

# Sunday 11th May 2025 - Question Time with Ian & Matt

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Date: 11 May 2025

Preachers: Ian McKeown, Matt Wallace

[ 0 : 00 ]     Okay, so as I say, we've put these questions into categories to make some sense about where we're going with it. I see this, Matt, and I said that earlier, as responses, not answers.

Is that your... Too right. Yeah, it's responses. Limited wisdom up here. Yeah, absolutely. So the first area that we thought of questions was church life.

The first question in that is, what advice would you give to someone who is new to all of this church stuff? Nice easy one.

Yeah, yeah. I don't know about advice. I think I want to say well done. For a start, if you are new to church stuff and you've come along and it's a totally new thing for you, I appreciate how big a step that is.

I've sort of been there trying to find a church and it takes real courage to walk into a new place. We've all sorts of people and so on. So well done for stepping over the threshold initially, if that's the case.

[ 1 : 01 ]     I think general things I'd suggest would be try and come along as much as you can when you can. Turning up, being present with each other, that really helps in terms of just feeling integrated and feeling a part of something.

Being on the rhythm and the flow of where we're at as a community and a community side of church is key. That's why we're here. It's a communal faith. So turn up when you can.

And if you feel this is a church for you, after turning up for a while, try and get involved with serving in some way. And there's all sorts of ways that you can contribute to the communal life.

And if you want to know more about that, you can come and have a chat with me and Ian. Find a way to give something of yourself when you can. That would be great. That includes giving financially. And it's not that that's a priority that we ask of people when they arrive.

But it does help to feel a kind of stakeholder, I suppose, in our shared life together as well. So, yeah. Turn up. Try and get involved.

[ 1 : 58 ]     Give if that's possible. But also on the courage and sort of bravery line. I think try and talk to as many people as you can. And I appreciate shyness. It's always a thing.

You might think everyone here, when you arrive, if you're new, is confident. But we're really not. Shyness is quite a shared virtue of a lot of us, I know. So don't be afraid to go up to someone and say, hello, I'm newish.

What's your name? Tell me about yourself. Let's have a chat. I hope the welcome will be such that people will be doing that with you as well. So get stuck in, basically.

And we're all just trying to find out what life is about with God. So we're all in the same boat of not knowing all the answers, but wanting to know more. And, yeah, we hope it's a friendly communal place to try and do that.

Yeah, I would just add to that. In the same vein, it's great that you're here. And faith is about a journey. And to me, it's a journey with others.

[ 3 : 01 ] And to me, that's what church means, I think, that you are connected and that we participate, that we're part of something bigger than ourselves. That's kind of, yeah.

And that, you know, it's, what is it? I can't remember, is it Ephesians? You know, the body of Christ. It's this idea that we're part of a body. We are part of, but it's a bigger whole, the whole thing.

And kind of falling into that is quite important. And just like Matt said, I think the way you do that is just get involved. And in many ways, it doesn't really matter what it is, you know.

No, we tried over recently, I suppose, to put in as many kind of social-based things as we can for different interests as a way of just helping us to integrate together more.

There's the worship and the prayer side and all that stuff is essential for us because we're a church. But equally, the relational side feeds into that in a hugely important way as well. So whether it's curry club tonight, pub club, book club, games club, you know, watercolour dabblers, drop-in, whatever it is that you can get to, try and find at least one of those things to say, actually, that's my extra to a Sunday if you can make it.

[ 4 : 09 ] Yeah. And living well is about learning to live in community, I think. And I was going to say, obviously, prayer and reading the Bible is important, but there's an element of kind of understanding what it is you're looking at as well.

And I said to Matt, I've kind of brought this one along. It's just one of the books. I often, you know, when I have conversations with people and they sort of say, well, you know, kind of where are you coming from in terms of how you understand it?

This is a book by Dave Tomlinson. I know a number of you may have read it. It's called How to Be a Bad Christian. Okay. That probably sounds counterintuitive, but it then says, and a better human being.

Okay. And I think there's some real wisdom in here. It's a very accessible book and it's easy to read. You saw him speak, didn't we, Greenbelt?

Yeah, he's a good man. Very good. Okay. Next one. Yep. So on the same lines, what advice would you give to someone who's been to church for so long that they now feel like they don't see the point anymore?

[ 5 : 21 ] Yeah, again, I can understand where that point of view might be coming from. I think it's probably indicative of a wider malaise you might be feeling about life and where you're at.

And if church is a reflection of life and you're not feeling fired up about church or that you belong somewhere, I suspect it's about more than just church going on with us if we're in that kind of situation.

