



QUESTIONS

for your real life journey

Episode 14: Commissioner Anthony Cotterill

How do we face change?

1. ANCHOR YOURSELF (8:48)

“God who changes not”, as we sometimes sing, is right alongside us: he is the one who stands, walks, sits right alongside us. To anchor ourselves to him and walk in step with him means that whatever we have to face – whether that is change that is gradual, almost imperceptible, or change that is drastic, like being caught up in a sudden storm – he is with us.

‘And so, I think we must recognise that change is here to stay – but God is with us. He's Immanuel, and we cling on to him and are guided by him through that change.’

Can you think of a time you got through a tough situation precisely because you knew someone – a family member, friend, teacher or other person you could trust – was there beside you all the way? Though we can't see God, have you ever felt the same kind of reassurance that God was there beside you?

2. SHARE YOUR BURDENS (13:52)

Talking about the UK and Republic of Ireland territory's initial response to Covid-19, Anthony says: ‘The second thing was to get the right people around the table: very, very quickly the burden immediately becomes shared.’

Have you ever been in an emergency situation before, where something unexpected happened and you had to work out how to respond? Were you alone or with others? Or have you ever felt weighed down by sadness, fear, shame, guilt or some other intense negative emotions and decided to tell someone else how you were feeling? Does sharing your burdens always make things better? What kind of people do you find it easiest to share your burdens with, and why?



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How do we move through suffering?

3. RIGHT THERE, IN THE MIDST OF IT (17:37)

Anthony shares his experience of helping in the aftermath of the Lockerbie plane bombing in 1988:

'Literally walking into that horrendous suffering is helped by an understanding that this isn't about God abandoning us - but God has always been preparing us for this. He makes it very clear in his word that "there's going to be trouble, tribulation, flooding, fire, bereavement, sickness... but I promise to be with you."

'Now, if I get that in my heart and my understanding, it makes it possible for me as a Salvation Army officer, pastor, leader to actually face up to all kinds of horrendous stuff, Lockerbie being an example.

'I can face that suffering, knowing that God is right there in the midst of it with me.'

Most of us have (thankfully) never been present at the aftermath of a bombing, but imagine this scenario: you are out shopping in town when you witness a huge explosion down the street. You're uninjured. What do you do? What difference would it make if you knew unequivocally that God was with you?

How do we receive joy?

4. HOW DO WE RECEIVE JESUS? (24:33)

'Joy for me is a deep-seated emotion based on the reality of the presence of Christ in one's life. So I would swing the question around and ask, "how do we receive Jesus?" Because for me that's the key question. Joy comes from that deep-seated understanding and experience of the Spirit of God in a believer's life. So for me, joy is received by staying with that anchor, which means that even in the midst of some of the rubbish, and some of the challenge, heartache, headache, and suffering, it's possible to still experience joy.

'So it's about keeping our hearts and lives in the hands of the one who is the joy bringer.'

Do you agree with Anthony's suggestion that experiencing joy is dependent upon knowing Jesus? Can you think of a time you experienced joy when you were going through something that was really challenging mentally or emotionally? What brought you that joy? Think of some of the most joyful (not just happy) people you know - are they Christians? What would be the impact on the world if every Christian was full of joy?



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5. JOY ISN'T JUST THE ICING ON TOP (27:10)

'But as it happens, we're told in Nehemiah that the joy of the Lord is our strength. So I desperately want to make sure I'm receiving that joy, living in the joy, because it's through the joy of the Lord, that we're known to be strong, and therefore, actually able to do things that in our own strength we couldn't do – or at least would really struggle to do.'

Matt points out that while many people would understand joy to be the 'icing on top' – that is, a kind of 'reward' for their dogged dedication, discipline and faithfulness through the tough times – Anthony is suggesting the exact opposite – that is, that joy comes first, and it's something deep down within us that sustains us and allows us to stay strong when we face hardships.

What do you think about this idea? Is joy a reward for facing change and moving through suffering? Or is it the very thing that gives us the strength for those things? Or is it both? Can you think of an example to back up your opinion?

6. JOY IN BEING RELEASED (30:10)

Matt asks where Anthony sees joy in The Salvation Army.

'I see it in the food banks, I see it in the parent toddler groups, I see it, when there's people from different ethnic backgrounds who come together, and who feel free in their worship, to be able to offer to God the individual. I see it when I know that there are Salvationists – and so many other people are, of course, as well – who are despite the lockdown looking out for their neighbours.'

'And in actual fact, I think there's been a revelation in this time. We've kind of enjoyed the fact that the Salvation Army has good reputation and does good stuff in the name of Jesus. But really, it's about us as individuals, and I see real joy when I see individuals realising, "hey, I don't have to do this corporately, I need to do it individually. I need to do it in my classroom, I need to do it in my place of work, and I certainly need to do it in my neighbors, I need to look out for them. And I need to share the joy.'"

Why do you think Salvationists may have felt released into joy during the pandemic? What has your own experience of The Salvation Army been over the last year?



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How do we mature in service?

