

OMS Podcast Transcripts



Order of the
Mustard Seed



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SEASON 1 EPISODE 1:

PETE GREIG

Published: 19th November 2017

Jill Weber

Well, I'm here today with Pete Greig, one of the founders of the 24/7 movement. We're sitting on a couch, he's got a cup of tea in hand and he's going to spend a few minutes telling us about how God has invited him on this journey with the Order of the Mustard Seed. Pete, tell us your story.

Pete Greig

Well, it's so exciting to see the way that the Order is really growing now and the number of people around the world, partly under your leadership, Jill, that are getting excited about the opportunity of making these commitments as a framework for grace fueled discipleship. For me, really, I suppose it began with 24/7 itself because we were inspired by the Moravians and excited by the fact that there they were in Germany, 18th Century, prayed non-stop for a hundred years, changed the world.

And so we had started our prayer room and it had gone bananas, you know, it was just spreading all over the world. And so we became more and more interested in the Moravians. We're like what else do we need to learn from these dudes? And the more we studied, the more we discovered that the absolute key to understand what happened in the village of Herrnhut in the 18th Century and what happened with Count Ludwig Niklaus von Zinzendorf, the leader of the Moravian movement, was rooted in a thing called the Order of the Mustard Seed. And everyone seemed to know about their prayer meeting, their missions movement.

But almost no one knew about this Order that Zinzendorf had founded when he was at university. And as I looked into that, I discovered it was so beautifully simple. I'm just really simple, I like simple stuff. And they just made a promise to be true to Christ, to be kind to people. I love that it's not, you know, loving, it's kind to people. Because I have people often who said in love and then they say the most horrible thing to me, whereas I'm like, do me a favour, just be kind to me, you know, true to Christ, kind to people and gospel to the nations and we may go, yeah, yeah, they're into missions.

But back then people didn't really do missions, they were in Christendom, they thought everyone was saved. So that was why when a bunch of refugees turned up on Zinzendorf's land and said "can we build a village?" He said, "okay," because he had promised to be kind to people. It wasn't like just, he was a nice guy, he'd made a promise and then when they all, you know, started falling out and he called them together and they repented. And the spirit of God fell on 13 August 1727 upon them. He called them to prayer because he knew he made a promise to be true to Christ.

And then five years later, till the day they launched their missions movement, because he knew there was still a third unfulfilled promise which was gospel to the nations. So you want to understand the impetus behind the Moravian movement. It was the Order of the Mustard Seed. So kind of, you can

imagine we're suddenly in the middle of this prayer movement that's spreading all over the world. We're in half the nations on earth now. We're fascinated by these weird 18th Century Germans who've hijacked our lives. We find out the key is this crazy Order of the Mustard Seed thing and we started to get really excited about the simplicity of their promise to be true to Christ kind to people, gospel to the nations.

We got really excited as well about the practicality of that because I just find being a Christian sometimes seems so complicated, and here it is, super simple and we worked out back in 2005, how do you do that stuff practically?

And that's when we came up with the six practices: True to Christ. You do that through prayer and worship and creativity kind to people. How do you do that? Well, that's justice and mercy and it's hospitality. Gospel to nations, how do you do that? Well, that's through, you know, evangelism and mission learning. And so suddenly it's simple and it's practical and it's powerful, clearly. Look at what happened with the Moravians.

And so in 2005 we gathered in Holy Trinity Church, Clapham in London, which is where the Clapham Sect, William Wilberforce, overthrew slavery in the British Empire. That's where they used to worship and we gathered there and we were terrified, but we made our vows terrified because promising is scary in our culture. But actually what we found is it's been the most beautiful, grace-filled, wonderful journey. And then ten years later, 2015, after a little bunch of us had been living by this Rule of Life for ten years, for a decade, we started to think this is too good to keep to ourselves. We need to include other people in on this.

Jill Weber

Brought the invitation to people.

Pete Greig

Yeah. People jumped in and said, can we be part of this? We extended, I suppose, the invitation, as you say, and into that the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, who leads the Anglican Communion, I think it's the third largest denomination on earth. He had heard about us and he said, do you want the Anglican church to acknowledge the Order of the Mustard Seed as a proper religious order alongside, you know, the Franciscans, the Benedictines and all of that.

