

# Sunday 7th April 2024 - Q&A; with Matt & Ian

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Preachers: Ian McKeown, Matt Wallace

[ 0 : 00 ] Okay, so once again, thank you to everybody that did contribute questions. It's really helpful. And what we've done is we've actually, because there were quite a few that came in, and I've got to say they're really good.

There's some really good questions in there. What we've done, we've grouped them into three different areas. Some that we've had to summarize, some that we've had to obviously join together. We've got the same sort of questions coming in. And then some that we felt might be better explored in a subsequent session. Because really two or three minute kind of soundbite answers may be not very helpful.

So we've got Pentecost coming up on 19th of May. So Matt thought it would be useful maybe questions that people had put, sort of particularly around the area of gifts of the Spirit. We'll explore that and unpack that maybe in more detail. So please don't be upset if your question isn't directly in here, because obviously we've had to sort of amalgamate these. So do you want to sort of dive straight in?

[ 0 : 58 ] I feel like I'm on the couch now. Yeah, yeah. Graham Norton or Jonathan Ross, that's the question. So do you want to just dive straight in there? You want to bust?

Go on, you're far away. All right, okay. Well look, what we're going to do, we'll take it nice and easy to begin with. So something pretty straightforward, nice easy one. So first question, I struggle to read my Bible.

Where do I start? It's a good question. It is. Hands up if you struggle to read the Bible. Yeah, I think I'm with you on that.

And those who haven't put their hands up, I'm in awe of you, to be honest, because it is a struggle sometimes. And I think there's good reason for that, because there's, I guess we could call the Bible three things.

I mean, it's lots of things, but it's definitely ancient. I mean, it's an old, old book, probably put together between, what, about 1900 and maybe up to 3,000 or so years ago.

[ 1 : 57 ] So it's an ancient, ancient book, which is kind of surprising that it's actually as readable as it is, given the age of it and so on. So it's ancient. I think it's also ambiguous as well in that it's not the simplest book to get your head around, because it seems at times to be quite conflicting.

And some of the things that it says, they don't always seem to be agreeing, certainly things from the Old Testament into the New Testament and so on. So there's a real sense of ambiguity in there as well, often, I think.

And it's also a diverse book. There's all sorts of styles of writing that are in it, from poetry and history to biography to wisdom stuff to legalese.

You know, there's loads and loads of stuff in it. So it's a very diverse book. And the word Bible means library. So it's not surprising it's got that diversity in it as well.

So I'm not surprised the question person and each of us, I suppose, struggle with it sometimes. The best place, though, I would suggest to start to try and get our heads around it, and this will probably come up quite a lot in some of the questions, is with Jesus.

[ 3 : 06 ] Jesus is the starting point, I would suggest, of any kind of understanding of God and of the Bible. So I would always start with one of the Gospels. There's four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They've each got a different kind of emphasis.

So my favourite Gospel is Luke. I reckon that's got the most in it for me, in my kind of appreciation of Jesus. It's got lots of healings, lots of miracles.

It's got the birth stories. It goes right through Jesus' life in that sense, in terms of lots of teaching as well. So I would recommend, if you want to start anywhere, start with Luke. And then that flows onto

Acts, because it's written by the same fella.

So Acts is the story of the early church and how these early Christians put their faith into Jesus in practice. So Luke and Acts, and then that will be doing, I imagine, for a few months, if you take your time on it, and then you can go where you want with that.

But Luke and Acts would be my start in point, I think. Brilliant. Yeah. Couldn't agree more. And I think, I remember when I was sort of getting into particularly, well, all of the Bible, but particularly the New Testament, is using an audio Bible.

[ 4 : 06 ] Because I'm an auditory kind of learner as well. So listening, rather than just having to read. And of course, now you've got Lumo and different other... Yeah. So the videos we use each week, you can get them all on YouTube.

L-U-M-O. Just search for that. Lumo. And they've got all the Gospels in there as well. The same company have put together a film called The Covenant as well. So you can look for that. And that's a story from Genesis right through to arriving in a promised land under Aaron and stuff.

So they've got a new one out. And they're also, I think, going to do a series on the Book of Acts as well, coming out soon. So, yeah. If you want those Lumo videos of Jesus, there's an easier way, perhaps, than reading. Yeah.

Audiobooks as well. Spotify, I've got loads of those on audiobooks. So, yeah. I think I'd probably give Leviticus and Numbers a bit of a wide berth. Maybe leave those for a while. Yeah. They're definitely a bit harder to get into.

