 05] Lovely, lovely. James, tell us a little bit about yourself and some of your musical heritage as well. So I'm James. And as you probably know, I am married to Ruth, who's the curate here.

My musical background is, I suppose, my parents are both opera singers, or were, and then they both decided to become vicars. So you can see how I end up in church music.

When I went to university for the first time in about 2005, I ended up at a church called All Souls in central London, which turned out had a massive church orchestra under this amazing guy called Noel Trudinic, who is one of the big figures in church music in the country.

And you had the opportunity to play with this orchestra, dabble in it a bit, and do other things. And I kind of did that for many years, worked my way up through it, and had the chance to play with some amazing people.

So they'd do an annual concert at the Albert Hall, which had guests like Graham Kendrick, Paul Belosh, Martin Smith, all these people. So I've been lucky enough to play with some of those people, which has been a sort of phenomenal experience.

[7 : 13] But then the other side to me is I do love classical music and that sort of thing as well. And so I do a bit of guitar, classical guitar. And since marrying Ruth, from her kind of tradition, one of the big things has been Teze.

I don't know if you've come across it. These nice sort of repetitive chants. And Ruth and I did a Teze marathon during lockdown where we both did a virtual Teze sing-along for people from our church to join.

And we did it every day for the whole of the first lockdown and into the second one. So that was good. So yeah, there's sort of two sides to me, I guess. And bass is your main instrument? Bass is my main instrument, yeah.

And your guitar as well, though? Yeah, I do a bit of classical and acoustic guitar, but yeah, only because I have to. Great. And James has a new bass this morning, so he's very excited, a five-string, isn't he, as well?

Good stuff. Great stuff, James. Thank you so much. Ellen, tell us a little bit about your own background and where you're at. Okay, so I currently work in primary school as a one-to-one support for a little girl with autism.

[8 : 14] Love it. And yeah, I've been doing that for the past nine years, I think. Just helping children with various different needs, mainly in Sen.

Musical background. I've been surrounded by music my whole life. My parents have been part of an amateur dramatic society. And yeah, they used to go around entertaining in old people's homes.

And so we used to go with them. My brother used to fall asleep in the piano case. Yeah. We've just been, yeah, I've just been surrounded by music my whole life. And we take part in shows twice a year at the Prince of Wales.

So I love my musical theatre. A bit too much. And what should I think? Oh, yeah. So I was in a Christian girl band many moons ago in the southwest.

So we'd tour around high schools. Taking over, we'd call them school weeks. So we'd take over lessons. And then at the end of the week, we'd put on this big gig, this big concert. And then we'd do like an opportunity.

[9 : 16] We'd give children the opportunity to respond to Jesus. So, yeah, so that was for two years, I think. We trained with the message. But it was part of Innovation Trust.

So we trained on the genetic course with the message. And then we then moved down south. So, yeah, so that was a big part of my life for two years. Brilliant. Brilliant. And Ellen, as you'll know if you're with us, regular singing with us on a Sunday.

I think during lockdown in particular, you were a huge blessing with that. Because we do these tracks each week. Or the band will put the tracks together each week. And we had 70-odd tracks, I think, over the course of lockdown. And having Ellen, Millie, Mark in particular singing on that.

That enabled us to have our Sunday experience, if you like, in a sort of musical sense. At home and out when we were in the car or jogging around Chasewater. Whatever we would do with those tracks. So, again, very grateful to Ellen for both her recording voice.

But also her voice here in helping us to engage with God through worship as well. That's indeed with James and Phil as well. So, great stuff. Thank you. Good to hear a little bit about your background on that. I think one of the main questions, I suppose, is this idea of worship is a big word for what encompasses a huge amount of what our faith, hopefully, is about.

[10 : 29] And yet, I guess we're talking today in a narrow sense about musical or sung worship. For you guys, again, just briefly, what would you say worship means to you? How would you define it for yourselves?

Worship for me is when I get up in the morning, I clean my teeth and I say, thank you, God, that I've got my own teeth. I go for a walk.

I say, thank you, God, for the lovely surroundings about me, for the smells, for the touch, for the view that I can see. Thank you, God, for tonight's curry.

