



QUESTIONS

for your real life journey

Episode 19: Sandjea-Marie Green

How do we face change?

1. HEAD-ON (9:26)

In the podcast we learn that Sandjea has a job that requires her to be respond at all times of the day and night. She's a foster parent and has supported 15 young people. And she lives in an area where her neighbours have changed multiple times.

She explains: 'Change is wearing on the mind, wearing on the body. If I did move away from where I live for five years it's very unlikely that I would want to move back to this space because there is so much change all the time: a lot of it isn't positive change.'

But in response to the question, she says: 'The world is volatile, uncertain. There's nothing I can do to stop that change. So I face it head-on. I'm not worried about it - it's not something I want or seek - but it's something that's a reality in my life.'

How much constant change do you feel you experience in your everyday life? Do you find change wearing on your mind and body? Do you relate to Sandjea's very practical approach to face change head-on, because it's a reality of life'?

2. PREPARING OTHERS (16:06)

Sandjea shares some great questions she asks herself to help prepare the young people she fosters for future changes in their lives:

- 'What repetitive scripts have been in their family and how I might disrupt the negative ones?
- 'What dreams and aspirations do they have? And if they don't have any, to what or who can I expose them to give them a dream?'
- 'How can I go the extra mile to make sure that person knows my love comes from a deeper place - the reason why I'm able to love you is because the God who first loved me in my imperfections is the same God who first loved you?'

Answer these same three questions thinking about someone - a friend, niece, nephew, brother, sister - who you want to help prepare for future changes in their lives.



QUESTIONS for your real life journey

How do we move through suffering?

3. RESOLVING NOT IGNORING (19:50)

Sandjea says that in her 30s, she recognised and started to unpack 'a few things that really weren't okay from my childhood... If you don't resolve these things it's going to eat at you like a cancer. To not face these things doesn't make them go away; you have to shut bits of yourself down.'

For her, this resolution came from a mixture of many things, including prayer, talking to good friends, therapy, mindfulness, yoga, reading, journaling, walking in nature and listening to music.

While you may not have faced trauma, does the idea that things that are left unresolved will eat away at you resonate with you? What sorts of things help you move on from your worst moments and take you towards resolution?

4. TUCKED IN (21:10)

Sandjea says of fostering young people that 'there are lots of things we take for granted. I learned in my own family without realising it how to wash, how to brush my teeth, that the feeling in my stomach was hunger. They often haven't learned any of that stuff, so they're reacting to things that we have no idea they're reacting to.'

'But at the centre of that is a human being who is crying out to be loved. And I get the privilege to join them on that journey, to tuck them into bed at night: most of them even at 18 or 19 I still tuck into bed. And they go to bed safe that night. And they go to bed loved that night. And for that moment that suffering and difficulty is... not gone, but lowered.'

Sandjea says the advice that's stayed with her for years is this: 'Seek first to understand before you try to be understood. It doesn't matter how many hundreds of young people I've worked with, how diverse my community is, or how many young people I foster – each person's lived experience is their own, and I *won't* understand.'

'Sometimes I might be able to relate more to one than another – but I will never know what it feels like to be them. And I believe that for the young people that I've worked with, they've wanted to be understood, they've wanted to be loved.'

Think about that feeling of your parents tucking you up in bed. How did it make you feel? When and why did that practice stop? Can you think of any scenarios where seeking first to understand someone before being understood might lead to a worse scenario? How do you feel when someone genuinely seems to understand you?



QUESTIONS for your real life journey

How do we receive joy?

5. GOSPEL TRUTH (29:28)

Sandjea mentions several songs in the podcast that she says she's listened to on repeat at various points in her life:

- *Worth* by Anthony Brown & group therAPy
- *Every hour* by Kanye West x Sunday Service Choir
- *At the Master's Feet* by Vasa Gospel
- *I know who I am* by Israel Houghton

Which songs do you listen to on repeat - or return to time and again? What messages do the lyrics of those songs feed into your life? Is there a connection between the music you listen to most and your emotions and emotional wellbeing?

6. THINGS I MAKE TIME FOR (41:44)

In a time when a lot of the positive things that bring Sandjea joy are not allowed due to the pandemic rules, she lists a number of things that she is intentional about making time for: listening to gospel music, walking in Tottenham Marshes, setting up a Friday night Zoom call with friends, going glamping with friends and belly laughing while lying on a blanket watching the clouds go past.

What brings you joy that you are making time for? What one thing could you book in now to boost this investment in your wellbeing?