Not the easiest ones to start. And for me, it'd be Mark, probably. Because it's clippy, isn't it? It moves along a pace. It is very immediate, Mark. You can really read Mark in probably one sitting.

[ 5 : 04 ] Yeah. It's a short list. It's very story-driven. Right? Cool. Okay. Ready for number two? I thought that was it. Okay. All right. Good, is it? So, this is quite a thought-provoking question, I think.

Okay. So, here goes. Should we continue to read the Bible if it hampers or puts in jeopardy our relationship with God?

Hmm. Okay. Should we continue to read the Bible if it doesn't help us, basically, in our faith? I think yes, as an answer.

But the reasons I would say that are sort of qualified a bit, I suppose. It's worth saying from the top, I think. The Bible is not God. The Bible is a book. The Bible is not God.

And the Bible, as far as I understand it, never actually describes itself as the Word of God. You won't find that in the Scriptures, perhaps, surprisingly. So, we can approach it as a book, not as divine in itself.

[ 6 : 08 ] So, that gives us permission to wrestle with it a bit more and to struggle with it, I think. But within that, there's a little verse in our letters to Timothy where it speaks about Scripture being God-breathed.

And we did a series on this a few years back where I don't think that means God dictates it, because it's not, I would suggest, the direct Word of God. But that God's breath brings to life and brings life out of the human words that people have written down over the years.

And there's something special and unique, therefore, about the Bible in a way in which God can speak to us through it. And having said that, though, I think if we try and read the Bible without engaging with God when we do it, if we're not praying as we read it, if we're not trying to sort of hear God speak to us through the Bible, then it can really hamper our opinion of Him, because, as I say, it's diverse and ambiguous, it's ancient.

It can give us the impression that God is not with us, God is not nice, God is not kind, and all that kind of thing. So, if we approach it as something that can be questioned, I think there's real merit in that, because not all the Bible writers, and I've said this in the part, I don't think all the Bible writers get it right with God.

I don't think it's very accurate sometimes, their way that they portray God. I think they're trying their best, often, to understand who God is and what God's like, but they don't always get it right.

Therefore, I think that's why Jesus had to come, to try and put those ideas right, by living it out in the flesh.

[ 7 : 49 ] And so, if Jesus has to come to correct some of the views, perhaps, that are prevalent in the Old Testament about the kind of God that they thought He was, then that gives us permission to be able to say of the Bible, okay, I'm not sure I agree with that portrayal of God as vengeful or wrathful or violent.

That was their interpretation of events. If I look at Jesus, God is not vengeful or wrathful or violent. So, if we read the Bible through the lens, if you like, of Jesus, then that helps us to see that we got permission, I think, to think, well, okay, Jesus, if it's between Jesus and the Bible, I will always choose Jesus.

And that, to me, is the way in which we can make sense of those passages that we struggle with and say, actually, I don't think that's who God is. They did their best, as I say, but their interpretation of God smiting people and sending natural disasters and so on in punishment, that's not Jesus. So, that would be how I read the Bible. And then it suddenly becomes a much more interesting book because you then start thinking, well, why were they thinking that at the time? What was the background and the history and the culture that made them think that God was violent?

And why did Jesus say something completely different to his culture, which was equally violent? And then it becomes a much more to and fro with God. Okay, then, God, what are you saying to us through these words? How can we get to know these writers better?

[ 9 : 10 ] What their motivations were? And most importantly, how can we apply that to our life and see, well, where is God in contemporary war and violence? And so on, I don't think he's in the violence.

He's in the repair of the violence in the way that Jesus was as well. Yeah. So, yeah. Thank you. That would be my take. Yeah. Thank you. Yeah, and I mean, I certainly, you know, wouldn't want to discourage anybody, I guess.

I'm sure, Matt, you wouldn't discourage anybody from reading the Bible just because you're struggling with that. I think you mentioned Timothy and he said that all scripture is useful for teaching.

For me, and this is part of my journey as well, it's just been, we've inherited a lot, haven't we, in terms of our understanding and our interpretation. And really, it's about putting it up against, as Matt was saying, about the lens of Jesus and kind of being willing to be brave enough to kind of say, okay, so let's look at this through that lens.

And then that means you have to ask some really tough questions. And you have to really be willing to kind of go there to look at those and to think, okay, so what was really being said? And what does it really mean?