Yes, we're going to have. Thank you, Lord. Then I clear my teeth at night and go to bed and say, thank you, Lord, that I've still got my teeth. So, worship for me is a whole person thing.

It's not just what happens here on a Sunday. Keith, our dear, lovely Keith, had a wonderful saying. I can't quite get the wording exactly right. But there's something about our service here has come to an end.

[11 : 31] Our worship has ended. Our service is about to begin. Our worship has ended. Our service is about to begin as we walk through those doors. Our service, our worship to God is about to begin.

So, it's not about this place, as lovely as it is and as lovely as you all are. It's not about this. It's about what happens when we leave this building and we walk out of the door.

So, I just want to read this to you because you might find this interesting. I came across this. Music is not the origin of worship, but it can be the expression of it.

Do not look to music to induce your worship. Look to music as simply an expression of that which is induced by a heart that is wrapped by the mercies of God.

Obedience to his commands. I know that's a bit of a mouthful. But basically, that's what I've been saying. You know, it's not what happens in here. Our worship is everything that we do.

[12 : 40] It's our very being, our very core. Or, that's what it is to me. So, whenever I just sit down at the piano and play, whatever I'm playing, that's worship to me.

Even the Beatles, inadvertently, I'm sure, wrote some stuff that could be, you know, love, love me do. You know I love you.

You can take it all sorts of ways, can't you? Yeah. So, worship for me is a very whole person thing. And it's not just what happens here on a Sunday. Yeah. Brilliant. Brilliant.

And rooted in gratitude by the sounds of it, from what you're saying, from the time you wake up to the time you go to bed. Absolutely. Sunshine to curries and everything in between. Absolutely. Great. Give thanks to God and worship him in every situation and in everything.

Yeah. Brilliant. Brilliant. There's a psalm in there somewhere. Nice one. Yeah. James, how about you? What does worship mean? How do you define it for yourself? Well, I think Phil's put it more eloquently than I could. That would be what I'd try to say, really.

[13 : 41] I think when it comes to what place does sung worship have for me, I guess music can sort of enrich and help us get clear, help animate the feelings or the thoughts that are lurking inside of us and help get them out.

And I think also music seems to be a huge gift from God. And when we're singing, when we're dancing, when we're, for example, moving in rhythm, there's something about that that feels like a bit like what we were created to do.

So I think that for me is hugely important. But I absolutely think that it's all inspired by everything outside of church. And that worship moment is a way of crystallizing that and just bringing it into clearer focus and helping express what's in our hearts at that time about all that other stuff.

Great. Thank you. Yeah. I played drums in a previous life. And one of the sort of things I always found helpful was even our heartbeats, you know, rhythm is hardwired into who we are.

And there's a cadence to that. There's a groove to it, if you like. And that helps me to sort of think, OK, I don't even realize my heart is beating. And yet there's a rhythm to it.

[14 : 58] And there's a rhythm, it seems, to God's engagement with us and his presence in the world. And from what you're saying, music is our way, perhaps, to connect with that rhythm and that melody in life in a worshipful sense.

Thank you, James. Thank you. Ellen, I know you're last on this. It's maybe harder to think of things to say. But fill us in. What does worship mean to you? So for me, obviously, what they've said, what Phil and James have said, is absolutely bang on.

But just to add to that, I think, for me, when I'm in music and in worship, my focal point is who Jesus is. And I focus on just his presence in my life.

And I know that sounds quite a selfish thing to think about. And I don't mean it to be that way at all. But it's a focal point for me because I put everything into that thought process.

I put everything into him, what he is in my life. But to go on to what you said about with music and with it being what we seem to be created to do.

[16 : 09] I notice that I love going to gigs. I love music. I love gigs. And the one thing that I happen to notice over the years is that no matter what song is playing, it doesn't matter what band you're going to go to see, most people in a gig will do this.

They'll always raise their hand, whether they're doing this. Do you know what? Everybody, nine times out of ten, will raise their hands. Even the applause is over your head, isn't it? And it's like, it is right.

It's what we've been created to do. Whether these people have a faith or not. It's like us as beings. It's almost like it's built into us that that's what we do.

Which I find really interesting. That is interesting. Thank you. Stick with Ellen and then we'll come back in reverse order. Let's talk about the sort of technicals, I suppose, of leading worship in a church setting.

