



QUESTIONS

for your real life journey

Episode 27: Dr Andrew Grinnell

How do we face change?

1. OPEN-SIGHTED, OPEN-HANDED, OPEN-HEARTED (12:19)

Andrew says there are three things needed to face change: 'We need to be *open-sighted*, by which I mean going into change with our eyes wide open, with a curiosity to be asking: "What is going on here? What is changing? What little things are emerging in this place?"

'We also need to be *open-handed*. We naturally cling on to the past, because we're wired to try to learn from it. But if we're going to embrace change, we have to open our hands and be willing to let go of things – as well as to receive what that change might give to us.

'And the great thing about change is that it often flows into relationships that we might not normally engage with. Being *open-hearted* means we can receive into our lives people who we might not actually get the gift of if we're closed off and trying to protect ourselves.'

Open-sighted, open-handed, open-hearted: Which of these do you find most natural? Which do you find most difficult? Do you think it's possible to face change without any one of them?

2. NO SALVATION OUTSIDE OF THE POOR (19:23)

'Jon Sobrino, an El Salvadorian writer, wrote the book *No Salvation Outside the Poor*, which argues that it's actually the poor who bring salvation to the church.

'In learning how to hang out with people who've struggled against poverty, you recognise that you're being rewired. It's those relationships which remind me that I'm a complete and utter idiot if I think I can sort their lives out.

'And it reminds us that the agent of change isn't us, it's God. So when we moved into the low-income neighbourhood we live in, we didn't bring God with us: he'd been part of the creation of that very place. Our job was simply to shack up and see where God was at work. The first lives that are changed are those who think they are the superheroes going to sort it all.'

Have you come across this 'superhero' mentality in Christianity before, which suggests that Christians have all the answers and God's authority and so we must go into the world and 'fix' it on his behalf? How might that understanding of mission be experienced by people who struggle against poverty? What do you think of Andrew's suggestion that his job living in a low economic area was 'to simply shack up and see where God was at work'?



QUESTIONS for your real life journey

How do we move through suffering?

3. RECOGNISING OUR PRIVILEGE (24:57, 26:46)

'I actually want to challenge the question,' says Andrew. 'We sometimes see suffering as a kind of period in somebody's life that we work through, that we only experience for a period of our lives. But I'm not sure it's true that everybody does move through suffering, because the nature of some people's suffering is so much a part of their totality.'

'There's a 20th century writer called Simone Weil, who was coming to terms with the struggle of the [First World] War, and struggling to think through what that meant for how we live as human beings. And she talks about the difference between suffering and affliction. Affliction is when there is psychological, physical, emotional and economic suffering, all felt by somebody at the same time. I have never experienced affliction. I have experienced suffering, but I've never felt experienced affliction.'

'So in some ways that question has a degree of privilege to it.'

Do you agree that people can experience suffering to very different levels, and therefore that for some it might be impossible to 'move through' suffering? What should our response be to those who experience not simply suffering, but affliction?

4. OUR WOUNDS REMAIN (34:28)

'To put a theological frame on suffering,' Andrew says, 'if the wounds of suffering are most clearly seen in Jesus on the cross, of course those wounds physically do not go away. They are there because Thomas needs to put his hands in his side. They don't go away.'

'So we don't move through suffering in the sense we graduate from it. We're *always* wounded by those things that we suffer through.'

'If you are suffering, really suffering, you cannot do it on your own. You need friends. You may also need professionals to help you come to terms with it. And that is part of what society needs today: to be able to acknowledge that we don't graduate from stuff, it will always be with us.'

Why do you think it was important that the disciple Thomas could put his hands in Jesus' side? Do you agree that wounds never fully disappear, that we always carry them with us? Do you think that it weakens or strengthens the message of Christian hope to say that the things we suffer will always wound us? In a world that seeks quick-fix solutions, do you agree that society needs to be able to acknowledge that we don't graduate from suffering?



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How do we receive joy?

5. HAVING LITTLE (37:47)

'People are brilliant. They're amazing. We can have joy just by having a cup of tea with an older person, because we are finding out about their history, how life has changed, what's been good... You can find joy in people. And so I think it's really important *who* you're around.'

'The other thing that creates joy is beauty. And we don't have to spend loads of money on beauty. Listening to music brings joy. Going for a walk brings joy. Despite all that suffering, despite all the insecurity and the overwhelming nature of what's going on in the world currently, life is still a joyful pursuit. If only we can get open-sighted enough to be able to see it in the moment and be able to celebrate it.'

