



QUESTIONS

for your real life journey

Episode 17: Dr Kate Middleton

How do we face change?

1. DON'T MAKE A LIFE PLAN (12:01)

Kate says she has no life plan: she loves possibilities, creative thinking, and finds it hard to be 'hemmed in' by things. She loves the thought of a nomadic life style, with the freedom to move around and an open road before her.

She says that 'in my faith walk that has been a really useful advantage, because I'm always able to be open to stuff when God calls me to it.'

Have you ever felt under pressure to decide how you want your life to play out? When? And how did it make you feel? What might be the advantages to Kate's kind of approach to life and vocation? What might be the downsides to it?

2. IDENTITY CRISIS (15:24)

Kate explains: 'The world tries to teach us what our identity and security should be found in. And most of those things are pretty flimsy, actually.'

'Every day there are always nudges that make you want to be more successful, or be more perfect, or want to more likes on Instagram or whatever it is. And those are things you have to really challenge, deliberately and proactively.'

One of the exercises Kate has to do regularly in her Pilates class is to balance on one leg. The key, she says, is to 'fix your eyes on something that's not moving. And it always makes me smile because that's what we do when we fix our eyes on Jesus: he is solid when the whole world is shaken, he's the only one thing that doesn't change.'

Do you identify with the temptation to base your identity on how successful, how perfect or how liked you are? What other things does the world tell us we need to be to feel secure? How does this compare to finding our identity and security in Jesus? What practical ways could you defy the world's lies and focus on Jesus instead?



QUESTIONS for your real life journey

How do we move through suffering?

3. UNDER PRESSURE (28:51)

Kate says that in her work she's been hearing a lot of people recently saying, 'I don't know what to do about that friend that wasn't there for me or didn't perform the role I thought they would when I was really suffering.'

She explains that all friendships have been put under pressure during the pandemic, and gives the following advice:

'Don't expect everyone to be perfect. Lower your expectations. Give more grace. Accept the reality of something that's happened and acknowledge "this was tough for everyone". And then think: "How do we move on from this?"'

How have your friendships changed during this last year? In what ways have your friendships suffered? In what ways have they improved? In what ways have you found it difficult to be a good friend? What do you think about Kate's advice?

4. MOVING FROM A(WFUL) TO B(ETTER) (30:24)

Kate suggests that 'so much of the challenge in suffering is moving from a place where you're just fighting with it to a space where you've managed to integrate it into your story in some way.'

When you're fighting suffering, you say things like: 'I don't want this to be the reality that happened. I don't want this as part of my story. I don't want that to be what happened to my friendship. I just I don't want it and I'm fighting with it.'

But when you've integrated your suffering into your story, you can say things like 'This happened – and yes it was awful. But here's how I journeyed through it, and here's where I'm now.'

What kinds of suffering have you tried to fight in the past? What did that fighting achieve for you? Have you ever managed to integrate your suffering into your story? What helped you to do this? Did it put you in a better place than when you just fought your suffering?



QUESTIONS for your real life journey

How do we receive joy?

5. MAKE IT A HABIT (40:37)

Kate asks, 'Do you value and make space enough for the things that will bring you joy - the things that will reliably lift your mood, the things that will sustain you even when everything else is really difficult?'

She explains: 'That could be making time for close friendships, or losing yourself in worship. But maybe it's also in other stuff, like a really good cup of coffee. For me, biking always brings me joy, and it doesn't matter what else is going on, I can get out on my bike pretty much wherever I am and it will always lift my mood, always make me feel better.'

'And I think the more we have those things that we can fall back on, the more that when life gets really tough, we've got some stability, but also the more we can push the limits as late as the more we can step into things, the more God can use us, because we have got that stability in us.'

What people, things, experiences always bring you joy? How do you see these things - as a self-indulgent luxury or as a self-caring responsibility (or something else)? How could you cultivate the things that bring you joy into habits that can sustain and strengthen you through the tough times so that God can use you more?