What goes on in your head when you're up there? How do you decide what songs we sing? How do you know when to repeat what we sing? How do you choose? Do you know what I mean? What's the sort of mindset?

[17 : 15] Aside from perhaps your own heart, what's in your head, I guess, is what I'm asking when you're up there? Well, first, I tend to ask God to lead me first.

Because my head, how I'm wired, I'm very all over the place. My head, I struggle to filter through sometimes. And if I go into panic mode, I can't, I feel like I can't focus.

So I just tend to, before every service, I tend to just be still. I try and just still thoughts and still everything. But when I'm up there, I tend to, I'm quite, I ask God to speak to me.

And I tend to, I try and listen. That's why sometimes I'll stand away from the mic and I'll just look around. I know people might think that, why is she looking at me?

Why is she just staring into the congregation? But I just like to see what God is doing. And I try and listen and just listen to where we, as a church, in that moment, in that time, where we're at.

[18 : 24] And give God space. I don't find leading worship the easiest thing in the world. I don't, I tend to, what's the word, I get nervous every single time.

I have like butterflies in my stomach. I feel sick. I like, I really do. I get really nervous. What's the nerves caused by, do you think? It's that leadership. Like it's, because it's a lot of responsibility.

Because getting up there, you are, you make like all of us, you make yourself, you are vulnerable. You are vulnerable. You were giving everything of yourself, you know, to God, for God to use you, for God to lead you, to lead everybody else.

So it's that kind of, it's, yeah, it's from that direction really. But yeah, so I tend to, I do look around, I listen. In terms of like choosing songs, I'll ask you what, you know, what themes you talk or something.

And I'll, you know, we'll try and fit in around that. But then the rest is up to God and what God wants to do. Okay, so it's that intuition almost coming on the moment often. Yeah. Okay.

[19 : 31] And James and Phil, does that resonate with you two in terms of what goes on in your head or other things going on? Last night's curry or whatever, what are you thinking about, you know? My first criteria for choosing songs on a Sunday is, is my son Mark going to be there or not?

Because if he's not, then I've got a little bit more freedom to do some of the old songs. Because if he is there, he'll look at the set list and he'll say, for goodness sake, Dad, what's this one here doing?

That's my criteria for choosing the songs. Okay. No, it's more than that. I'm jesting, but yeah. We try and bring, don't we, joy.

Because music is so powerful an instrument in itself, isn't it? So I think when we're looking at it as a service for you all to come and participate in, we are looking at the different aspects of it.

And the first part, naturally, needs to be uplifting. It needs to be joyful. It needs to have, it needs to empower your hearts as you're singing.

[20 : 42] So that's the first criteria. So we choose songs that hopefully will make you joyful and inspire you to worship God. And then, naturally, there's a lull in the middle where we try and reflect and come down.

So we choose songs that are going to help you to do that. And we normally like to send you out on a happy note with a smile on your faces at the end. So we choose another rousing song to finish. But that's the kind of situation we're in.

Yeah. And if you've been part of a fellowship, and you are part of a fellowship within worship, you feel the heartbeat of the church that you're involved in, don't you, really?

Yeah. And so in the choice of songs, we try and feel the heartbeat that's going on at the time that we're in, really. Okay. The season that the church is in.

So you get a sense of, what, energy or mood from the congregation? Very much. Yeah. Very much so. Okay. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. We do. Yeah. I mean, anybody watch Paul McCartney last night at Glastonbury?

[21 : 45] Did you? Yeah. He said an interesting thing. Talking about nerves, he said that they were in Abbey Road Studios recording Love Me Do, which was the first song they recorded, was it?

Pretty much. Yeah, pretty much. And John was supposed to sing the lead and then play a harmonica. But the riff with the harmonica, he couldn't do both because he had to play the first harmonica note while he was singing the last of these words.

So it wasn't going to work. So he turned to Paul and said, can you sing it, Paul? And Paul said, I was absolutely horrified that he'd asked me to sing this song, you know, so that he could play the harmonica, John could play the harmonica.

And he said, and I listened to this day on that recording and I can hear my nerves in my voice. I'm absolutely petrified. And it's still with me now because I can still hear it every time I listen to the recording.