The antidote to that, I would suggest, is the same as for new people. Try and get stuck in in new ways perhaps than you might previously have done. And the key thing, which I've seen sadly too often, I think, is that because we have quite an influx of people coming and going and joining and some leaving us, if you've been here a long time, you can gravitate towards people who you've always known.

And my advice would be try and speak to new people. Try and converse with people who you haven't yet met. That keeps it fresh. And you'd be amazed, if you haven't done already, just how life-giving that is to get to know new people as part of a shared communal life together.

So enjoy the freshness of new people. Because, what does he say, we refresh others, so we ask... We refresh. Yeah, you refresh others and you yourself will be refreshed.

- [ 6 : 33 ] That refreshment can come from new people and we will be refreshed by that if we're long-standing members as well. Yeah, that is an easy one to fall into, isn't it? You keep within your little group and actually I think there is something about going...
- It's going outside of your comfort zone, isn't it? If that's where you're at, I would say to you, it's okay not to be okay. It is, you know, if you're feeling a bit dead inside and you think other people don't get you, okay, well, God gets you.
- And God loves you, okay? And it doesn't matter. I know that's how we feel and we feel, you know. And the easy thing is to walk away. But my guess is that, and I think, and I've experienced this personally, you know, is that sometimes that's that you're on the brink of something.
- Spiritually, you're breaking through. I think actually often our faith journey is about going through those experiences. I'm afraid, you know, the dark night of the soul and drive times is part of it.
- Sorry, go on. I know, I was just going to repeat what you were saying. Yeah, I think that is part of it and I think you have to be courageous to walk through that and to know that God will be with you all the way through that.
- [ 7 : 49 ] And just on that, there's a good book by Nick Page called The Dark Knight of the Shed, which is a kind of mid-life, mid-faith crisis from a male perspective because he's a bloke and he's writing about sheds. But there's a deeper spirituality with all that.
- Worth reading if you're in that kind of mid-faith, mid-life, not quite sure where you fit in anymore. That's a good book. Yeah, and maybe try and find somebody who will walk with you, you know, and not try to fix you because, you know, it isn't about that, is it?
- It's about, it's that sort of opening of your heart and a kind of, a brutal honesty sometimes. This is how I feel. I can't, I can't deny it. But just to sort of make it personal, so about 18 years ago, I've been here since 89 at St. John's.
- So I'd been here about 18 years. And about 18 years ago, I got to a point where I thought, I just, you know, the love was always here at St. John's. This has always been a very loving, caring church, okay, since we've been part of it.
- But I just, I just, I just couldn't go along with some of the stuff anymore. I just, I was really struggling with, you know, does God actually tell the Israelites to kind of commit genocide in the Old Testament?
- [ 9 : 01 ] Is that real? Is that, is that what he's saying? You know, does God have to kind of have the idea, this idea of penal substitution that, you know, he's got to let his anger and wrath kind of play out on his son?
- And so, I, you know, it was a crisis really of going through a lot of rethinking about what does this actually mean? And what does my faith mean?
- And how does, how do I then live in light of that? You know, the easy answer is just to not think about it, isn't it? So the, so this question about, you know, don't see the point anymore.
- The easy thing to do is just not engage and just switch off and just turn up on a Sunday and smile. Okay. But that isn't the honest thing to do. And, and I appreciate it's harder, but I think you have to get in there and face the challenges and be honest.
- So, yeah. Okay. That was only the first question. Oops. We will get quicker, yeah. So what do you think about the recent polling by YouGov and the Bible Society on church attendance?
- [ 10 : 12 ] What's been called the quiet revival, for those of you who didn't know about this? And is this something we should be encouraged here at St. John's? Yeah.

If you've seen this, I don't know if you've come across this. It's a poll by the Bible Society, which is trying to get grasp of how many people go to church on a regular basis, say once a month or so in their criteria. And they're reckoning that 12% of adults in this country go to church at least once a month, which I think is ambitious, should we say, in terms of what is actually happening.

So if you think about Burnwood, we've got just under, what, 30,000 people in Burnwood. 12% of that is over 3,000 people in church from Burnwood once a month on a Sunday. I'd reckon it's probably about a quarter of that, maybe.

Maybe 700, 800 people go to church once a month in Burnwood. So I'm not convinced this poll is accurate. And it might give us a false sense of sort of security, I guess, going forward.

I think it's probably weighted towards urban areas where the influx of, particularly with immigration, those from Eastern Europe who come with a Catholic background. So the Catholic church in these stats is one in three people go to a Catholic church in this survey, I think, which may or may not be the case.

