

## TALKING THE WALK

# Walking with your future self

Episode 35 | Joanna Adeyinka-Burford

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Rarely does something said by a guest on [The All Terrain Podcast](#) intrigue me as fast as it did in this episode.

Before host Jo even gets to the first of the four questions, TV presenter and actress Joanna Adeyinka-Burford offers this intriguing idea when asked to choose who's joining them on their hypothetical hike:

'I'm going to start with my fictional person, and that would be my 70-year-old self. It's fictional because it hasn't happened yet, and so we don't know what she's going to be like. But I think that'd be so fascinating, to be able to talk to her and reflect, you know, on whatever experiences have happened between now and then.'

As a sucker for sci-fi films, the scenario is really intriguing – but even if you're someone who prefers their movies to be 'based on a true story', it's a brilliant, albeit unintentional, reminder of the ultimate purpose of the podcast: to get listeners thinking about their discipleship journey and the kind of disciples of Jesus they want to be.

So, before we dig into some of the other things Joanna shares, let's take a moment to ask ourselves:

- ☰ *What kind of person do you want people to know you as when you are 70? (If you're already 70, what about when you're 100?)*
- ☰ *What would you be most disappointed to discover was true about your future self? What could you do now to prevent becoming that disappointing version of yourself?*

## Small change, all change and call for change

*'It's worth remembering that it is often the small steps,  
not the giant leaps, that bring about the most lasting change.'*

– From the Queen's Christmas speech, 2019

Joanna identifies three kinds of change that exist:

- ☰ **Small change:** *'normal, incremental change that's a sign of growth'*
- ☰ **All change:** *'unexpected, unwelcome and uncomfortable change that you have to wrestle with'*
- ☰ **Call for change:** *'exciting change that you welcome and proactively plan to bring about'*



Without the first kind of change, 'you're not growing, you're static... or you're dead', but it can be so gradual that we don't necessarily notice it taking place: 'Wouldn't it be weird if we didn't look in the mirror for ten years? Because we don't realise the incremental changes when we see ourselves every day.'

The third kind of change is one that Joanna as a goal setter and a dreamer thrives on. Those like Joanna can work out the changes they long to see and proactively aim to make a difference in the world.

But it's the second kind of change which is so hard to deal with. 'When my friend passed away, I didn't want that change in my life. We had prayed and believed for her to be healed. But when she died, it was an unwelcome change, and I have had to wrestle with it.

'But the one thing I had to come around to is that, even though our lives might change for good or bad, God is still good. God is still who he says he was. And he is still our constant, even when things change.'

- ☰ *Reflect on your life over the last month. Which small, incremental changes have been taking place in your life – signs that you are growing?*
- ☰ *What positive, exciting change do you dream of, even if you're not confident you can bring it about? What one small action could you do this week to be a step closer to that change?*
- ☰ *How do you wrestle with God? If you don't, why not? Have you had an unwelcome change in your life that you need to talk to God with complete honesty about?*

## Smile, springing back

*Today's a new day, but there is no sunshine  
Nothing but clouds, and it's dark in my heart  
And it feels like a cold night  
Today's a new day, where are my blue skies  
Where is the love and the joy that you promised me  
Tell me it's alright*

*I almost gave up, but a power that I can't explain  
Fell from heaven like a shower*

*I smile, even though I hurt see I smile  
I know God is working so I smile  
Even though I've been here for a while  
I smile, smile  
It's so hard to look up when you been down  
Sure would hate to see you give up now  
You look so much better when you smile, so smile*

– Lyrics to 'I Smile' by Kirk Franklin<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Listen to the song's official lyrics video.](#)

While Joanna doesn't mention the particular song quoted above in the podcast episode, she does choose Kirk Franklin to be on her playlist for their hypothetical hike, and the lyrics resonate with how she describes moving through suffering:

'You move through suffering moment by moment. You don't really know how you're going to feel, you just have to allow yourself to experience whatever's going on – not hiding from it, not running from it.

'It's like allowing myself to completely collapse into the arms of God and knowing that I can't hold it together. It's like collapsing into a really mega-fluffy duvet and it wrapping around you. And then the bed springs gently push you back up again, to give you the strength for the next moment.'

- ☞ *What line of the song lyrics most resonates with you? Why?*
- ☞ *How helpful is the imagery of collapsing into a fluffy duvet and springs pushing you back up again as a metaphor for how God embraces us in suffering and gives us the strength for the next moment? How would you describe the support that God gives you when you move through suffering?*

## Being fully yourself

*'Comparison is the thief of joy'*

– Attributed to Theodore Roosevelt

Joanna explains that dancing is one of the ways she most experiences joy.

'I remember as a kid, if I was getting a bit frustrated, my mother could tell I was not feeling quite right. She would say, "Joanna, just go and dance!" And I would, and I would feel so much better.'

And so, being fully herself brings her joy – as does seeing other people be completely themselves.

'I met this woman who was through-and-through confident in who she was. It was so refreshing. And I had to say to her after a few days: "you've given me so much joy because you are so comfortable in your own skin. You love your body. You love your voice. You love your hair, your skin. You're an amazing actress." You just felt that kind of permission to be you as well.'

- ☞ *How do you most easily experience joy? What are the ways you get most excited about expressing who you are? How could you prioritise time for that every day or week?*
- ☞ *Who do you know that is the most authentic version of her- or himself?*

## Willingness and wisdom

*'We have come as far as we have because we are the cleverest creatures to have ever lived on Earth. But if we are to continue to exist, we will require more than intelligence. We will require wisdom.'*

– David Attenborough, 'A Life on Our Planet: My Witness Statement and a Vision for the Future'

Joanna has a few pieces of wisdom to share about maturing in service.

**Be willing.** She remembers in her 20s she felt called to serve at church and told God, “I’ll just do whatever you want me to do. Whatever the need is, I’ll just do it.” And of course the biggest need was being with the three-year-olds. I didn’t know anything about babies, but I said “Okay, I’ll do it.” And there was something important about just being willing, about saying, “I don’t really want to do this thing, but it needs to be done, so I’m going to put myself aside.”

**Be wise.** In her 20s she gave a lot of time and energy, but she reached a point of maturity where she realised she didn’t have to burn herself out and say yes to everything. ‘I remember inside and outside of church I would say yes because I just wanted to be a helpful person, but it got me into situations where I would be run absolutely ragged. So I try to be wise about what I’m committing myself to. I look over the next week and think, “some stuff needs to come out – what’s really important to prioritise?” And I make sure I have carved out some time for myself to chill, to reflect, to spend with friends.’

**Put people first.** ‘It’s less about the task, and more about the person. If what I’m doing is not really serving and blessing the person, I’ve missed the point.’

- ☰ *Think of the period in your life when your willingness to serve God was highest. What did God teach you during that period, even when you were doing things you didn’t want to do?*
- ☰ *Think of a period in your life when you’ve taken too much on: how do you seek God’s wisdom on how much to take on? Or maybe you’re not doing enough: how could you use your gifts to serve?*
- ☰ *Have you ever been so committed to the task of serving that you’ve lost sight of the people you are trying to serve? What impact does that have on the fruitfulness of your service?*

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TALKING THE WALK is a blog series reflecting on episodes of [The All Terrain Podcast](#), written by Matt Little.

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