He said, but not tonight. I'm okay now. Now Phil plays in the Beatles tribute band, the Beatless, every once in a while. So they're your top band, aren't they, basically, I imagine, or one of them.

[22 : 52] Yeah. They were my upbringing like many other people, really. And they were what introduced me to popular music. Yeah. There's a lot of stuff in the Beatles that the writing of their songs is just, as this world's phenomenal to me.

Yeah. How they wrote so many quality songs, I'll never know. Great. But, yeah, it's part of my childhood. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It's been with me through. Yeah. Great. And then, James, I don't think you'll mind me saying, you've got a bass player's face when you play, haven't you?

You get that kind of closed eyes. You know, he's got that kind of groove thing going on often. So how does your face reflect what's going on in there? What's in your mind when you're playing, when you're leading worship, when you do, what's going on?

I suppose that's about, I think, as a member of the rhythm section, as you described the bass and the drums together, our job is to kind of get things going and try and uplift things and bring people along with us.

So I'm always thinking, oh, how can I just make this a bit more lively? How can I push it along? Is this a moment where I need to be playing down? Do I need to suddenly surprise people by coming in big here?

[24 : 01] But I think you've got to go for it with these things. So my motto is don't hold back. If there's a big chorus, give it everything you have. Okay. Because people will respond to that. And that's a great feeling when you come back and people are giving everything.

So that's it, really. And is there a difference for you playing, for example, here on a Sunday or the Albert Hall? Does your mind in a different place or is it the same principles that apply? To be honest, the overall experience is the same.

We're trying to do the same thing to bring everyone along with us. I guess I'm more constrained playing with a massive orchestra because I don't have as much responsibility for pushing everything along. My job is to play the right notes, make sure the bass is sounding good and groovy.

But a whole ton of other people are responsible for that as well. Here it's a bit more focused and there's a bit more freedom. But yeah, both are good. Yeah. Interesting. All right. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Now, we talked a little bit about the Beatles in terms of their McCartney craft in the words and the music, for example. I know for each of us, we'll have perhaps different songs that resonate in different ways, whether it's the words are important to us or we might really appreciate the melody in other songs.

[25 : 10] And I imagine that's the same for you guys here. I mean, what's more important for you, the words or the music? Now, Ellen's voice is her instrument. So you play through your singing, if you like, not through your hands, don't you?

But for you, is it words or is it a melody? What connects you to God best and how do you balance the two up, I suppose? It's really interesting. So I'm a bit of both.

I'm very much that there are some songs. There is, in fact, really old, well, I say really old, it's not really old. It's older worship song.

It was, oh gosh, these are the days of Elijah. Love the lyrics, hate the melody. That's me just being personal. I really don't like the melody.

But the lyrics are really powerful. Where you've got some, but I'm just, I'm a melody geek. I love a good tune. I love a good, you know, that's just me.

[26 : 14] But I am very much both, probably leaning more towards the melody side of life than lyrics. But both are as equally important to me.

Great, thank you. And then, James, I guess with a love of classical music, melody can't not be important for you. But for you, where's the theology or where's the melody?

Where do they stand in terms of each other? Yeah, it's a difficult one. Me and Ruth were talking about this recently. I think there are different ways that worship songs or hymns can work.

So sometimes contemporary worship songs get criticised as having overly simple, not very poetic, banal lyrics. But I think that's kind of missing the point.

That sometimes the idea is that the lyrics are simple. They may just say something like, I love you, Lord, and repeat it over and over again. But coupled with the right melody, they sort of take you into this, it's a bit like meditation.

[27 : 14] And it can become a prayer. And sometimes when you repeat it over and over, it can become a prayer and that can start to do its own thing. And it doesn't really matter that the words aren't Shakespeare.

But other times the words, there is more focus on the words, like I guess traditional hymns, which we don't do so much here. The idea is that you're really thinking about the poetry of the words as you're singing them.

So I think it depends a bit which type of song you're doing. Context, yeah. Thank you. And Phil, for you? Yeah, I suppose I'm airing on Ellen's side.

Were you in the heart group when Matt did the, we all had intellect, heart and all that? Yeah, of course you were. Yeah, so was I. So you've got heart people predominantly up here.