And so that began a journey. It wasn't, we weren't becoming Anglican. Some of us are, but many of us aren't. But the Anglican church is just one of the church bodies that's giving us the Facebook "like," and just saying, "you guys are legit, you know what you're doing most of the time and we trust you." And so it's been a wild ride. And Jill, you becoming the first Global Convener of the Order of the Mustard Seed in October this year is such a key moment of us throwing the invitation wide and saying, "Come on. And this is good news. This helps ordinary people live by a way of life that can change the world." So that's the excitement of this thing for me.

Jill Weber

That's wonderful. So you're using the language of *us* and *we* a lot. Can you just take a couple of minutes and share? What has it meant for you personally, in your own life, to live according to vows and to shape your life around these six practices? What's that been like for you? How has that changed and shaped you as an individual?

Pete Greig

I mean, I regularly audit my life around the six practices, actually, and I find it's a bit like juggling. I'm terrible at juggling. I can just do three balls, but for not very long, I will drop one eventually. And so I'm always dropping a ball. But there's just grace in this. It's like you're never going to be perfect at all six, but it's a helpful mechanism. Sometimes I feel like I'm nailing hospitality, but maybe I'm really failing in prayer or something. And so this is just like a GPS system, it helps me navigate. So at least there are at least three moments in the year that I pause and audit. One is on the annual renewal of my own vows. February 1 is on December 31, just reviewing the year, thinking about the year ahead. And the third is always in October, around the 24/7 Annual Gathering. So I audit my life around that.

And then I wear a ring on my finger that reminds me. It has the Greek *no one lives for themselves*. That's a constant reminder. This isn't about me, about others. And then, if I'm really honest with you, Jill, the one out of the three vows, I fail at the most well, I'll tell you mine if you tell me yours. For me, it's definitely kindness. Just even in the way I drive a car, I'm sometimes really unkind. The way I treat my dog sometimes is really unkind. The way I speak is sometimes unkind. So that's the one I probably have to apologise most for. But I don't feel like God's beating me up. He's just, this is the prodigal Father. He loves to embrace us and forgive us, and this is just a mechanism that helps me find my way home to him.

Jill Weber

That's beautiful. Talk to me just a little bit about the power of making promises and making promises not to one another because we're promising to God, but making promises with one another.

Pete Greig

I will. You've dodged yours – you're meant to tell me which one.

Jill Weber

Kindness. I think if you were to ask my husband, he would be a witness that. To be kind to others. I think that when we're talking about kindness, it's the love. What does love look like today? Love is so beautifully abstract, but what does it actually look like in the here and now? And that's always the challenge.

Pete Greig

That's exactly right. No, the power of promising is, you know, I noticed, particularly with the millennial emerging generation, that people are pretty scared of making any long-term

commitments. And the danger is that we miss our lives one year and one relationship at a time. Before you know it, 510 years have passed, and there's something about hunkering into commitments that means we have to embrace the fear of missing out, because by committing to something, you exclude other things. And we understand this with, say, marriage, the power of promising. It's why so many people are terrified on their wedding night, because it's not that they don't want to, sorry, the night before they get married. Some people are terrified on their wedding nights as well. But it's that thing of, oh, my goodness, in sickness and in health, I'm committing myself to someone.

But we know that it is also the gateway to often the most beautiful relationship. And so we understand that it's only through promising, through covenant, that we come into relationship with Jesus Christ. One of the problems I think we got is when people preach the gospel, they just say, come to Jesus. Do Jesus a favour, become a Christian, he's terribly nice, and your life will be better. And actually, I just don't read that in the Gospels.

