



QUESTIONS

for your real life journey

Episode 18: Selina Stone

How do we face change?

1. CHANGE IS BEYOND ME (7:07, 9:10)

Selina identifies as someone who dislikes change, because it means she's not in control and this can make her feel very uncomfortable. But, she says, she has trained herself to believe that good things happen when she's not in control.

She also recognises the irony that many of the changes she advocates for in the world are actually going to affect her and her desire for comfort. But she has to be willing to face that.

'A lot of people are just not willing to admit they have more of a desire to be comfortable than they have a desire to see the world change.'

Do you identify with the need to be in control of your life? How does it feel when things in your life feel out of your control? Which do you have more of a desire for – your own comfort, or to see the world change? Are you willing to advocate for changes that might negatively impact you? Why or why not?

2. TRUE DISCIPLES PURSUE CHANGE (11:41, 15:08)

Selina suggests that too many Christians see their walk with Jesus as consisting of the 'core business' of church meetings, Bible studies and prayer - which are the kinds of things they believe really help them to grow spiritually - and secondary, optional activities like politics or mission, which some people are called to but most are not.

Her view is that discipleship is not something we should primarily do in Bible studies, but out in the world. She asks, 'Where are we being disciples of Jesus, like, where we actually having our whole lives transformed by this message of the gospel? Where are we willing to actually take up our cross daily, and walk out what it means for us to no longer live according to the patterns of this world, but be renewed?'

'What we speak about, the choices that we make about what we watch and what we do with our money, how we treat our neighbours or our enemies... challenging racism, challenging sexism, challenging the exclusion of people who are LGBTQ plus, environmental concern... These are not things we can just choose to do as an add-on. Because Jesus is always walking towards change, always. He's never keeping up the status quo.'



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Why do you think most people think politics or mission are 'optional' in the Christian walk, but Bible studies and prayer are not? Where do you have the most opportunities to be transformed by the gospel? Consider the list of what Selina states are 'not things we can just choose to do as an add-on': which do you find most challenging in that list? In what ways do the Gospels show Jesus as someone who always walk towards change and challenged the status quo?

How do we move through suffering?

3. BE GRATEFUL FOR THE GOOD BITS (20:34, 24:39)

Selina talks about the attitude her mum had as she lived with cancer:

'She was grateful for the little things. Being able to get out of bed in the morning is a real blessing. Being able to smell, taste and enjoy your breakfast is a blessing. Being able to go outside to see nature and people is a blessing. What I think she taught me about suffering was not to let it overwhelm me. There is always something good you can find in the midst of it. And if you can keep your eyes on those small things, then you'll be okay.'

Can you remember a tough time you experienced? What were the little things that got you through it? Who are your role models when it comes to seeing the positive in every situation? Whether you feel like you're moving through suffering at the moment or not, what are the blessings you can be grateful for?

4. TALK TO YOURSELF (26:07)

Selina says she often has a word with herself: 'I'm doing it all the time. All the time. Because I know myself well enough. I know how I spiral. So I have to catch myself and say, "Selina, come on, now. It's important that you have some joy in this time. So enjoy yourself."'

What do you think about talking to yourself? Why do you think it's important to be self-aware enough to catch yourself thinking negatively and give yourself a pep talk? What kinds of negative things does your inner voice tell you? What messages would counteract this self-criticism?



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How do we receive joy?

5. TAKE IT ALL IN (29:28)

Selina lists a great range of things that she takes joy in:

- Eating a really nice pizza
- Going for a walk and seeing the changing seasons in the park near where you live
- Laughing at something really funny, from your belly
- Holding your grandparent's hand
- Getting lost in a really great story
- Seeing a hilarious stand-up comedy show

Her philosophy is that 'life does not spare you pain. And when I say life, I mean God: God doesn't spare you pain. God doesn't step in and say, "No, I'm not going to let you have that." We all experience pain, but you can never have too much joy. You can't have too much pleasure. I don't believe God's an enemy of joy. I think God gives joy and abundance.'

Why do you think God doesn't spare us pain? What little things bring you pleasure? If you were to live by the philosophy that you can 'never have too much pleasure', what would change about your life?

6. DON'T SAY YES TO EVERYTHING (31:17, 32:06)

'As a black woman living in Britain,' says Selina, 'I grew up in a working class family. I know how life can be horrible. I know what it's like to imagine that the world is not set up for your success.'

'But I'm not living in that limitation. I don't fester in those feelings. I don't spend all of my time talking about the pain and suffering of racism and sexism - and I actually don't like talking about those things. I have to address them to a certain point, for my own sake, or for the lives of people like me, but it's not something that gives me joy. So I limit it. I don't say yes to every panel about racism I'm invited to, because I know how much it takes for me to have to talk about that.'

'What helps me is being aware that I'm not the first one to be here. Me opening up my wounds again for you on this panel is not going to do anything more than all the writing and all the panels and all the podcasts that have gone before me. So I don't feel like I must be a martyr for the cause.'