[ 11 : 28 ] God bless them. But I think it's a slightly skewed poll. And it also says, I think, I've got, I've wrote down here to remember the stats. It says 21% of 18 to 24-year-old men go to church at least once a month.

That's one in five 18 to 24-year-old blokes go to church. Hands up if you're aged between 18 and 24 here this morning and you're a male. Nice try, Gary. Yeah. Feel like it. By my reckoning, that's no one.

There's no one aged 18 to 24 who's a male, who's here. Which kind of says, not sure about this survey, really. So as much as we might want it to be the case, I'm not convinced of its legitimacy or reflection of reality with that.

Having said that, I think the ethos behind it is wanting to explain and understand there does seem to be a bit of a groundswell of people realising, as always, but particularly perhaps post-COVID, that the answers to life that are often portrayed in the media as being financially free and independent, success, looks, popularity, all those kind of things.

I think people are realising, as I would suspect may well have done so already, is that those things lack substance and lack meaning. I think people are searching for something deeper, more profound.

[ 12 : 44 ] My answer would be that you find that in Jesus and church is a part of that journey. So I'm glad that we have people who come here from non-faith background finding God, which is great.

But we keep being open, keep praying for things. I'm not too bothered about stats. I'm more interested in individuals, really. So that's the aim here. Yeah, I agree. I think, you know, I'm not convinced, to be honest, because it's about Gen Zs, isn't it?

And I don't see that. All I'd add to that is just I do think increasingly, particularly young people, are looking for authentic, relationship, community-based expressions of faith that are real.

And that's a spiritual experience, not a religious experience. I think that's true. I think people want authenticity, not relevance. We kid ourselves. We're trying to be down with the kids or being, you know, whatever.

But, you know, I can't blag it anymore, you know, but I can try and be authentic. And I think that's far more attractive and appealing and meaningful than trying to be on the cultural button all the time.

[ 13 : 52 ] Okay, good. Right, next one. If you had to get rid of either the Bible or the church and the buildings, which would it be? So the Bible or church buildings?

Or church buildings. Which one are you going for? It can't be the Bible. As much as the Bible is a complicated, and I've said before, it's an ancient and an ambiguous and a diverse book, which is, on the one hand, there's real beauty and accessible, loving wisdom in it.

On the other hand, it is incredibly confusing at times as well. So I would hate to not have the Bible in my life or in our lives or in the world's life, because it is one of the best ways in which we can understand God and the history of people trying to understand God.

And in particular, it gives us the best understanding of just who Jesus was, is, and will be, and how he lived his life when he was with us here on earth. So the Bible is crucial for our understanding of God.

Again, I've said this before. I don't believe it's God's word that's dictated to us. I think it's written by humans with the genuine desire to try and understand God and their place in God's world.

[ 15 : 06 ] But it's a gift of a book, which God breathes through and breathes life into us through when we read and engage with it. So you can't get rid of the Bible, I don't think.

Buildings-wise, my gut would say buildings don't matter, because the church is the people. If we didn't have this building, then we could easily meet in a school or an industrial unit or somewhere else.

This building is not precious in that sense, and yet it is incredibly precious. I love this building. And when you walk in, there's something special about this place, and the prayer and the heart and the vision that went into getting it built was vital.

And it's not just about Sundays. We could find somewhere to meet alternatively on a Sunday, whether it's a marquee or whatever. I don't mind. It's more about things like dropping and little friends where we have a base for us to do church stuff day in, day out, week in, week out.

So the building is a gift as well. Well, what I would suggest, if I had a magic wand, is we probably need to close probably a quarter of Church of England church buildings around the country that aren't used and aren't fit for purpose anymore in the wrong places, need too much repair being done to them.

[ 16 : 18 ] We're too precious about knocking down old buildings. Because I think if we got rid of those, I think that might revolutionise what the Church of England could do. But not this one. I like this one. Well, that leads nicely into the next easy question, Matt, which is, what is the future of the Church of England?

Yeah, I was aware this one was coming. It's a stinker of a question. If I'm being authentically honest, I think it's pretty bleak, really. I don't think the Church of England is in a good state.

It's the sort of established national church that has been for, whatever it is, 500 years or so in this country. Not better or worse than any other denominational way of trying to express community life.

It's the one I grew up in, which is probably why I'm in it still. But I'm not particularly loyal to it in that sense, just because I've grown up with it and it's the church that I belong to.

I think there are a myriad problems from safeguarding, you'll know all about this, from the mess of safeguarding over the years to the hierarchy, to the power, to the hoarding of assets.