[ 10 : 21 ] And how do I understand how God is speaking through this? Because I, like Matt, I think there are sections where what we're hearing is more people's anger at what's happened to them.

The Bible is a, yes, God-inspired, but a very human book. Just read Psalms if you want to know about that. It's about everything being sort of thrown out there.

I think that means we have to be courageous to ask some tough questions. Yeah, but there's permission to do that, I think. I mean, Jesus did that all the time when it's like, you've heard it said this, but I say to you.

You've heard it said in the Old Testament, take an eye for an eye. He says, that was a wrong understanding. This is how you do it. Love your neighbour. Pray for those who persecute you. Don't take revenge. So Jesus reinterprets the Bible all the time.

That gives us permission, I think, to do the same. Yeah. Good. Right, here we go. These are all sort of around the Bible, so this one leads in quite nicely. So I sometimes wonder that the books I read about the Bible and about faith just make me feel comfortable with a version of God that suits me to believe in.

[ 11 : 30 ] It can all get too cosy. Can we cherry-pick when it comes to God? I get that, but yes, we can. We can cherry-pick.

We can choose to listen to that sort of echo chamber of things that we already agree with to confirm our own ideas and bias and so on. But if the books that we're reading about God and the way in which we read the Bible makes us feel better towards God, I think that's part of what the good news is.

I think that's part of what the good news is. It's meant to be good news, this whole thing. Jesus came to proclaim the good news of God and the kingdom. So if in the books we're reading and the approach to faith that is resonating with us, if that warms our heart, if that makes us feel invigorated and inspired when we're engaging in that way, then I think that's usually God reminding us that it is good news.

There is a positive in that. I'm reminded of the couple of people who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. And when Jesus unpacked all the scriptures, they're described as saying, weren't our

hearts warmed within us when he was explaining it all?

And if other literature, other readers, other writers and stuff who we engage with, if our hearts are warmed and we're inspired by that, I don't think it's cherry picking.

[12:57] I think it's resonating with what's meant to be good news. And in all that we're reading and watching and listening to, if the fruit of that is that we're kinder people or we're more loving people or we've got a better understanding of God being generous to all people, then that's not cherry picking.

That's the way it should be. And cherries are good as well. Cherries are meant to be, they're the best bit of the cake often. So I don't think it's a problem to cherry pick in that way if it's positive and good and fruitful.

I know the person who put the question in, I've talked to them in the past about their background and the things that they might have left behind in their ideas about God. And I think a lot of it is we already know perhaps the picture of God that we might have been given that doesn't seem that loving.

And so if we're reading books that emphasise God's love and kindness and generosity and welcome, then perhaps that's the correction for those previous ideas that is needed. That's good news to me.

Yeah, I think it's a really good point actually. It's a really good question. Because I think we need to be mindful of that bias. And actually we'll look at, there's some more questions which kind of like dig into that a little bit more actually a bit later on.

[14:12] All I'll say is personally, I've got a lot of books. I have got a lot of books. Lisa will tell you I've got a lot of books. I've run out of books and I've got a lot of bookshelves as well. So over the years I've bought all sorts of things.

And there are favourites obviously. But I've got Tozer on my shelf and I haven't read it recently but I've looked at that. I've got quite a lot of stuff with it by N.T. Wright and Tom Wright, who's more trad, evangelical.

C.S. Lewis, Henry Newman. And I've tried to be eclectic in that. There are places I go and I've shared it before. And one of the authors who's a speaker and writer is Brian McLaren.

I have a lot of empathy with what he has to say. And more recently Richard Rohr. So I've tried to sort of go to different places. Because I think that is, you know, and people like Pete Rowland, you know, who's like well out there in terms of some of his ideas.

Yeah, and we've got the benefit of the internet so we can often hear interviews with writers. If you're interested in someone's book then dig out an interview with them. Because if their character is something that you think actually you come across as a good person.

[15:22] I'm more likely to want to read their books. If they come across as a bit snarky I probably will leave them a bit. You know, it's the reflection of their character and what they write. Yeah, really good point.

Okay, so we'll finish this little section of questions on this last one. Which is a real, this is a really good one actually. So, with so many issues that we will never agree on, how do we disagree well? I think you've got to start from a position of humility. That I certainly don't, Ian doesn't, none of us know all the answers, far from it. So you start with a position of wanting to be open to being corrected or learning.

Being interested in other people's opinions as to why they think that. What's the background to why they might hold an opinion quite strongly in compared to something that you might hold.