Have you ever been surprised that a conversation with someone turned out to be much more interesting than you expected it to be? Who was it with? Why was it so fascinating? Do you make it a habit to talk to people who have different experiences to you? Do you agree that 'we don't have to spend loads of money on beauty'? What beauty have you experienced that cost little or nothing?

6. SLOWING DOWN (39:29)

Andrew talks about a time twenty years ago when he and others were given 'way too much permission to be able to go and have fun within the Salvation Army than people of our age and experience should have been given.'

'But I'm not sure I was as joyful in those experiences as I should have been. And the simple reason is, when we were having one of those experiences, we were always thinking about the next one: "What do we do next? How do we move forward? What's the new big idea?"

'And I actually think we have joy when we slow down a bit and enjoy things in the moment.'

He suggests, 'Let's be dictated less by the wristwatch, and more by what is going on in this moment: "How can I enjoy this relationship that's in front of me now, not thinking about how can I utilise it for some other thing in the future?"

Have you ever had several intensely exciting, fun experiences in short succession? Would you have preferred to space them out a little so you could have enjoyed each of them a little more deeply? Have you ever left an enjoyable experience because you were conscious of the time? How might we 'slow down a bit and enjoy things in the moment' more?



QUESTIONS for your real life journey

How do we mature in service?

7. NOT TAKING YOURSELF SO SERIOUSLY (45:57)

'I think we mature when we don't take ourselves so seriously. The ability to laugh at ourselves is so important.

'And included within that is recognising that we don't need to take the credit. It might have been us that did something and someone else got the credit, but it really doesn't matter, actually, because it's not about us: it's about God doing the stuff, and we're just joining him in that.'

How easy do you find it to laugh at yourself? Why might doing that help you to mature in serving others? Has someone ever received the credit for something great you did? How did that feel? How could you become someone who doesn't demand praise?

8. BECOMING MORE AVAILABLE (48:23)

'The other thing that's helps you to mature in service is becoming more available as you grow older, rather than less available.

'A career structure says that as you move up the ladder, you become less available to people, and only people at a certain level can engage with you.

'I don't think that's the service that Jesus imagines. I think real service is actually when you are *more* available, particularly to the least of these.

'You know, I pretend when I don't say I'm obsessed with power. I want to be powerful. But the Bible reminds me that that kind of obsession with power for my own ends is a real falsehood. So my way of recognising that is to be available to him and to be available to more people. For me, there's something about subverting the ordinary.'

Is it your experience that people you know who have 'moved up the ladder' in their career to more responsible positions generally become less available to others? Do you know anyone who has bucked the trend? Why do you think it can be so powerful when people with a lot of responsibility make time for others? In what ways might it benefit these people to make themselves 'more available, particularly to the least of these'?



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Act: THE GIFT OF ANOTHER'S PRESENCE (53:42)

Andrew explains that one of the privileges of being involved in The Poverty Truth Commission is 'watching people who in the world's eyes have incredible power, like MPs or sports people, sitting with somebody who in the world's eyes has very little power. And seeing them find human relationships with one another, be present with one another, and give the gift of one another's presence. I see how that shifts people. That work is not explicitly Christian, but it's the most theological thing I've ever been in. Because in some ways, it is the nations of the world gathering together to learn how to be with one another.'

In that vein, below are a number of video conversations that have been recorded by various (secular) organisations which show how powerful it can be when strangers meet or have a conversation.

Pick one, watch it, and discuss it afterwards.

- [A powerful experiment | Amnesty International UK](#): Refugees and Europeans look each other in the eyes for four minutes and come away feeling amazing connections.
- [57 Years Apart - A Boy And a Man Talk About Life](#): Can people in two very different stages of their lives learn from each other?
- [Strangers Meet Without Seeing Each Other - Pure Impressions Episode 1*](#): Pairs of people who have never met have a conversation without being able to see each other.
- [I became friends with 100 strangers in a day*](#): Someone who is new to a city decides to spark up conversations with 100 people to challenge the stigma of not speaking to strangers.
- [Old Soldier Meets Young Soldier | The Gap](#): Two people, of vastly different ages, discuss a shared experience that impacted their lives, how it affected them and how they dealt with it.

** Please note these videos contain some occasional swearing, which has been bleeped out.*