

TALKING THE WALK

Who's walking with us?

Episode 37 | Lee Ball

In this episode of [The All Terrain Podcast](#), host Jo Taylor meets Lee Ball, Director of Addictions for The Salvation Army.

New perspectives

The first thing that strikes me about Lee Ball is how positive, accepting and encouraging he is of others – and how that extends to a deep delight in his family (he chooses to take his wife and all five kids with him and Jo on their hypothetical hike).

In 2013, The Salvation Army endorsed a new, Christian approach to harm reduction that has 'fundamentally changed the way we view addiction within the organisation,' he says. 'I think it's a much more compassionate approach, one that doesn't cast judgement or place conditions on our work with people.'

The new approach understands that alcohol or drug use aren't the problem – they are an attempt to deal with the real problem behind the scenes that is driving that behaviour.

'I don't think there's one of us who lives doesn't have a coping strategy. And when we dig deep, we realise our coping strategies are not always healthy either. But those things we do are about alleviating discomfort, releasing stress and distress or dealing with trauma: they're basically about wanting to feel better in the moment.'

 *An addiction is a behaviour that is difficult to control and which interferes with your ability to function in daily life. People can become addicted to a wide range of substances and activities, including drugs, alcohol, gambling, video games, social media, pornography, over-spending, over-exercising, over-eating, and more. If you are honest with yourself, what behaviours do you find difficult to control? What might drive those behaviours in you? Who do you trust that you could talk to get support?*

Considering your discipleship impact

I've written a few of these articles now (seven – and before that 20 'Questions for your real life journey' for small groups), and I've only just realised something about the four questions each podcast guest

answers: despite each question starting 'How do we...' I've always understood them as guests sharing wisdom about how individuals should follow the path of discipleship.

But Lee's answers to the questions brought a wider perspective that challenged me to view the four questions in another, arguably more important, way: 'How do we face change, move through suffering, receive joy and mature in service *together*?'

So, how might we not only answer the four questions ourselves, but help others to do so, too?

How might our individual discipleship journeys empower, or disempower, others on their journey?

How might your own discipleship journey present less of an obstacle, and more of an outstretched hand of support, to others wanting to get closer to Jesus?

 *How might your discipleship negatively impact others' journey of faith?*

Love all your dark corners

Lee talks about his upbringing – 'When we were kids we didn't have much. But my mum had a really creative brain, so she would be able to make something out of nothing' – and is frank about his own drug use – 'Whenever I used drugs, they served a purpose, they gave you relief.'

But there came a time where he questioned even whether he wanted to live:

I was probably 12 or 13 when it was at its worst. I had such a deep sense of sadness that when I look back now I was probably deeply depressed. I would cut myself, I would hurt myself, I'd do anything or take anything to get rid of some of that pain.

'And I remember having this one moment, when I was really young and thinking, "I just can't carry on. I don't think I can do this anymore." But nobody tells you what sadness is and therefore you go through your own internal journey, thinking, "Well, nobody talks about this, so there must be something wrong with me".'

Thankfully, his best friend rang him up one day. 'He said, "You know all those dark corners that you try and hide? I love all those as well, just so you know." I remember the tears streaming down my face at how profoundly powerful that was. The suffering you're going through: you have to love it, you have to learn to love it unconditionally. And that's where real healing takes place.'

Lee's words reminded me of a scene from the recent Netflix documentary *Stutz*, made by comedian Jonah Hill. Phil Stutz is his therapist and Hill wanted to make a movie about his work so others could learn the tools that have been so valuable for his mental health.

In this particular scene, Stutz encourages Hill to identify his 'shadow' – the expression of himself that throughout his life he has been ashamed of and done everything in his power to not be like. For Hill, this

is his overweight 14-year-old self. Phil Stutz talks about the need to listen to the shadow, to apologise to it, to treat it with love and accept it in order to experience healing.

- ☞ *Who is your shadow? What makes you ashamed of it? How might you treat that part of you with love and acceptance?*

Let others experience sadness

When he was four years old, Lee's son, Noah, complained that Lee never gave him any room to be sad, that his dad just wanted to 'make it better' all the time.

