



QUESTIONS

for your real life journey

Episode 13: Miriam Swanson

How do we face change?

1. EXTERNAL PROCESSOR (6:15)

Miriam explains that she's an external processor, so when she has to make an important decision, or knows that a big change is coming her way, she prefers to talk through her thoughts and feelings with others. She recognises the power of her community because she has received their discernment, prayer, encouragement and wisdom.

On the other hand, when internal processors have a big decision to make, they're more likely to retreat into their own mind and emotions to get clarity. They tend to be quieter people who crave alone time, and are more likely to meditate or keep a journal than call a friend.

Both external and internal processors can benefit from writing down their thoughts and feelings. For Miriam, the process of writing out everything in her head helps her to ask herself 'what this change will feel like... what are some of my concerns around it... what are my hopes and dreams?'

When it comes to facing big changes, do you think you're an external or internal processor? What does this look like for you, and how do those close to you interpret your behaviour when you're processing a huge decision? Have you tried putting your thoughts and feelings down on paper before? How does it help?

2. DOUBLE VISION (9:44)

'I think self-awareness and God-awareness make a whole heap of difference to how you respond to situations.'

Miriam introduces this idea when talking about how she faces change, but she also refers back to it several times later in the podcast.

What do you think she means by having self- and God-awareness? Why is this so important? Can you think of a time when being both self- and God-aware helped you to embrace change more easily?



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How do we move through suffering?

3. TANGIBLE GRIEF (19:22)

Miriam points out that even though Covid-19 has caused all kinds of suffering, many people have felt guilty about grieving the suffering they've experienced because no one actually died.

But, she suggests, 'there's real, tangible grief in people having to cancel their wedding days.'

How do you think couples have felt about having to cancel their wedding day? What suffering have you, family or friends experienced because of Covid-19? How might you recognise and express that grief in a way that allows you to experience God's healing?

4. TRIVIAL PURSUIT? (22:58/26:25)

Miriam explains that people in their 20s who have left home and started to become independent adults can often find themselves experiencing various crises – of identity, of faith, in romantic relationships – as well as becoming aware of past trauma.

She says that God is interested in all of it, even the small stuff: 'It's a privilege being able to offer a little bit of hope to people who feel utterly heartbroken by that boy that said no, or because their dream job didn't fall into their lap upon graduation, or because they're attending their first funeral ... God is interested in why you're not sleeping well, and he's interested in which bits of the Bible you find so difficult to get on board with... he's interested in how I give my life to Jesus, and everything in between.'

Is there anything you're struggling with that you've not talked to God about because you don't think it's important enough for him to be concerned about? Or would you love to talk to an older Christian about something, but are embarrassed that they'd find it petty – or that you'd be patronised? What could you do about this?



QUESTIONS for your real life journey

How do we receive joy?

5. DOOR STEP (34:09)

Miriam says, 'God is at work in the world, and you get to join in. If you step out of your front door assuming God is good, God is kind, God is with you (and also in your neighbour) and is up to stuff, then you're far more likely to pay attention.'

What are your expectations when you step out of your front door? Why? What might happen if you had the same assumptions as Miriam and looked out for how God is at work in the world?

6. COSTLY JOY (35:00)

Miriam explains that her husband Ben has experienced a lot of loss in his life: 'There is an element where joy feels scary, too costly, because what if it disappoints? The Bible tells us that hope doesn't disappoint - but certainly our experience is that we hope for things that don't happen, and it's way more painful than if you've not been looking out for them in the first place.'

Do you agree that joy can be costly? How do we hope for joy when we've experienced disappointment? What does it look like to have hope, to look out for the fingerprints of God?

How do we mature in service?

7. BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT (41:44)

Miriam explains that in her work with students, the best way for them to mature as a disciple of Jesus is by letting them get stuck in and serve - even if they're not sure what they believe:

'Serving is the way of discipleship... [We've got to] allow people to serve even when they're questioning. If you want students to understand the theology that they *are* the church, they don't *go* to church, then you *can't* just have them as seat fillers on a Sunday and then not see them for a week and think that you've done your bit.'

Can you think of a time when your church allowed you to serve, even if you weren't sure what you believed: how did it impact you? If more churches allowed students to get stuck in with serving, what do you think the impact would be?



QUESTIONS for your real life journey

8. CALL TO ACTION (41:41)

Miriam says:

'We can run the risk in our 20s of being so hung up on [the question], "what am I called to do?" that we miss [the truth] that primarily who you're called to be is a friend of Jesus, a disciple, a close follower of God.

'My boss [Rich] always says, "Don't worry about getting a vision for your life - serve someone else's vision and watch what God does as you serve.'"

Do you find yourself 'hung up' on discovering what you're called to do? What do you think of Miriam's advice that your primary calling is simply to follow Jesus? What about Rich's advice: could you serve someone else's vision?

Act: CENTRE OF ATTENTION (12:01)

Miriam shares about how powerful the practice of 'centring prayer' has been for her and her husband.

Every morning, they simply sit in silence and try to focus on a word or phrase for 20 minutes. Each time their mind wanders, they intentionally re-focus on that centring word or phrase.

She explains that the practice is a 'very practical way to remind your heart, body and mind to be present to the presence of God with you, before you do anything else in the day.'

Your challenge is to practise centring prayer for five minutes every day this week. Try it out together as a group now to get familiar with what it involves.

Pick a different centring word or phrase each day. Here are some suggestions:

- Names of God: Abba, Jesus, Lord, King, Immanuel, Wonderful, Counsellor, Good Shepherd.
- Simple words or phrases: Love, peace, ocean, let go, breathe, change, others.
- The Jesus Prayer: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.'
- Images: Find an image of a piece of religious art or 'Jesus icon' and use it as your focus.

Feel free to practise it longer than five minutes: we only suggest that timeframe because your brain is far less likely to resist or find excuses than if you go all-out and try a full 20 minutes on your first go!