And yeah, the words are crucial. And a lot of the words that we sing, even in the choruses that we sing, are scriptural. They're taken directly from scripture.

[28 : 15] A lot aren't, but a lot are. And that's just singing scripture. There's nothing, it's fantastic to do that. It's wonderful. But I am a sucker for a tune as well as Ellen.

And I think you can have the most wonderful words in the world, put them to an awful tune that nobody can sing. And it becomes tough, you know.

And the heart needs to soar with these songs, doesn't it? And for the heart to soar, it needs a good tune and a memorable, catchy tune to sing it to, really.

Some of the best choruses that have probably been written have come from Graham, you know. Graham was so influential. Graham Kendrick was so influential in my early Christian music days.

Because he's word rich too, you know. And a lot of his songs are directly from scripture. So when we sing them, we have confidence that we're singing God's word. You know, we're singing the words from the Bible.

[29 : 17] And that's amazing. But I am a sucker for a good tune. Yeah. Yeah. I think you're right. Without the tune, it's poetry. And poetry's great. But we wouldn't sing poetry to a dirge, would we?

You know, it's got to be. No, no, no. I always remember when he first wrote Shine, Jesus, Shine, which is a strange lyric. You wouldn't really sit down and think, oh, just write a song, Shine, Jesus, Shine, you know.

But we sat in the marquee at Minehead with about 10,000 people, I suppose. And he first did this song.

We were on the back row, right up in the gods. And when they played it, I just couldn't sing it. I could not sing it. The spirit just absolutely, you know, it fled through the song.

And it was just, even now, you know, thinking of some of the stuff that he's written, the heart is there in them. But the tunes are good, too.

[30 : 17] You know, so, yeah. Best in both worlds. Yeah, it's wonderful. Great, great. I want to open this up in a minute for other questions. Have a think if there's anything else you want to ask.

A couple of things for us to maybe consider, though, before that. All three of you, and indeed all the musicians we have in the church who play, incredibly talented and gifted people. And a lot of you are playing in other bands.

There's a sort of semi-professional state to a lot of you as musicians. And there's a pro and con to that, I appreciate. Because the level of expectation and quality that's here is quite high for a small parish church in that sense.

And yet we want to give God our best. So for your opinion, where does musical ability or striving for musical excellence come in to our worship?

How does that balance play out for you? It's important to get, you know, a good quality of, you know, worship. I think with taking all the musicians into account, we're very blessed with what we've got here.

[31 : 19] I've been to other churches and you just think it makes you really appreciate what we have. I'm not saying that, like, the worship of other churches are rubbish.

I'm not saying that at all. But it does make you appreciate what we have. There's so many musicians here that are just, you know, so talented, absolutely incredible.

I do feel it's an absolute honour for me to get up with the, you know, folk in the band. It really is. And I love it.

I love creating music with them. And it's brilliant. But I do think it's important. But also it's important to know, I don't know how to put this across, but it's not a gig.

It's not a gig. It's not a gig. It's not a performance. It's worship. And we are doing this for one person. You know, we've got, with that focus in mind, God's in mind, and how his spirit is moving.

[32 : 21] And so it's not a gig. I was at New Wine a few years ago. And I was actually really shocked how I felt. So we were, it was, Martin Smith was leading worship in the main tent.

And I remember being really angry. I walked away from that meeting in particular really angry because I felt people were cheering Martin Smith than God.

And I was just thinking, like, who are we worshipping? Who are we worshipping? Martin Smith or Jesus? Or Jesus? And he doesn't ask for that. He doesn't welcome that, does he, as a worship leader?

No, no, no. It's that. It's kind of, you know, and I just, I walked away feeling really angry. And I thought, and I know that he was leading worship the next night in the tent. And I didn't want to go.

I didn't want to go because I thought, like, the reason, it's lost. It's lost. The reason was lost. And I just felt, it still gets me now. But I just felt, I did feel angry about it.

[33 : 23] And, yeah, so it's just important. Yeah. I guess you're offering the best you've got. Yeah. In a non-performing kind of way. Yeah.

If that's a, summarise in that way. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Thank you. Thank you. James and Phil. I mean, where's excellence and musical ability come into worship? Yeah. I think that, in some ways, the point of trying to play with, you know, a degree of musical quality and excellence there is really because it helps to sort of draw people into worship.