Generally being open-minded that God can speak to us for everyone. And, yeah, who's to say that God might not speak to me or to you through someone who we might vehemently disagree on some topic.

[16:28] But on other stuff, they get it spot on. So I wouldn't want to dismiss anyone as being a conduit for what God might want to be saying to me. I think in all of this, empathy is probably key in terms of trying to identify with what is it about that particular opinion or argument that is important for that person.

And if you unpack the reasons behind that, you know, not going amateur psychology and stuff, but trying to understand what is it that matters to you about that. Often that's quite revealing.

And that can tell us why someone might dig their heels in. Because if you rock that opinion, then perhaps other opinions like a house of cards might fall down that they hold. And that can be quite

tricky for people.

So it's understanding the weight that people might put on opinions. And I think as well, it's choosing your battles. So if I'm honest, I love the worship music that we have here.

The folks who play in the band are both incredibly talented, but people of immense character and faith as well, which is great. Some of the songs we sing, I don't agree with the words.

[ 17 : 34 ] As you'd expect in a group this size, not everyone is going to agree with all the words that a particular songwriter has put together. So I either sing them because it would be rude not to, or I kind of have a pray at that point and say, really?

I'm not sure that I'd put it like that. God, you know, where are you in that one? But I don't, as a vicar, I don't veto those songs. Because for other people, they might be the very thing they need to connect with God this week.

So you choose your battles. Whereas with teaching stuff from the Bible, I'm quite keen that we do wrestle with this idea that the Bible can be pulled apart a bit because it's not God.

So you could say worship songs are equally, could be pulled apart in their lyrics. But that for me is not a battle that I want to fight at the moment. And it's not one that I feel would be that fruitful for us as a church.

And again, underpinned by humility, like what do I know compared to someone else? If God's speaking to that, through that, brilliant to them. So yeah, humility, empathy, open-minded, listening, all that stuff.

[ 18 : 40 ] And I'd say snap. You know, it has to start with humility, doesn't it? You know, none of us have got a monopoly on the truth. And I think it's 1 Corinthians 13, it says, for now we only see a dim reflection, as in a mirror.

So, you know, you come into this willing to listen. And ask, why do you think that? Not just like straight back and back with a, I don't know, agree. It's like, tell me more.

Where's that opinion come from? You were talking about a trampoline the other day, to me. Yeah, yeah, it's the idea. If you see our faith more as like a trampoline rather than a brick wall, actually. Because if you take a few bricks out, you know, things can fall down quite quickly.

And a trampoline, you know, you can take out a few of the springs, and it's still a trampoline. And the springs can be, you know, some of the stuff that we've, you know, sometimes some of the sacred cows, some maybe doctrinal stuff that we're not too sure about.

But we can disagree on those things. Clearly there are things. So for me, okay, I'll tell you, resurrection is a non-negotiable. That's one of the core things at the heart of my faith.

[ 19 : 47 ] And I think you'll probably... Yeah, absolutely. Without taking the resurrection away... I'll take it, I'll take it. We're kind of dead, really. Yeah, you sort of lose it, don't you, really? But then there's other stuff which you can, those springs can, you know, and we can have different...

You see, I actually think that it's important that we have the courage to say things and the permission to know that we can say things. You know, it's like, well, you know, I'm not where you are at, but do it in a graceful way.

Let me just share one thing. I don't want to embarrass Karen in our house group, but we meet, obviously, in the house group every week. And I just remember... I can't remember. It must have been a couple of months, maybe three months ago.

And we're having quite an interesting discussion. I can't even remember what it was now. But I said something, and I prefixed it by saying, you know, I'm sorry, but, you know, I just don't see things that way.

And sorry, Karen, if you listen to this afterwards, but Karen so graciously said to me, said, Ian, you don't need to apologise. You know, that's okay. And, you know, that has stuck with me.

[ 20 : 51 ] Because it's like, yeah, you know, thank you for that. Thank you. That's an affirmation. We might not agree, but we can still do this stuff gracefully to one another and in love. And I think that that's it for me.

That's it about disagreeing well. Yeah, and you're free to leave. You haven't got to come here. You know, there's been people who have left in recent months a lot because they don't agree with some of my views that I would say from the front.

And that's okay. They find somewhere else that they want to be part of a church. And they go with my good wishes and my blessing in that. But they have come and spoken to me and said that we're struggling with this. We may think we might be better off elsewhere.