[ 17 : 24 ] I think the church commissioners, who are the wing of the Church of England who oversee all the assets and money, I think they've got something like £12 billion in reserves, which is offensive, really, and morally wrong.

And I would want to see so much of that money either given away or released into doing what we do. I appreciate there's a need to be financially prudent and all that kind of stuff, but that's excessive to a huge degree.

So there's a lot that would need revolutionising, I think, to make the Church of England more reflective of what I think Jesus meant when he said, I'll build my church. I don't think we're getting it right in so many ways.

And yet what I do appreciate about the Church of England is that it's a structure, and it's a pattern of meeting across the country that is based on communities and presence in local places, rather than personalities.

So this isn't Vicar Matt's church and never will be. It's not sort of Pastor So-and-So's church. This is St. John's because that's the name that was chosen years ago. But this is our church. It's not personality-driven, I hope.

[ 18 : 30 ] It's a presence in a community. And that's what I do like about the Church of England, this idea of being locally present everywhere. And you kind of know what you're getting. There's a diversity within the Church of England, but you know there's a stability which comes with that.

And that stability leads to being too conservative, I think, small c, with how we do things. But there are pros and cons. Overall, though, I think it needs some radical change.

Yeah, I mean, as I look at it, I see kind of two parts of this. One is institutional decline. And I think actually that's across the piece, not just for the Church of England, but all institutions.

This idea that we just don't trust things in that same way that we used to. But then I think there is the potential for spiritual renewal. You know, God's at work, and there's hope.

There is hope. But, you know, so I don't, you know. Yeah, and I'm aware, I don't want to ever get, you know, the Church is described as the Bride of Christ in the Bible. And that means God loves the Church.

[ 19 : 33 ] You know, there's a real sense of wanting to honour that picture as well. But the Church is the people. That's who the Bride of Christ is. And it's not the institution. It's not the buildings.

And it's not often the theology or the doctrine or whatever. It's the people. And that's what I'd want to champion. And all the structures need to champion that rather than just keep the institution going, if that makes sense.

Yeah, and if anything, the whole idea of death and resurrection is that something dies for something new to emerge. And actually, that's a healthy thing.

That's a good thing. But the trouble is, that's a hard thing. It's hard for churches to go through that. So there's a space there as well, pastorally, to embrace and love people.

And we're going to have to face it, you know, because it's going to happen. Because we are collectively the Church. It's not just St. John's, you know, brothers and sisters. And we need to kind of love people.

[ 20 : 34 ] But it is going to be, I think the Church is going to have to face up to some kind of quite harsh realities in the next decade. Which doesn't faze me. No.

Like you're saying, I think it's a good thing. Yeah, it's a good thing. The pruning is God, you know, God done. Yeah. Right, okay. Next section, conscious time. This is on sort of theology, Bible prayer.

Okay, this one's interesting. How, okay, how has God always been there? How has God always been there?

No, how, no, how? That's very deep. It is very deep. It's very deep. I don't know.

Is the short answer. I guess a slightly less short answer would be, my understanding is that God is existence. And without God, there's nothing.

[ 21 : 33 ] And we can't imagine or conceptualize what nothing is. It's not like dark matter in space or black holes or anything like that. There's nothing without God. It just doesn't exist.

So God is existence. Which means, however long existence has been in existence, God has been there. And since God is eternal, existence is eternal. And so that's how God, it's a very deeply philosophical kind of mind-boggling concept.

I think one of the things that always strikes me, Jesus says, I think it's in the Last Supper kind of discourse, in John's Gospel. Where he said, the Father loved, this is Jesus talking, the Father loved me before the creation of the world.

And that blows my mind. Because this idea of the Trinity, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, of Jesus being there at the beginning, as we say, in time. Being loved by God the Father, present with the Holy Spirit, before the creation of the world.

That eternal existence then became flesh and walked and talked and lived among us. And that blows my mind.

[ 22 : 41 ] So how much must that have blown Jesus' mind when he's trying to convey all this to his disciples and so on and now to us? I think I'd probably dwell on the enormity of God coming to be with us.

That's existence itself becoming human form. That's why I love Jesus, or one of the reasons. Because without Jesus, there is no existence. There is no life. And he is the way, the truth, and the life.

So, yeah. Yeah, good. Yeah, it's a toughie. It's a toughie. So, okay, as I was thinking about this, I thought, okay, Genesis 1, chapter 1, verse 1.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. So he's always been there. And it didn't matter whether you're a Christian or whatever faith you have.