6. HOW TO FIGURE OUT WHAT BRINGS YOU JOY (45:11)

For those people who don't know what brings them joy, Kate offers the following simple advice:

'Be creative. Brainstorm things - make a really long list. Be explorative. Try things out you've never done before.'

What things have you never tried but have always wanted to? What things do other people enjoy doing that you've never actually tried, but should? What one new thing will you commit to trying this week?



QUESTIONS for your real life journey

How do we mature in service?

7. YOU ARE SUCH A BLESSING (52:50)

Kate tells of how she'd been really encouraged after having had a bad weekend: An elderly gentleman that she was serving in her new church congregation simply told her, 'You are such a blessing to us.'

Kate recalls: 'It was a real moment of God's kindness, but also a little bit of a maturity kick. Because it reminded me that this isn't about me. Why do I do this? Not for me, I do this because I get to serve and feed into other people's lives. And I get the amazing privilege of seeing them grow and seeing God smiling on them and seeing them see themselves the way God sees them.'

'At the end of the day, we mature in service by reminding ourselves constantly why we're doing it. Because otherwise, when it's tough the temptation will be to bail.'

What are your best and worst experiences of serving other people? Have you ever wanted to pull out of a commitment you've made to serving others? How much impact does it have when the people you serve voice their gratitude and encouragement? How might 'reminding ourselves constantly why we're doing it' help us when that gratitude or encouragement is absent?

8. IT'S YOUR CHOICE (56:16)

Kate reminds us that God never forces us to step into things: it's always our decision.

She says, 'The thing I love about the story in which Peter steps out of the boat is that it was his idea to do it. He wants to step into the storm and the chaos. Jesus doesn't call him - he's just so full of passion. And in that moment, it's like he's realised that if his eyes are on Jesus then he can do something amazing. Because he sees Jesus doing it and he thinks, well, this is possibility.'

What does it tell you about Jesus that he went along with Peter's idea to walk on water? Do you resonate with Peter's passion? Why or why not? Have you ever done something you thought wasn't possible because you trusted Jesus?



QUESTIONS for your real life journey

Act: DEFYING DARKNESS

Kate says 'In times when we feel like life is out of control and difficult, despair is such a horrible emotion. It really is overwhelming: it feels suffocating.

'In John it says, "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it." But in one of the French translations of that verse it says, "the darkness cannot suffocate it." It's like it can't snuff it out. And what I love about that is that it only takes the tiniest light and darkness has already lost, because darkness has to be absolute to win. And so it only takes a little spark - that tiniest, most pathetic little flame you can manage to generate - to defy darkness.'

1. Collaborate to create a page filled with words/pictures/emojis representing the varied emotions you experience when darkness seems to be winning. You could use a free trial of MURAL (<https://mural.co>) or a Jamboard (<https://jamboard.google.com>) for this if you're doing it virtually, or do it old school with pens and a flipchart pad or a roll of wallpaper. Use dark colours to represent the darkness these emotions can bring.
2. Then, on the same page, using bright, colourful colours, fill the gaps on the page with words/pictures/emojis representing the varied emotions you experience when light breaks through the darkness.
3. Use your creation to pray for you to have the boldness to defy darkness.
4. Finally, listen to the track 'Look Up Child' by Lauren Daigle, or read the lyrics out, as an act of worship.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Upbeat (<https://upbeat.cloud>)

A preventative resource to help boys aged 13-16 develop a healthier approach to their emotional wellbeing.

Made to be (<https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/youth-and-children/made-be>)

A project, offering girls aged 12+ a range of resources to help them think about their own identity and specific issues that may be of concern in their own life or the life of a friend

Mind & soul foundation (<https://www.mindandsoulfoundation.org/>)

Exploring Christianity and Mental Health.

Headstrong (<https://www.beheadstrong.uk/>)

Emotional wellbeing resources and advice to do real life and real faith in the real 21st century world.