7. KEEP DOING WHAT GOD HAS ASKED YOU TO DO (35:06)

Anthony suggests that to mature in service, 'I think you just keep doing what God's asked you to do. I don't think you can sit down say, "Right, I'm going to mature today. And I've got a strategic plan to ensure that by 2022 I will have matured." I think maturing in service is as simple as keeping on keeping on.'

'I don't think anyone notices that they're growing. As a kid, the standard thing our relatives said to us was, "Haven't you grown!" We never noticed it ourselves.'

'So just keep doing what you've been asked to do. Keep feeding yourself, keep exercising physically, mentally, spiritually... keep doing the right things, and then leave the rest to God. And maybe maturity just comes like so many good things.'

Have you had the experience of relatives saying, 'Haven't you grown!?' Is there something else you'd prefer them to say instead? Do you agree with Anthony's suggestion that you can't be intentional about your own growth or maturity? What has God asked you to do? If you don't have a specific sense of God calling you to something, what passions has he given you that he might want you to develop?

8. GETTING OUT OF YOUR DEPTH (37:18)

Talking about becoming the Territorial Commander, and being the person to lead the territory's response to Covid-19, Anthony admits:

'Every appointment I've ever had has always felt beyond me, always felt beyond what I could possibly do. So, coming into this role, part of me felt, "it's the same old, same old," because I could never see myself being able to do this. I could never see myself thriving, let alone surviving.'

'And you know, but there is no guidebook, there is no training for any of us. So it's been incredibly difficult, as everything has changed. But on reflection, God has blessed us, and he's blessed the Army, despite all of this - he's opened new opportunities for certain. It's been tough but - my goodness! - hasn't it been blessed? Put it all down to God: give him all the praise and glory.'

Have you ever felt out of your depth, as if you didn't have the right personality or skills to fulfil a task or a role? How did you overcome that feeling? If you not only overcame the feeling, but accomplished the thing that you felt was beyond you, what impact did that accomplishment have on you? How do we develop godly confidence?



QUESTIONS for your real life journey

Act: Gold, silver, bronze

Anthony talks about the organisational structure that the Army use during emergencies. Gold command looks at the big picture, Silver command at the tactical planning and Bronze command at the on-the-ground implementation of the response.

We're going to take a few moments to reflect on (and maybe change) our own response to sudden change. It is probably easiest to think about your response to Covid-19, but if you're fed up of the pandemic feel free to adapt the questions to reflect on a different, huge change you've experienced in your life.

Take a piece of paper (or a drawing app if you're using a tablet) and, holding it in landscape orientation, divide the page into three columns. Label the three columns Gold, Silver and Bronze.

In each column, write or draw answers to the relevant questions:

Gold

Gold is the big picture, strategic view. It identifies your goals, based on your core values.

It's likely that the pandemic response in the UK and Republic of Ireland will continue for many months, if not years.

- What core values do you have about yourself through the pandemic - Are you optimistic? Creative? Fearful? Ambitious? Apathetic? How do those values influence or define your goals?
- In 2 or 3 words, what's your long-term goal during the pandemic? Stay positive? Keep connected? Get a job? Family first? Don't care? Opportunity to grow? What do you ultimately want to achieve during this time of huge restrictions?

Silver

Silver is the mid-level, tactical view. It makes a plan, based on the resources you have.

Everyone's resources have been restricted during the pandemic, but despite this, we still have so much freedom to decide how to approach life in lockdown.

- Write down all the resources you still have, despite the pandemic, in terms of people, time, money, space, etc.
- What's been your specific plan to achieve your goal? If you need a job, how have you been trying to achieve that? If you care about staying connected, what have your tactics been? If you're determined to learn new skills, how have you been doing that?



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Bronze

Bronze is the ground-level, operational view. It decides on daily activities, based on location.

Some places may have higher levels of risk in lockdown..

- Are there particular challenges about your town or household that impact how you get things done on a daily basis during the pandemic? For example, parents or siblings sharing the same space or equipment, and the accompanying noise or impact on bandwidth? How can you work around those?
- What daily habits or routines have you put in place to ensure you take action toward your pandemic goal?

Reflect

Look at your page. Would you change anything? Which is your weakest area of command?

Discuss it with each other. Identify the area that would make the biggest impact in helping you to face change, move through suffering, receive joy or mature in service during the pandemic.

This might be a change to your:

- Gold command, eg 'I must change my mindset to one that is more positive.'
- Silver command, eg 'I need to change my approach to better achieve my goal.'
- Bronze command, eg 'I'm going to start a new habit that helps me achieve my plan.'

Then pick one new small practical thing that you can do to action that change straight away.

For example:

- Place a piece of paper with the words, 'Be positive,' or a Bible verse that you will see every day as soon as you wake up – or change your phone's lock screen to an image with an aspirational message.
- Plan to do the schoolwork that you most dislike first thing in the morning, so you can get it out of the way and feel good about yourself rather than procrastinating.
- Go for a 5-minute walk around the block to get the blood pumping and re-focus as soon as you get distracted.