It has a function. So having the drums playing well in time just makes the whole thing feel better for everyone. Having the guitar sounding good gives it a nice sheen over the top.

And people do notice that. But the point of that is to draw people into where the worship, communal worship experience, and it's not to sell a commercial product or anything like that. Yeah. And I think because of that, it's not important to be perfect and polished in worship.

It's important that it works and it draws people in and the rhythm is good and things like that. And because of that, I think the worship band can be a place where you include people and you bring people in.

[34 : 32] And even if they're not the greatest player or singer in the world, sometimes they can come and get some experience, get better, get things like that. Because perfection is not the goal.

Okay. Interesting. Thank you. Phil? Yeah. I'll give you a little story because I heard this on the radio once. An evangelist was doing a mission out in an African country, I believe it would have been.

And he was also a keyboard player and he often used to lead worship himself as well. And he arrived for the first evening meeting and the place was absolutely packed with people.

And this guy got up to play the piano. And suffice to say that the gentleman that played didn't do very well.

He was not in tune. He couldn't hardly play the piano. And so this worship leader stood there and thought, oh my goodness, as we do, because we're musicians, so we do.

[35 : 41] But what happened that night was phenomenal. Nobody seemed to listen to what was going on. They didn't care that the gentleman playing the piano couldn't really play the piano.

The Holy Spirit was at work. Tens of thousands of people were singing to God in their way to a man that really couldn't play the piano.

And that's the crucial thing, isn't it, really? Yeah. It's not about what we're listening to. It's about our hearts and it's about us bringing ourselves to God, really.

Great. Great. Thanks, Phil. All right. Last question for me. I'm aware of the time. Last question for me. As I say, we're hugely grateful to you and all of those who lead our song worship. How can we as a church, as a congregation, support and encourage you in your roles, would you say?

What would you most appreciate from us? Because you give a lot to us. What can we give back to you, I suppose? I think... The rider. I think one of the things is it's not always going to be great and sometimes things go wrong.

[36 : 47] And if ever we have a dodgy gig or we play badly, just give us a pat on the back and say, well done. And maybe save the feedback for a couple of weeks later in the pub. Okay.

So not immediately after the service. Yeah. That B flat was terrible. Save that for two weeks' time. All right. Thanks, James. Anything, Ellen and Phil? What do you reckon? Yeah. Yeah, we are human. So, yeah.

And we have human feelings as well. Yeah. And we'll have bad weeks and we'll have good weeks. And we'll have bad choices of songs and we'll have good choices of songs. And sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't quite work.

You know. So, but be patient. That's the main thing. Yeah. And we're all in this together, aren't we? This isn't an us and them thing. We're all in this together. But we try and everyone that's involved, I'm sure, tries to bring the best that we can bring, really.

Yeah. And I was thinking of the song, I'm Coming Back to the Heart of Worship. Yeah. Which was a Matt Redmond song that was written by him because they veered away from the truth of worship.

[37 : 49] They were worshipping the worship. Yeah. And there's a line in that song that says, I bring you more than a song. For a song in itself is not what you require.

You're looking into my heart. That's kind of it, isn't it, really? Yeah. It's not really about the song that we're singing. God's looking into our hearts as we're singing it.

That's what worship is about. Great. Lovely stuff. Lovely stuff. All right. There is a chance to talk to these guys over teas and coffees, I'm sure, afterwards and indeed every week.

Maybe a couple of questions. I know I'm aware that I find this fascinating. I don't know. I hope that comes across from what they've been sharing. Maybe there's a couple of questions you'd like to pose and then we'll round it up.

Thanks, Angie. Not necessarily a question, but just something on Jay's behalf because you said something this week that was really important. And when you asked about where the excellence in music sits, I think we need to remember that when you are a musician and you're talking about worship in everyday life, for them, striving for excellence in their music is part of their worship.

[38 : 59] And therefore, it's perfectly okay to aim for excellence. The prep Jay puts in to any music that he does is incredible. And he said to me this week that he's realized over the last few years, especially through COVID, that over all the things he does, all the crazy events he does outside of work, all the running and muddy things he does, and all the music and the theatre and all these shows he does, he said that the music stuff is what makes his heart happy.