It's like, great. Good for you. Yeah. Equally, we've got new people coming in because they've left other churches. And I wouldn't, you know, cuss the other churches. But there's, you know, I'd hope there's that to and fro here that you can ask questions and wrestle together.

That's part of the grace. Hopefully that's here. Okay. So we've got a second group of questions now, which are sort of more on, I suppose, church life. So here's a nice easy one.

[ 21 : 59 ] What's the point of coming to church? Something to do with it. Yeah. What are you going to do on Sunday? My answer with this would have changed over the years.

I guess when I was sort of late teens, early 20s, the reason I went to church was to meet girls. That was the main thing. Yeah. That has changed, by the way.

There's all sorts of reasons why I think it's good to be church.

We could talk about come to church as in the building. I get that kind of understanding. But primarily, church is the people. Church is you and me. And so we come to be community together. That's the main reason. We come to share with one another. We come to work out in community what it means to have a faith. We can have a faith on our own, but it's tricky. It's really hard. And church is the way in which we can come together to do that, to explore that.

[ 23 : 03 ] It also goes part of this humility thing in that I get an immense amount out of being in church because through the conversations, through different people speaking, through some of the things that are shared, through the way in which I observe and can watch other people engaging and worshipping, my heart grows, especially when I know some of their stories which are tough, and yet still they're worshipping God within that toughness.

That lifts me. It's a good thing to be able to be taken out of yourself and into someone else's life. So that's what church offers, I think, as well. Help us in terms of transforming the wider community because there's strength in numbers in that and we can do a lot together that we can't do on our own.

I guess one of the main things why we come to church is not simply to receive, though. It will be what we can bring, what we can offer. And over the years, I guess some people have said to me, you know, I didn't really get much out of that service, so I'm not really enjoying church at the moment.

It's like, again, I understand that. What is it you're putting in? You know, if you come to church and think, well, no one spoke to me, it's like, well, who did you speak to? Who did you approach?

And I know that takes bravery, but we get out what we put in, I think, often. So I'd encourage that part of church, what we can bring and offer. And who knows, that little smile, that word of encouragement, that question, that remembering someone's name and saying, how are you doing?

[ 24 : 29 ] You were talking about this last week. How has it gone? That coming in the world to people, and that's part of the way and the reason why we do church, because it encourages us, in the ups and downs of life, to keep going.

So, yeah, what about you? Yeah, well, I mean, I suppose it's one of the few spaces where you get to sort of come together and, you know, collectively worship, pray.

There aren't many opportunities to do that. I actually think, I've said this many times, you know, and you can come and have a chat with me if you want, I think some of the most important ministry at church happens after we've finished this bit, when we're having coffee.

It's in the conversations. So, you know, it's thinking about, well, where are the opportunities for me to rub shoulders with people who I wouldn't normally necessarily do that, and to see things from a different point of view, and to understand where different people are at.

Because we can never know, can we, just how important a smile is, just how important, you know, just listening to someone, or, you know, or just a few kind words, and it can make such a huge difference into someone else's life.

[ 25 : 34 ] And to me, that's ministry. That's what ministry really is, isn't it? And because church isn't just Sunday, we can continue that all through the week, whether it's other events and groups that come here, getting people's numbers and keeping up with them.

You know, church is a 24-7 thing, you know, as well. I was just thinking, it's like, you know, if I can borrow from JF Kennedy, you know, ask not what your church can do for you, but what you can do for your church, you know.

And that's, and again, that's about kind of growing up a bit as well, isn't it? Anyway, yeah. Good. Okay. So, sort of link to this.

I'm relatively new to church. How do I get involved and be part of things? Yeah. It's a good question. It's a simple answer, I think, for this one. It's get stuck in. You know, turn up as much as you can to things initially. Try things out. We've got lots of different groups going on, for example. Try them out. [ 26 : 33 ] If you don't like them, that's fine. But come. Come along to pub club, curry club, watercolors, whatever it is that's going on, to meet new people. It does take an element of courage. I appreciate, I'm naturally, it might be surprised, but I'm naturally a shy person.

And I find talking to people for the first time, I get very self-conscious with that, because I'm trying to, what do I ask them? What do I say next? You know, that kind of thing about that conversation. And that takes real bravery to do that, especially in this kind of setting, I understand. But if we, if we can... Is that a ringtone or a bird stuck in it?

