



# QUESTIONS

## for your real life journey

Episode 30: Major Helen Schofield

## How do we face change?

### 1. ASK WHY (11:11)

Helen says, 'I handle change better if I have a choice in it, or if I can have a conversation around it. I can't abide being "done to": I want to be part of the dialogue. I want people to tell me *why* a particular decision has been made, because I want to understand it a little better. And I want to be part of shaping decisions.

'Asking *why* helps me to own the decision as well. It helps me to not feel something is being "done to" me.'

How do you feel about someone else (a parent, a church leader or even a friend) making decisions for you? How healthy would you say your response to being 'done to' is? Do you like to ask *why*? Why? To increase your understanding, be able to influence decisions, or some other reason?

### 2. TALK ABOUT IT SOME MORE (17:21, 17:53)

'Wanting to be part of shaping decisions doesn't always work well for Salvation Army officers, does it? Because you don't get to pick your appointment: it is given to you. So I have to go through quite a process of thinking that through.

'But I always come to the point with changes in my officership that it's an act of obedience. Even if I'm not convinced about a certain appointment, if I just keep allowing God to shape me and take hold of what's been given me, it actually helps me to deal with it and to change my attitude about it.

'Because my natural inclination is to ask why, when I lead my team I am really open to bringing them into the conversation. It's really important for me to empower people in my team to make decisions, and to shape what's going on within whatever we're doing. It's really important that they can ask, "Can we talk about this some more?"

Could you see yourself in a role in which your 'bosses' could tell you what role you would be doing? What might be positive about that? Do you think talking about it would help, even if you knew it wouldn't influence the decision? Have you ever been in any kind of role where you felt empowered to make decisions and to shape things? How important was the ability to 'talk some more' in that role?



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## How do we move through suffering?

### 3. BE STUBBORN (19:58)

At one point in her life, aged 21, Helen had five weeks to go until she became a qualified nurse: 'I had my life planned out: I was going to practice for a while, get some money, and then train as a Salvation Army officer, because I'd felt called to that from a young age.

'But then I badly damaged my back. I spent eight years in and out of hospital. I had five major spinal operations – they all failed. I had lots of minor treatments – they failed too. Eventually the consultant said, "There's nothing else we can do for you, you have to live with the pain."

'As you can imagine I experienced a lot of physical, emotional and spiritual suffering during that time. I lost two careers: I lost nursing, I couldn't move forward into officership. It was a complete mixture of emotion.

'I moved through that time only by sheer determination. I'm quite stubborn at times. But that stubbornness helped me after a real major operation to learn to walk again. And so I took hold of my character trait of stubbornness, and that helped.'

What mixture of emotions might someone with their life planned out experience if those plans for the future were suddenly taken away? What would you do if a consultant said to you the words they said to Helen? How stubborn are you? Is stubbornness a positive or negative trait? Why?

### 4. TELL GOD EXACTLY HOW YOU FEEL (23:30)

'During that time I was spiritually just hanging on. I felt quite abandoned by God and by others. There were times I shouted at God, times I cried, times I was just silent.

'There were other times in those eight years that my spiritual life was strong. I look back on prayer journals that I kept and see evidence of a deep connection to God.

'But actually it was those moments when I didn't sense God that I had to dig deep to know that he was there. It was important to tell God exactly how I felt. I had to be real – to shout, cry, rant. And it was in the mess that, somehow, I knew God was with me.'

Have you ever told God exactly how you felt? Why or why not? When have you felt the strongest connection to God?



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## How do we receive joy?

### 5. THE DISCIPLINE OF GRATITUDE (38:20)

Helen says she felt God telling her to 'pay attention' in 2020. She started keeping a gratitude journal and recording all the things that brought joy into her life.

'Living alone during the pandemic, I had to dig deep to ensure I stayed in a good place, and having an attitude of gratitude changed my perspective.'

Apart from a few days, she's maintained this discipline since she started.

What do you think the most difficult element of living alone during lockdown would be? How might a regular habit of keeping a gratitude journal change someone's perspective? Would you find it easy to think of 365 different things to be grateful for over the course of a year?

### 6. MASHED POTATOES AND TAP WATER (42:16)

'Once, when it had been a particularly painful day at work, I remember sitting down and thinking, "What am I going to write here?!" I replayed the whole day in my head and eventually wrote, "I'm grateful for mashed potatoes."

'Also, I've always had that mindset that I'm grateful that I can turn on the tap. Unless there's a major power outage, I can turn on the light. I've got food in my cupboard and I've got beautiful friends. I should be grateful for the basics of life.'

What three 'basics of life' would you say you are most grateful for today? What would your equivalent to 'mashed potatoes' would you write down in your gratitude journal on a bad day? Why do you think we so often take these small things for granted?



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## How do we mature in service?

### 7. FROM A YOUNG AGE (41:31)

'I think maturing in service is very much about getting involved and getting your hands dirty, from a young age. Just getting involved in service helps to shape you and helps you to mature early.'

'I went to a small Salvation Army corps, and I was working with the children at the age of 14, and looking after the young people at 16.'

'But it shaped and it developed me, and obviously as the years have gone on I've found that getting alongside people on their journey helps me to mature in service.'

When is the earliest age you remember being given some responsibility to do a specific task or look after another person? If people who take (or are given) responsibility at an early age (eg young carers) mature early, do you think it's true that people who don't take (or aren't given) responsibility as a child are late to mature?

### 8. WATCHING OTHERS SERVE (43:37, 45:09)

Helen shares several examples of how seeing the way that others serve has shaped her:

'It was amazing to visit officer friends of mine when they've lived in Zambia, Kenya, and Bangladesh, and to see them in action caring for the communities they're involved with. But I was shaped not only by their influence, but by the influence of the local community I saw out there, and the way that they served others so generously. Despite living in extreme poverty, they just wanted to provide lunch for you. It was mind-blowing.'

'I visited a brothel in Bangladesh with one of the local officers and saw how she loved and cared for the girls. And they loved her. It challenged me.'

'I've also had to consider how I allow others to serve me. I'm quite independent, but there have been moments in my life when I've had to learn the lesson that not only is it great to give out grace, but I also need to pause and receive the service of others, and allow myself to be vulnerable. And the power of allowing someone else to serve you shapes you.'

Have you ever paid attention to how others serve? What did you learn? Whose example of service has challenged you the most? Do you find it difficult to let others serve you? How might allowing someone else serve you help to shape you?



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## Act: GRATITUDE (53:42)

Helen told us she keeps a gratitude journal. And in his final sign-off, Matt listed a number of people he was grateful for.

This final Act of Season 3 of *The All Terrain Podcast* is about identifying people we are grateful for and then doing something special to demonstrate our gratitude.

Write down one name (on paper, or in a digital note on your phone) for each of the following ten categories – a different name each time!

1. Someone who made you feel valued this week
2. Someone who regularly makes you laugh from your belly
3. Someone who creates beautiful things (music, art, poetry...)
4. Someone who generously shares what they have with you
5. Someone who encourages you
6. Someone who challenges you in ways that make you grow
7. Someone who gives you opportunities to grow
8. Someone who gives you the gift of their time
9. Someone who has shared their story with you
10. Someone who you feel listens deeply to you

Pick three of those names, and to show your gratitude:

- Send them a letter
- Write them a song
- Bake them a cake
- Buy them their favourite Fairtrade chocolate
- Give them a bear hug
- Do something else that's special