Have you been through any experiences you don't like to talk about, even if you know it might be helpful for others to hear? How do you get the balance right between those two things? How



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might you gain a better understanding of an issue without talking to someone who's gone through it and potentially opening up old wounds for them?

How do we mature in service?

7. PERSIST PAST EXCITEMENT (40:25)

Selina says that 'Some of the best things in life require you to persist past the point of immediate excitement. If you're in a job and you really want to master it, you've got to stay in there longer than a few months. If you have a relationship, you can't just end it when you stop feeling that immediate excitement.'

'Maturity demands persistence and perseverance past that immediate excitement about the thing that you're starting, and I think that's where the maturity really comes. In my own life I've had to persist in my writing to become mature as a writer, I've persisted through lots of feedback and improved and grown.'

When have you felt like giving up something that you originally found quite exciting? On reflection, do you think you made the right choice? Which skills would you really love to get better at that require perseverance? Are there any other areas of growth that you know you need to mature in but you resist? Why?

8. STRAIGHT UP (43:33, 45:14)

Selina says that the best thing to do when you see there's a reason for you to persist in serving in a particular way, but are battling with the temptation to give up, is to be honest with God:

'Just keep talking to God about it. God knows I'm brutally honest at all times. One of the things my parents taught me when I was learning how to pray was "just tell God exactly how you feel. Because he knows anyway." And that's just kept me my whole life.'

'I don't beat around the bush if I'm angry, I tell God: "I'm angry!" And I tell him exactly why. And if I'm frustrated about something, I talk to him about that. And I'll talk God's ear off talking about that thing, and then I'll come to that place - because I've learned to not just rant and then leave my prayer - where I sit there a while to give God a chance to speak back to me and guide me to a place of peace.'

Have you ever told God that you were angry or frustrated? Why or why not? If you've ever had a rant at God, did you then give him a chance to speak back to you?



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Act: ACTS OF PASSION

Selina made the point that disciples of Jesus should be people who reject the status quo and instead pursue change. But there are so many causes we could support or advocate for to see positive change. Here are just twenty:

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|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| Racial equality | Giving blood | Serving the homeless | Anti-terrorism |
| Anti-capitalism | Gender equality | Make poverty history | Climate justice |
| Children in care | Helping the elderly | Political truth-telling | Dog adoption |
| Democratic freedom | Ending war | Ending gang culture | Volunteering |
| Protecting the oceans | Advocating for Downs syndrome | Stopping religious persecution | Cancer research |

So we're going to think about how we as disciples should act in response to the passionate causes of four different people.

ACTING ON YOUR OWN PASSIONS

It's easiest for us to act on our own passions, because they're closest to heart. But, as Selina says, sometimes the initial excitement of serving – even if it's a cause we're passionate about – dies away, and we must choose to persist.

So, thinking about a cause you've been more passionate about in the past, what ONE action could you take right now to reignite your original passion?

If you can't think of anything you're passionate about, ask yourself why that might be, and pray for the Holy Spirit to stir your heart.

ACTING ON THE PASSIONS OF FRIENDS

We may not be as passionate about a particular cause as our friends and family are, but inevitably their passion can rub off on us and influence us to take on their cause in some way – whether that's speaking up for that cause when you used not to or supporting them in their fundraising.

Identify a friend or family member who is passionate about a particular cause and has influenced you to be more active about that cause. Take a moment to pray for them right now. Pray that they can be an effective communicator for that issue. Why not also send them an encouraging message to let them know their passion has influenced you.

ACTING ON THE PASSIONS OF STRANGERS

Take a look at the list above or think of a cause that you've never really been that passionate about – and that you don't know someone who's passionate about it either.



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Most of the time the reason these causes don't stir anything in us is because they don't affect our lives (or anyone in our lives) directly. But that's not a reason to remain ignorant about it.

Pick a cause that you know nothing much about and commit to buying a book about, or watching a documentary online, or finding the website of a charity or organisation that works in that area and finding out all you can about it.

One cause you could consider exploring is the injustice of trafficking and modern slavery. You can raise your awareness of the issue and check out the latest campaigns of the Anti-trafficking and Modern Slavery team in the United Kingdom and Ireland by visiting <https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/modern-slavery/latest-campaigns>

ACTING ON THE PASSIONS OF 'ENEMIES'

Should we act on a cause that we actively disagree with? Some might argue that to do so would lack integrity. But there's nothing to stop Christians from trying to understand why others are so passionate about things that we have a different opinion about.

In fact, it never bothered Jesus to spend time with someone who he absolutely disagreed with. He often ate meals with people like this, having a respectful conversation with them. This is the basis for understanding someone else's point of view.

In his recent book *Think Again*, Adam Grant shares evidence that the best way to change someone's mind (or to be able to realise your own ignorance and be able to change your mind) is to approach people with whom you disagree with humble curiosity – being willing to accept that your view might be wrong, and open to finding common ground with someone you disagree with.

Pick a cause that you disagree with and for which you know someone who holds that view. Respectfully explain that although you hold a different opinion, you would like to understand the reasons for their belief better. Have a conversation where you don't try and persuade them to your view – instead, listen to them, ask questions, and try to find common ground.