You know, look around at the beauty in the world. Why is it we feel that way? When we look up at the sky and we see the stars and the cosmos and, you know, all of the galaxies, you know, he's there.

[ 23 : 46 ] And she's there in our experience of love and compassion. You know, just thinking about what's going on in the world at the moment and how you get that kind of almost, it's like a gut feeling about things.

You know, whether that's looking at what's going on in Gaza at the moment or the war in Ukraine or the stuff that's coming out of America at the moment. And you kind of, well, I do anyway, you just sort of feel that kind of gut wrench that something is, you know, there are things there that are wrong.

There's injustice. There's, you know, people are kind of suffering. And we connect with that. And like God said, like Matt was saying about God kind of joins us, I think we're joining God in that sense of this isn't right.

And I can't actually, I can't explain it any better than that. It's just something deep and instinctive within you that knows that there's love or that there's actually things that are wrong. You know, I get it.

I mean, you must get it when you watch a film sometimes. Have you ever seen like Schindler's List or Shawshank Redemption or something like that? You know, you just, you know, whether it makes you cry or you kind of just feel something.

[ 25 : 05 ] That's something just deeply about what it, if we're made in the image of God, then something's happening. Something's happening in us that resonates with God because that's who, that's just who we are.

Talking of films though, it always blows my mind with the Marvel films and the multiverse. What's this idea and beyond our universe and what's there? And if the universe is always expanding, what is the universe expanding into?

Work that one out. That's for another time, yeah. Okay. I like your Shawshank better. There we go. Yeah. So if God created Adam and Eve as perfect humans depicted as we are today, fully intelligent, upright, etc.

Where does the evolution of man come from, i.e. Homo habilis erectus to Homo sapiens as, you know, in our human form?

It's a good question. All right. So Adam and Eve, how does that fit with evolution and the development of the human species and so on? So Genesis 2 is Adam and Eve story.

[ 26 : 11 ] There's two creation stories in Genesis. Genesis 1 is the one with the six days and the day of rest at the end of creation. Sort of the bigger picture, I suppose, of one understanding of the way God created.

And I would suggest that's a poem, not a scientific textbook of the way things happened. And Genesis 2 is the second creation story, which doesn't quite tally with Genesis 1.

There are differences and discrepancies that are difficult to conflate together with that. But Genesis 2 is the story of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden and so on. It's much more personal understanding of God's creation.

And the interesting thing is that Genesis 2 in Genesis, it's reckoned, was written and came about a lot earlier than Genesis 1.

So Genesis 2 was written about 1,000 BC or put together about then, it's reckoned. Genesis 1, the six days of creation story, that was probably about 600 BC.

[ 27 : 09 ] So the first story that people had was Adam and Eve and Genesis 1 came later in people's understanding. So I think within that, that helps us perhaps to see that it's meant to be, I think Genesis 2 is a story about Adam and Eve being these representative figures.

Adam means man, mankind, humanity. Eve means life. And I think they're meant to be sort of examples and representatives of what it means to be human.

It's not, I don't think, a literal picture of how humans were formed. And that means we can embrace, if we wish, the idea of humanoids growing from Homo erectus and so on to become Homo sapiens at some stage.

What I find most interesting is thinking at what stage of that human evolution, from early humans to what we know of ourselves now, at what point was the God sort of consciousness awake in us, you know.

That is where I would suspect this Homo erectus, Neanderthal, bad, whatever woman first kind of thought beyond themselves and thought there must be more than me here, there must be more.

[ 28 : 26 ] And it's at that moment in the history of development and evolution that I think that's probably the picture of God breathing in to that creature, a God awareness.

And that might be reflected in the Adam and Eve story. But personally, I don't believe Adam and Eve is a literal story. There might have been real people who it's based on in terms of, you know, there might be an Adam and Eve floating around somewhere.

But I think it's more meant to be representatives. It's almost a parable, really, I would suggest. Genesis 2, with a whole lot of truth in it that gets lost if we focus too much on the mechanics of it.

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, one's about why and the other question's about how, isn't it? And in terms of human evolution through natural processes, the evidence is totally compelling for that.



And I'm not going to argue with that. But I don't think that's what Genesis 1 is about, you know, or the Genesis accounts are about. No. When I was at school, though, I was called the missing link by a couple of friends because I'm very hairy.

[ 29 : 26 ] So work that one out. Yeah. Right. This next one is a very long question. So you're going to have to listen. I'll try and, like, give a praise to you at the end because it is long.

So, ready? If we believe that God, by his very nature of being love, cannot control people, then what's the point or purpose of petitionary prayer?