QUESTIONS for your real life journey

How do we mature in service?

7. KEEP YOUR PRACTICES (45:32)

Sandjea explains that there were some good spiritual practices that her youth leaders schooled her in when she was growing up, like having quiet times and understanding the Bible. She subsequently used these practices as a youth leader, cell coordinator for her church and theological Master's student, and as a result:

'I've put routines and practices in place that are just part of my DNA, that when I don't do them I miss them, I feel bereft of them. Those habits have been great for when life got really, really tough.'

Which spiritual practices were you taught when you were growing up? Which do you still use now? Which do you miss when you don't do them? Which one habit - that you don't currently have, but which could make a huge difference to your spiritual life - could you take five minutes to start building today?

8. KNOW YOUR PURPOSE (50:22)

'Every job that I choose, whether it's in a faith-based organisation or not, is about purpose, and about me living my truth... My purpose comes from the Bible, but it has specifically been the Salvation Army context of serving suffering humanity. I get my reason for being from my faith. Yeah. And I know who I am in terms of my identity. I need to be me.'

Could you describe your purpose? Which parts of the Bible that speak about what we are called to do resonate most with you? Which parts of Salvation Army mission resonate most with you? How might you get as confident about knowing who you are as Sandjea is? Who is the person that God made you to be?



QUESTIONS for your real life journey

Act: CIRCLES OF ACCEPTANCE

Introduction

Sandjea says that 'Seek first to understand before you try to be understood' is a mantra that has served her really well in life.

In her discussion with Matt about young people in care, she mentions three ways that people can be in respond to them:

- **Intolerant:** These people are 'quick to judge their actions, without trying to understand... 'In England we generally are sympathetic to small children in care, but not teenagers – we tend to have mixed reactions to that... We just see a young person who has problematic behaviours, or is aggressive or is involved in crime when we don't really know at we're talking about.'
- **Tolerant:** These people 'put up with' young people, but don't fully receive them. Sandjea says, 'I can remember as a youth worker trying to work out what it meant to accept somebody rather than to tolerate them? Because we're often encouraged to tolerate.'
- **Accepting:** These people try to empathise and understand before being understood: 'For the young people I've worked with, they want to be understood, they want to be loved.' Accepting young people gives them a sense of being well received and of belonging, where they recognise that 'I'm accepted. I'm loved. I feel safe. And when I feel safe, I can start to do the work of change.'

Intolerance of young people is the worst approach. Tolerance is better, but as Matt adds 'When we tolerate someone, we're actually not really helping them flourish, to be who they are.'

What Sandjea strives for the young people she cares for – and what we as followers of Jesus we should also aim for in our relationships with anyone we come across – is acceptance. And the key for her is to 'seek first to understand before you try to be understood.'

Part one: how much you are accepted

Take a piece of paper and on it draw three circles – the first as large as possible, the second within it, about two-thirds its size, and the third within the second, about half its size. Label the circles, from largest to smallest, 'intolerant', 'tolerant' and 'accepting'.

Give the diagram a title: 'People who are _____ of me'. Then look at the 15 categories of people and write each within the circle you feel best reflects how that group responds to you. For example, if you feel like 'My family' accepts you (rather than just is tolerant or even intolerant of), write 'My family' in the smallest circle.



QUESTIONS for your real life journey

My best friends	My family	My church
My peers at school/work	My teachers/bosses	The police
God	My followers on social media	My neighbours in my street
Those who ignore rules	Homeless people	People of other faiths
Refugees	Politicians	Celebrities

Questions:

- Count how many groups of people are in each circle. In which circle have you placed most of the groups?
- In which have you placed the least?
- Do you know *for certain* that this is how these groups actually treat you, or could it be just your interpretation?
- What does the completed diagram tell you about how you view yourself?

Part two: how much you accept others

Now take a second sheet of paper and repeat the same diagram with the same labels, only this time you should give the diagram the title: 'People I am _____ of'. Add the fifteen groups of people to this new diagram.

Questions:

- Count how many groups of people are in each circle on this sheet. In which circle have you placed most/least of the groups?
- If you compare this diagram with the first one you made, what differences do you notice? Are you more or less accepting of others than you believe they are of you?
- What does this second completed diagram tell you about how you view other people?
- Is there a connection between how you view others and how you believe others view you?
- What changes could you make about how you view and treat these different groups that could make a difference to how accepted you feel? How might you seek to understand before being understood?
- Which groups of people do you struggle most with trying to accept? Why do you think this is?