Birdies are about it. It's a ringtone. He's been tweeting again, has he? Lovely. All right. Thank you. Thank you. Yeah, it's just going up to people. And if we've been here 10 years, and there's people who have been here 10 years, and we've never spoken to them, that's okay. But just say, look, I'm aware.

[ 27 : 34 ] We've never spoken. How are you doing? Tell me about yourself. What have you been up to this week? Or tell me more about your life. Or just address the elephant in the room that you haven't spoken yet. And that's fine, because that's a two-way thing.

So be brave, I would suggest. That's the best way to get involved. Serve. Get on a rota or something. The way in which you can offer your time and your gifts. Come and chat to me, to Ian, to Marie, to Ruth, and say, I do this.

Is that any use for us as a community? And I'm sure it will be. But yeah, get stuck in. Turn up. Give it a go. Ditto, yeah.

I think the clubs are great, actually, because it gives you that run-in, doesn't it? It's a social setting, it's a chance to get to know people. So if you start with that relationship, yeah. But absolutely, just jump in.

Okay, so next one. How do I do church if my family don't? Yeah, that's a good question. I sympathize with that a lot, because I appreciate people's home backgrounds, people's family backgrounds will each be unique.

[ 28 : 41 ] And there's no reason to expect either a family unit or a couple to be journeying at the same pace or in the same way in their understanding of God.

And that can cause friction and tension. I fully understand that for folks. I don't fully understand it, but I try to understand it, I guess would be a better way to put it.

So I think within that, there's a need to be kind with yourself if you're in this situation, that God sees, God knows, and he's not wagging the finger and sort of saying, you need to put me first above your family.

And I don't think it's that kind of idea. I think it's more God would be saying to you or to I in that kind of situation, okay, this is how it is.

How can we bring love and kindness and conversation and care into this situation and perhaps this disagreement between partners or families about the way in which we can commit to being part of a church community?

[ 29 : 43 ] And the same applies, I think, within a family unit or whoever it is. Try and have the conversations. Try and explain why your faith matters to you. What difference it makes in your life.

And you can ask the people who are struggling with perhaps why you might want to come to church. We say, well, do you see a difference in my life when I come back from church or haven't been to church or when I've spent time in prayer?

And they know us best, obviously, the people we live with. So you'd hope there is a difference when we come back. We've been encouraged or we've been lifted or lightened in something. And if they can't see a difference, then that might be them speaking to us or God speaking to us through them and saying, well, come on a minute.

Your walk's got to match your talk here. It's no good going to church and coming back in a right old mood. What difference is this making? And that might open up the conversation and say, actually, this is helping me.

And I'd love for you to know that, but no pressure. I'm not trying to convert you. I just see the positive difference that God can make in my life. And because I love you, I'd love for you to know that too.

[ 30 : 48 ] And that gentleness, that might help. But I'm not qualified in many ways to speak on this. But I know that God gets it. God sees it. God has every sympathy with that.

And if you can't make a Sunday, that's okay. If you can't make a Monday, that's okay. If family commitments are elsewhere, there's ways to keep up online. There's other groups to be involved with midweek. If you only can make it once a month because your family want your time in other ways, that's okay.

There's no rules in terms of attendance or engagement. I know we've said turn up if you can to get involved, but that's caveated by life. It has to be. So there's permission to do what you can, not what you can't in that, I think.

It's not quite the same, but I was just thinking, when I first joined St. John's, which is the back end of the 80s, and there was a thing, I don't think it's a thing now, but it was a thing then.

This idea of don't be yoked with an unbeliever in terms of relationships and things. And I met Lisa, what, 89, 90, so it wasn't long after I got here, and so I just brought her to the church.

[ 31 : 58 ] But for me, it was just about, just like, this is my life, and this is who I am. Yeah. I don't think I was sort of being particularly, forcing you to come to church or anything, but it was just like, you know, this is it.

Yeah, and any partnership will take interest, you'd hope, in each other's interests. And if this faith stuff is a big interest of yours, then you'd hope that would be shared if you're taking an interest in things that are important to them as well.

But it all stems from the attitude in which you're approaching it. You can't Bible bash in your own home because your home will become a horrible place to be. Yeah. It's got to be done in grace and love and...

Yeah. Yeah. Okay. So, third group of questions, which it is more over to you here, to you, Matt, here. It's on being the vicar and sort of faith.

So, what's the best and worst thing about being a vicar? This is the best thing.