And thinking most specifically of major national or global situations such as political power, war, or environmental issues when asking for divine intervention.

It doesn't feel realistic because mostly it would require particular individuals, e.g., and they've written this, Trump or Putin, to have a change of heart.

And that doesn't seem feasible. And so how can prayer resolve any situation if God cannot directly control behavior and allow us to have free will?

[ 30 : 32 ] So I've kind of read this. I've worked through this. So to me that says, how does prayer work in a world of human freedom? Which is a great question.

I mean, they've all been great questions. But that one, I think, gets to the heart of our understanding of God and understanding of prayer. You don't have to agree with me. You don't have to agree with anything we say up here. I've talked about this before on a few occasions about my understanding.

And there's various writers and scholars who are sort of on board with this kind of line of thinking. That because God is love, love is by nature uncontrolling, and therefore God is not in control.

Because to control things means that you're imposing on people in a way that is not loving. So I would say God is not in control. And that has an influence on my understanding of the way that God does or doesn't intervene in the world.

I don't think, on the whole, God is an interventionist God. But I do wholly believe that God is an interactive God. So God interacts with the world, with us, constantly.

[ 31 : 41 ] In terms of God not being in control and able to do things which go against individual personal freedom, I think God would always, because God is love, want everyone to know the fullness of life, to know healing, to know hope.

God never wants anyone to go through suffering. He would long to have that heavenly reality now, I think. But because of the nature of the freedom that he's given us, there's an inability on God's part to do as much as God would want to do, if that makes sense.

And I think in that inability to act, that breaks God's heart in many ways, because he sees so much that is wrong in the world, but there's a restriction on God because of this lack of ability to control because of love, that means God is required to work through us and with us to bring about his good plans.

It's a very complicated thing, I understand. I think in terms of prayer, therefore, my understanding of prayer is that we're entering into something which is deeply spiritual, which goes beyond our own body, if you like.

So my spirit is bigger than my body. And when I pray through the Spirit of God, the Spirit of God connects my spirit with the situations and the spirits of the situations that I am praying for.

[ 33 : 16 ] So I can pray for Donald Trump and I can pray for Vladimir Putin, because our spirits are connected through the encompassing Spirit of God. So if I pray for Donald Trump to have a change of heart, something in the cosmic universal existence, my prayer will have a tiny difference on attempting to steer Donald Trump towards love.

And I think that's the way that God works in that. To get all sort of metaphysical or something, the scientists have worked out, you know, quarks, these subatomic particles, they've worked out hadron collider stuff and all that.

They've worked out that if you split an atom, the subatomic quark stuff of atom, you can change the behaviour of a quark in Australia and the split of that atom in the UK will behave exactly the same way as the one in Australia, even though they're not together in location.

And I think that's how prayer works. That if I pray for something or we pray for something we are disconnected to physically, through the Spirit there is that connection. And that enables God to move when prayers and spirits align.

Because God is not forcing an outcome, but there's a willingness on the spiritual side of those involved down to a minuscule level when everything lines up.

[ 34 : 43 ] They talk about when all the actors and factors involved in a situation are in line, then God's Spirit can move because he's not intervening in a way that goes against freedom. That's where healing comes, that's where miracles come, I believe.

That's where prayer makes a profound difference when everything aligns. And in a way, that makes prayer even more important because who knows what difference our prayers might make to something on the other side of the world, if that makes sense.

That doesn't make a huge amount of sense, I know, but it's a big, big summit. And we're going to be talking much more about prayer in the coming weeks with a series, and I will tackle this in much more eloquent detail, hopefully, in that time.

Yeah, I mean, it is, isn't it? It's a really complicated, and it's almost impossible to put words to it, to some extent, because we're trying to describe something that is metaphysical.

Yeah, and you kind of get into weird, hippie kind of sort of vibration stuff. Yeah, well, I mean, that's right, yeah. But there's something in that, in terms of, you know, we minimize the importance of prayer to our detriment, I think.

[ 35 : 46 ] Prayer is a powerful thing, not because prayer in itself is powerful, but because God's Spirit is powerful, and our prayers somehow partner with God's Spirit in enabling change to come about.

That's what I'd say. And I'd just add to, I mean, I think that's my understanding as well, but I'd just add that, is prayer primarily about asking God to intervene and change external circumstances, you know, and that's maybe what a conventional understanding, a petitionary prayer might be, or is it about God realigning our hearts and our minds so that that prayer changes us first?

And so this kind of dualistic, you know, either it's pointless or, you know, either God controls everything or it's pointless is actually not, you know, it's misleading because there's something in the middle there which is this energy field almost that we're joining in with.