That's where his worship is. That's what really gets to him. And I think listening to you guys up there, he would be saying very similar stuff. But for us as a congregation, to know that their striving for excellence in their music is part of their worship, and that is perfectly okay to want to strive.

And like Ellen said, we're really blessed with the musicians and the fact that through all of them, you can see that their striving for their excellence is in their worship. That is their worship.

So, great. All good. Brilliant. Thank you, Ange. Thank you. And then Mark. Mine isn't a question either. It's just picking up on what Ellen said.

Each Sunday when we come here to worship, I've never felt that the band has been a performance. I've sincerely felt that each and every one of them acknowledge that it's a gift from God.

[40 : 20] And I sincerely believe that they give that gift back to God in worship. We all embrace different styles of worship, whatever Phil or Mark or Ellen or Jack, whatever they bring.

I remember being greatly admired with Jim Orport because he embraced every form of worship. And I am very grateful that you give your gifts, your God-given gifts, back to him with grace.

And I'm very grateful. So, thank you. Great. Lovely. Lovely. All right. Maybe one more comment if there's anyone want to say something. Jack. A fun question for you all.

James mentioned that we didn't do a certain style in this church. So, is there a particular style or a worship song that we've not done in St. John's but you'd love to do it?

Good question. Desert Island Discs. What's your request? Yes. Yes. That's the answer to that one. I absolutely adore.

[41 : 24] There's a worship song by Phil Wickham who I just, as a worship leader, I love. It's called It's Always Been You. And it is so powerful. And every time, I mean, I couldn't sing it because I'll cry.

But, so, if you guys want to sing it, please go ahead. But honestly, the lyrics and the melody is just, it is so powerful. So, yeah, that's the one.

I don't know about you. I'm open to most things, really. I like a bit jazzier stuff. I like a bit of that. And, yeah, I'm quite content with how things are as we stand.

But I think as musical trends come in to the Christian songwriting world as well, it's interesting to bring some in and adapt them, if we can, to our style of worship here, really.

So, I think a lot of songs we can adapt and make fit. They won't be exactly as they were recorded or written, but we play around with them and make them ours, make them special.

[42 : 27] I always used to remember, you know, we sang a lot of the early choruses here and I'd do them my way. When people used to go to other places or other big meetings and that, they'd say, we sang that song, but it wasn't like the way we sang it, was it, Phil?

Wasn't it? Really? Smart version. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Great. Yeah, maybe a little bit, a few songs that involve a bit more kind of participation from the congregation can be nice occasionally.

There's a really good new song called Is He Worthy, which I think Chris Tomlin sings, though he didn't write it. And it's got kind of a bit of the band does, then a bit that other people sing back. It can be a bit cheesy at times, but if you do it right, I think it can be really good.

So, yeah. And brings the cheese. Yeah. All right. Brilliant. Brilliant. And likewise, if you're listening or you've got stuff that you'd love us to sing in church, just ask and we'll try and include it. So, requests are welcome.

Not on the day, because that gets quite tricky to rehearse, but it was 24 hours notice and we can get them in. All right. Brilliant. All right. I know that we could go on and I'm aware of the time, so we'll knock on the head there.

[43 : 34] But I just want to pray for these guys and for all our musicians if we can. And so, Lord, thank you so much for Phil and James and Ellen, Lord, for all of our musicians, our worship leaders, our singers here, Lord.

Those who help us to encounter you through music. And we know it's something that you've given each of them a heart for and a passion for and a talent for.

And we're grateful, Lord, for the way in which, as Marg was saying, they give that willingly back to you and bless us through that offering. So, would you bless them with your pleasure, your encouragement, your energy, Lord, to pursue the best that they can be with your help, Lord, in that role.

Because we know that will bless us, but also bless you. So, thank you for them, Lord. Thank you for this church. Thank you for the way in which the music enriches our enjoyment of it. And we trust, Lord, and we hope and we ask that that will enrich your enjoyment of us as we offer our praise and our worship to you each week.

Amen. Amen. Can we thank these guys? Is that all right? Thank you. Thank you. Well done. Well done. Thanks very much, guys. Thank you.