[ 33 : 15 ] You. The privilege of being involved in people's lives, and it is a privilege, of being... People sharing stuff with you that you know is at the core of their experience, their being, their anxieties, their hopes, their dreams, being involved at significant life stages for people, whether it's birth or death or marriage or baptism.

There's a huge privilege that comes with that, and that's the bit I enjoy most. It's a people-based job, and... Yeah. I'm shy, and I'm an introvert.

I do my best to love people, and I find... It's... That's the best thing for me, sharing life with people. Conversely, that's also the toughest thing, I think, because where do you stop with that?

Where's the boundaries between what is a job, of which I've got... I'm meant to do six days a week and 48 hours minimum a week in that. That's what I'm sort of contracted to do, often turns in more than that.

So how do you stop engaging with people in order to boundary your work time? And that's what I struggle with. That's the worst bit for me, trying to work it out. So this week, you know, I was...

[ 34 : 34 ] You know, we had Kay's funeral on Thursday, and I was hoping to get some time off after Easter, this just past week, but having prayed with Kay at the hospice a couple of weeks ago, she asked me to do the funeral, which again is a privilege, and it's a privilege to be involved in that kind of life situation.

Just because I've booked some time off, I'm not going to turn down, if I'm able to do it, the funeral of someone who's asked me to, and who I want to, because she was a top person.

Okay. So I can't boundary in that sense, I suppose. How can I turn someone down in that? But then the repercussions are, don't quite get the time off or the recovery time that you might have wanted.

So I haven't worked that out, really, how to... In a people-based job, when does that stop? I guess for me, I have to get away. I have to retreat, be out of the area, turn my phone off, that kind of thing.

The other side of this is that when I was trained to be a vicar, two years at Bible College, a theological college, down in Bristol, and the way that they wanted me to be a vicar was to be anonymous, basically.

[ 35 : 45 ] So they encourage you to wear the robes, because that is impersonal, and every vicar looks the same. They encourage you to talk in a way which is a kind of public speaking way, not with your own accent, or with your own vocabulary in some ways.

So you're trained to read the Bible in that monotone kind of vicar voice. Do you know what I mean? That kind of, you know, for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish.

I can do it if I have to, do you know what I mean? But it's just rubbish. It's rubbish. And so all of that, all of that training was to take out the personality and the character, and we were told, even, this was like, what, 13, 14 years ago, we were told at college, don't make friends with people in your parish.

Don't have friends. Because otherwise, the boundaries between work and your life, they're blurry, and when you have a day off, be uncontactable.

No one can contact you. You've got to guard that day off, they say. And someone dies, or someone needs you, or you bump into someone in the pub and they want to talk about church. If you're, sorry, it's my day off.

[ 36 : 59 ] I just want to drink and watch the football. Can't do it. You know. So, it's my own making because I reject that model of being a vicar entirely. It's got to be, you know, God made me to be me.

And you'd smell a rat a mile off if I'm not authentic or I put on a different voice or dress a different way. It wouldn't work. But the cost of that is that I'm Matt, not the vicar, I suppose.

And I don't stop. Do you know what I mean? It's not, I can't just put the role down because I put me down as well. And I'll tackle that when I retire. You know, I'll become a new person when I retire, I imagine.

But, yeah, for now, that's the worst bit. Just not overdoing it. But the best bit is the people and the difference that I see God making in their lives.

Yeah, thanks for that. Yeah. And we're so glad, aren't we, that you just ignored them. But, you know, I mean, yeah, awful. Okay, this is a good one as well.

[ 37 : 59 ] I wonder, or I wondered if you have ever had any doubts about there being a God. And if so, how did you work it out?

Yes. Yeah, I've doubted that God's real. Often in a kind of questioning kind of way. It's like, I'm doing all this or I think I believe all this.

what if I'm wrong? What if there is nothing? What if this is it? How would I live my life differently if that was the case? So I have those kind of existential questions, I suppose.

They come in to my mind occasionally. But, I don't think they stay for long with me because Jesus is the one who confounds all that for me because I believe Jesus is real.

I believe Jesus was real. I believe the accounts we have of his life are pretty accurate in terms of the kind of person he was. I believe that he thought he was God. So, if Jesus thinks he's God and Jesus did all these amazing things and came back to life, then that needs to be taken into consideration in terms of if there's a God.

[ 39 : 11 ] Because if Jesus is wrong or deluded or mad or whatever, then the whole thing collapses. So, Jesus keeps me online thinking, okay, I don't get it always, but there must be a God and God must be like this because Jesus is the authentic one.