Yeah, and to go back to the building, you know, I have the privilege of having keys for this place, I can come in on my own, and when I come in on my own, even if no one's here, there is something in the atmosphere here that is special because it's been a house of prayer for decades and decades, and something of that prayer, something of that Spirit remains here despite the absence of people's physical presence.

And I think that says to me, as I was saying, our spirits are bigger than our physical bodies, and we'd be wise not to underestimate the impact that living prayerful lives can have in our building, in our town, in our homes, in our country, in the world.

[ 37 : 27 ] Joined together, it's hugely influential and powerful. Yeah, and just one last thing on this. As I was thinking about this, about this unseen realm, I think twins have always got this.

So they almost know what each other is thinking, and they can be hundreds or thousands of miles apart, and something kind of resonates. There's something definitely going on there.

Okay. We'll leave that toughy, and you're going to be looking at that in a lot more detail. Yeah. Okay. So this is more about personal life, and sort of spiritual practices.

So what would you like to achieve personally, and to see us achieve, or reach as a goal, as a church, so for this year, and then for the next five years?

Okay. One year, five year plan, kind of strategy stuff. Again, good question. I guess in some ways, you could answer that, in terms of the life coaching idea, of what you want to achieve.

[ 38 : 32 ] I'm not that kind of person. I don't really set myself targets, in terms of things for me personally, to achieve. COVID taught me that, if nothing else, that you make plans, and you have to be improvising, within those, shall we say.

More importantly for me, I guess, if I can, and I mean this in all sort of, humility really, I guess my hope, is that for the next year, the next five years, I will grow into a kinder, gentler, wiser person.

That's my goal. Asking God, to form me increasingly, into the likeness of Jesus. That's a big prayer, but that's our prayer.

That's everyone's hope, I think. That's my goal. And to put that out to rest, that would be my goal for us as a church. We can talk strategy, and we can talk structures, and all that kind of stuff, and there's things that we put in place, to enable church to function, and hopefully to grow.

But my hope and my hope, and my prayer for us as a community, is that we'd be, look back in 2030, and see ourselves, actually we have got gentler, and kinder, and wiser, as a people.

[ 39 : 45 ] And I'm, not to be ashamed of that, but to glory in God, in helping us to, to become, more of the people he wants us to be. That's what excites me. And I think actually, aside from any kind of strategic stuff, you might have in place, it's the love, and the kindness, and the joy, and the peace, all the fruit of the spirit stuff.

It's that way, by which Jesus grows, and builds his church, and it's those qualities, which shape, a community, and inhabit God's kingdom, in this place, and beyond.

So yeah. Good. I was 60 last year. Never. Wouldn't believe it, would you? And I, I wanted to mark that, by going on, a kind of, a pilgrimage walk, a long one.

That didn't happen, for various reasons. But I am, going out, later on this week, for 10 days or so, to walk the Camino, in Spain, in Santiago, towards Santiago.

And that's, that's my goal. That's been, that's been a focus, actually, for a while. And I think that's important. I think, I think that whole pilgrimage thing, and the kind of, you know, get going out there, stepping outside, getting on the road, is, is important.

[ 41 : 01 ] And that's, so that, for me this year, that's an important, kind of thing. I think, longer term, if I was to say, although, you know, really, this is Matt's domain, but I hope, as a church, that we, can be more intentional, about our, kind of, deepening our faith.

I, I look around me, and I'm as guilty, as anybody else, on this, okay. I think we are living, in a time, of mass distraction. And, and I, I genuinely think, it's kind of a, kind of a spiritual malaise, that's kind of gripped us, that we're, you know, we're kind of, captivated by our phones, and our, you know, screen devices, and we're, and I'm not, you know, I don't want to get on a rant here, but, but I do think, it kind of is, is hugely distracting, and I hope, maybe, that we can kind of, grow, grow more intentionally, into our faith, this, over the next few years, yeah.