'I suppose in my own head I didn't want him to feel the way I used to feel like. I wanted to make things better.

'But what I needed to do was just sit alongside him and say, "I can see this".

'And I think that's probably one of the biggest life lessons I've learned in a professional capacity, too: to not try and take pain away from somebody. They need to be heard first. Otherwise, what you're telling them is that suffering is bad or wrong, and that they're the problem.'

Lee talks too about the need to recognise your own privilege when tempted to judge others for the choices they make, particularly when trying to help people get free of addictions.

'You're talking to people sometimes that don't have the options that you have, and yet you expect them to act in the same way that you do. What seems like a completely rational choice to them may be completely irrational to you. They often can't think in the way that you're currently thinking about the situation, sometimes because there's just such an abject loss of hope.

'And one of the things that you see at the moment with the sheer level of poverty that we have is that choices are being taken away from people left, right and centre.

'But it's part of the human condition to want control over your environment, because it reassures you, it gives you a sense of safety. And when that power or control is taken away from you, it elicits a fear response from people, and the people's thinking brain immediately goes offline.

'So if you want people to really be on board with change, they need to understand that they need to be involved in it. And they need to be given some control.'

- ☞ *Do you agree that experiencing sadness, and letting others experience sadness, is important? Are you a fixer? How might your desire to fix other's pain be unhelpful to them?*
- ☞ *How might we allow ourselves to approach others with compassion and understanding rather than judging their choices and decisions through our own lens? Rather than giving telling others how they should change, in what ways could you instead give them the power to make their own decisions?*

Find your calling in doing what you love

Lee describes the sadness he felt aged 24 or 25: 'I was working but having no joy. I was getting money but still getting no joy. On paper my life probably looked amazing, but I was deeply sad. I remember waking up one day and thinking that things had to change.'

'And I went to a place called the Rural Autistic Society and said, "Look, is there something I can do?" And they said, "Well, what skills have you got?" So I said, "Well, I don't really know. I like painting. I've always been really into painting and drawing."

'So they said "Well, we've got this basement that needs to be decorated." So they let me just "vandalise" a room for about three weeks with children, and paint it and do whatever I wanted. And I had such a feeling of joy: it was indescribable. All of a sudden I felt what some people would describe as a calling. That was such a transitional moment.'

- ☰ *Have you ever experienced a feeling of deep joy when you used your passions and strengths? What were you doing when it happened? Would you describe it as a sense of calling, or in some other way?*

Who's walking with us?

I'm grateful to Lee because despite sharing his wisdom and giving me answers to the four questions, he's left me with a lot more questions.

And these questions all relate to a bigger question that features in every All Terrain Podcast episode: Who's walking with us? – whether that's fellow followers of Jesus trying to grow in discipleship, or people you cross paths with that you might influence as you aim to demonstrate Christ's character in your life.

Perhaps create a list of all the people you're walking with: family, neighbours, friends, colleagues, peers, leaders, followers, older people, younger people, people you pass on the street, people you queue behind, people that others might ignore, people that no one could miss...

And with them in mind, think about these questions:

- ☰ ***How might you help each other to embrace change?** What areas of privilege do you have that you need to be aware of, and which might cause me to misunderstand others' fear of change? How could you give those people your acceptance and understanding rather than your judgment or pity? How might you encourage or empower them to feel more confident in facing change?*
- ☰ ***How might you help each other to move through suffering?** How could you sit alongside them and let them know you see them, rather than try and fix things for them? How might you avoid reinforcing the perspective that suffering is wrong or that they are the problem? How might you avoid shaming them with your best intentions?*



- ☰ **How might you help each other to receive joy?** How might you see and release people into their unique strengths and help them feel a sense of calling to simply be themselves? How might you demonstrate to them how much you value the positive things they bring to your life?
- ☰ **How might you help each other to mature in service?** How might you be to them the person who inspires and energises them to keep serving, loving, fighting injustice, when they are feeling tired or frustrated? How might you demonstrate commitment to serving without isolating yourself and becoming a lone ranger?

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

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