That's the God in human form who gets it right and who I follow and base my life on. I look at creation. I've been reading a lot about the size of the universe at the moment and all that kind of stuff.

That blows my mind that we in this little dot have got this consciousness with God unlike anything else it seems in the known universe. There's got to be something in that as well, so that humbles me.

But I guess the second part of it is, well, if people struggle to believe in God, I want to ask, what kind of God are you struggling to believe in? So, if you think that God is someone who is going to make your life sweetness and light and no problems and never let you get ill and always give you a way through, then I don't believe in that God either.

I don't think that God gives us a pain free or trouble free life. If we believe in that kind of God, we're heading for trouble because that just doesn't work, doesn't exist.

[ 40 : 30 ] It's not a vending machine God you can put coins in and get a reward out of. But if you believe in a God as I do and I think as Jesus shows us, who doesn't deny the ups and downs of life but says in the ups and downs I will be with you in that, then I believe in that God.

And then we don't let suffering or pain or troubles question our faith in a God who exists, rather we question where God is in it so that we can find him in those troubles, in those ups and downs because he's definitely there.

So that's what I question. Where are you God? Not in terms of existence but where can I find you in this mess? Because you're here. Let me delve because you're present in this.

Yeah, I couldn't agree more with that and I think for me, I think doubt is actually, I know this is going to sound strange but I think doubt is actually a healthy part of our growth and change and development and so it's not something to be kind of feared or oh my goodness, I'm not sure if I believe the same things I believed before because I think that's just part of us changing and moving. And if our faith gets rocked because something goes wrong in life, then what's the alternative in that? That God has somehow singled us out for protection and blessing in a way that other people aren't protected or blessed.

[ 41 : 59 ] Because what? Because we live a better life and then there's reward for that in how we're treated but where's the cut off in that? If I give loads of money away, am I expecting that to dictate God's goodness to me?

If I'm 10p short, does that mean I won't get there? You know what I mean? It all falls apart if we think God's going to respond to our goodness by being good to us. God is good to us by being with us.

And the blessings are mysterious within that but the existence of God and the existence of the goodness of God, I think that's one of those springs, that's one of the fundamentals. Okay.

Okay. We've nearly reached the end. Yeah, I'm just conscious of time. So, last one. How's your faith changed over the years? It's more Jesus focused, I think, than it has ever been.

Jesus increasingly, the older I get, becomes more and more important to me in terms of how I see God. There's a reason Jesus came and that's the centrality, central point for me.

[ 43 : 03 ] I shared about this in the past so you can go back and listen to various things. I've become more inclusive, I hope, in the way I do it. Previously, growing up in particular, it was a bit more who's in and who's out and that gave you a sense of identity within being a Christian.

But for me, God gets bigger all the time and his arms are wider all the time and he surprises me all the time. She surprises me all the time. So, it's that kind of inclusion has become more important for me.

I'm less certain on some things but I have hopefully a deeper trust in God. I don't need to always have it right up there to know it in there, in my heart.

And I think I'm probably quietening down a little bit. I guess I grew up in the 90s in my faith and that was all kind of big events and sort of worship stuff and so on and spiritual gifts and speaking in tongues and all that kind of pizzazz stuff.

And that hasn't lasted for me in terms of it's not how I find I best relate to God. I'm much more better going for a walk and being quiet and reflective. I'm getting old, I suppose.

[ 44 : 20 ] But that's, my faith is aging with me, I suppose. Yeah, that'll do. Yeah, yeah. I'm getting old. I mean, I know I've taken more of a turn to sort of the contemplative, you know, it's been the last five or six years really.

But yes, things do change and change is a good thing. And kindness is key. I know all these Be Kind t-shirts, hashtag Be Kind and stuff. It kind of, it's become throwaway in some ways, but it's central.

And I realise every day, if you go through the fruit of the spirit, you've got love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control, whatever it is. Kindness is number five of nine.

You've got four before it, four after it. Kindness is the pivot, if you like, for the fruit of the spirit. Love comes first, yeah, but kindness is what, the one which holds everything else together.

And if you're not kind, I struggle to see how Jesus is at work. Kindness, beyond doctrine, beyond being right, being kind is key.

[ 45 : 23 ] It's not easy, but that's my, that's my aim, I suppose. Yeah. Brilliant. Right, so, thanks ever so much, Matt, because I know that, you know, being that vulnerable and just sharing this stuff, it's not easy.

Thank you.