I agree, yeah, and I think, the one other thing, we'll be quick, because there's only a couple of left, but, I think one thing I do want to say, is I'm aware, when, when people leave, a church, which has happened, a number of cases, over the last, sort of, year, 18 months, I think my main sadness, with that, that regardless of what people, might feel about, what's taught up here, or the theology, that's, that's held, is that in leaving, a church, community, you're leaving, a community, and, and, that's what pains me, it's not, you don't have to agree with me, in the slightest, your choice, on all that, but I hope, this would be a place, in terms of that gentleness, and kindness, and wisdom, where we can coexist, with difference, but doing so, in community, and if we have, theological differences, that's fine, but don't be different, with each other, let's not, throw the baby out, with a bar, do you know what I mean, it's, that's, that's what saddens me, that people, almost throw away, the gift of community, and the gift of the body, of Christ, simply through disagreement, on certain things, that's the tragedy, and my hope is, as we move forward, in the years to come, that we can still be a place, where difference, is celebrated, but community, is valued,

I suppose, okay, good, all right, let's get through these, then, so, what one spiritual practice, do you think, makes the biggest difference, to experiencing, everything, God intended for us, there's lots of spiritual practices, I don't know, if this is a spiritual practice, I think the biggest difference, certainly for me, would be a knowledge, that you are accepted, accepted as you are, by God, and loved as you are, by God, and when that hits us, profoundly, in our understanding, of God's, just, unconditional love, for us, that shapes everything else, we start from that position, of security, and everything else, you know, nothing can separate us, from the love of God, it is in Christ Jesus, and that's the starting point, that's the discipline, that's the discipleship, from which everything else, flows.

I had a, a verse came to me, for this one, I won't go too long, but it's this one, it's in Ephesians, chapter 5, verse 14, it says this, wake up, oh sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ, will shine, on you, and I think, you know, I know, it's maybe not, a spiritual practice, as such, but there's something here, about, kind of, looking out, at what's happening, in the world, and, and the power systems, and, you know, where we sit, within that, recognizing, whether you like it, or not, we're part of the problem, okay, and, waking up, to that, wake up, and see, and see reality, you know, allow God, to break in, and then, and then, when, when that happens, and it's really, it's, it's not an easy thing, you know, but then, you kind of start saying, well, I'm not going to play those games, and then you realize, that actually, the only way up, is down, and, that you're, you're only at your strongest, when you're at your weakest, and, you have to lose your life, to save your life, and, the first shall be last, those are difficult realities, to kind of, realign, to, but I think that's what discipleship is,

[ 45 : 30 ] I think it's waking up, and, it's in, Christ, you know, Jesus will shine on you, Christ will shine on you, in Christ, you cannot, we cannot do this, alone, and actually, that's why we're all here, isn't it, because we do it as church, we're, no one of us, is big enough for this, we're not, we're just not, yeah, yeah, okay, what is the most helpful thing, that anyone has ever said to you?

Don't support West Ham, I think, I think it's a Brazilian writer, he said, and someone said it to me once, which I liked, it said, in the end, everything will be okay, and if it's not yet okay, it's not yet the end, I like that, and that's a, that to me, tallies with a God of love, who is in eternity, everything will be alright, in the end, and if it's not yet, alright, it's not yet the end.

Yeah, a quick one from me, about 14 years ago, I was kind of wrestling, whether or not, to go forward, for lay readership training, and whether that was the right thing to do, and the vicar here at that time, many of you obviously know him, Duncan, Duncan Leak, had quite a few conversations with him, over the time, and with Linda, and one of the things, that he said to me, was to look, just, just push the door, push the door, see what happens, you know, because you, you just don't know, and you know, three years later, I, I kind of, I was licensed as a lay reader, and I think that's just good advice, for life, just sometimes, you just need to push that door, you know, step out, step out of the boat, do it, just do it, okay, last question, what would you say, to your 16 year old self, I used to have terrible curtains, I'd tell him to get a haircut, for a start, it was dreadful hair, I think more importantly, it would be, my 16 year old self, wouldn't listen to this advice, if I was given it, because I, they think I was old, and irrelevant, but, 16 year old self,

I would say, do all you can, to try and, be yourself, try and feel comfortable, in your own skin, because that's the way, God's made you, and, you will spend a lifetime, trying to fit into, other people's, standards and perceptions, find in yourself, the person, who God has made you to be, and be comfortable, in that, yeah, and I, for me, I think it would, don't sweat the small stuff, you know, stop worrying, stop worrying, you know, good news, Julie Cole, is going to go out with you, bad news, it's not going to last, but, you know, I think I spent, I spent way too much time, but things worked alright, in the end with Lisa, didn't they, so it's alright, but I think, you know, it spent far too much time, worrying, and like, and being self-conscious, I think, I don't think you can tell people, I think you have to experience, that stuff, I just wish it came quicker, that's all, anything else you want to add?

No, I'm aware of the time, thank you very much, for indulging us, with all this, thanks very much, for the questions as well, really appreciate, all those who've written in, it's taken some time, but we wanted to get through, all of them, in honouring those, and thank you to Ian, as well, for this, yeah, thanks Matt.

[ 48 : 56 ] Thank you.