I read Jesus saying, "hey, you got to pick up your cross and follow me. The only way to step into the holy holiest is through my blood. You know, so there's a cost. It's through cost and it's through covenant." And I think one of the reasons that there's such power in the OMS vow is that many of us, sadly, when we became Christians, didn't understand that it was a covenant relationship. We thought it was a kind of religious lifestyle choice. And this is understanding that when we take communion, we're celebrating a covenant that Jesus bled through on the Cross. You know, it's a covenant relationship. So the power of promising gives shape and sustainability to life itself. And I've not got many, but I've got just a few covenants that I've made in my life. And one is to my wife and one is clearly to the Lord in the context of the communion of the Mustard Seed Order.

Jill Weber

So, Pete, is there anything that you'd like to say maybe to new candidates, people who are stepping into this year long period of preparation to look towards taking vows next fall? Is there any encouragement that you'd like to bring to them?

Pete Greig

Yeah, I think that firstly, you want to do this because the spirit of holiness is working in you, drawing you to greater intimacy with the Father. And so don't be scared. This is something that is not like a test you've got to pass. This is a beautiful journey that God has invited you to. Come on. And my own experience, Jill, over what has now been a twelve year journey, is that these vows, this way of life, works and it goes deeper and becomes more meaningful as the years go by.

And finally, I would just say, it's okay to fail. God is full of amazing grace. And the vows of the Order of the Mustard Seed are nothing like an iron man outfit that will make you spiritually invincible. This is a little way for the weak. Many of your friends don't need to become members of the Order of the Mustard Seed because they're already in a great place with God, good on them. But I'm not like that. I needed a little help. I needed a bit of a GPS, a bit of framework, some promising. And it helps me because I'm weak and I fail a lot to receive a little more of God's grace in my life.

Jill Weber

That's wonderful. I think it helps too, being in a community of people who are talking about the power of promises, but then we've also got this. There's a bunch of us who promise and we're all facing the same direction together and cheering one another on and praying for one another. Do you think you could just finish off our time together by praying for just members of the Order and those who are considering entering into the Order?

Pete Greig

Yeah, sure. We can't do this on our own, can we? Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, thank you so much for your invitation into covenant relationship. We pray, Lord, that you would help us to stir one another up towards love and good deeds. We pray, Lord, that you would continue to transform us from one degree of glory to the next. And I pray for every person listening to this now that you would reveal more of your love and more of your purpose for their lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

SEASON 1 EPISODE 10: PHIL ANDERSON AND ANDY GRIFFITHS

Published: 18th August 2018

Jill Weber

Well, I'm here today in. Where am I? Stanford Le Hope, Sussex or Thurrock?

Phil Anderson

Right, yep, Stanford Le Hope in Thurrock in Essex, in the east of England.

Jill Weber

East of England. And I'm here with Andy Griffiths. Andy has been a vicar for twelve years with the Church of England and now he trains ministers for the C of E as well here in England. And I would say just a wonderful explorer of Zinzendorf's theatre, been to Herrhut and dug around and has been trying to live into that legacy for quite a number of years. Phil is our legendary Phil. He is the author of *Lord of the Ring* and has been a member of the Order right from the beginning, well, not since 1716.

Phil Anderson

The latest interview, he's getting on a bit by now.

Jill Weber

But in the last 13 years has been living into this way of Jesus with a bunch of us in the 24/7 movement. And this is a week where we remember just a really exciting date in the life of Zinzendorf and the Moravians. So, August 13, 1727. So who's going to take us into the story? Phil?

Phil Anderson

So I'll make a start. I mean, this event was in many ways the birth of the hundred years of prayer. It was the birth of the Moravian renewal, which is this incredible story in Church history. It was also the point where Zinzendorf's Mustard Seed vow that he'd taken as, as a young man really started to bear the fruit and to be manifest in terms of outward expression, to really get what it's all about, you have to go backwards a little bit. Sure. When I'm talking to people about dates, it's always worth remembering. Zinzendorf was born in the year 1700, so whatever year people chuck at you, that's his age. So 1727. He was 27. So go back to 1716/1718. Zinzendorf and a group of school friends, they come up with this idea of a covenant order where they're going to commit themselves to what was basically a 16 year old version of being true to Christ, kind people and taking to the gospel to the nations, which were all pretty radical ideas in their day.

They make this solemn commitment amongst themselves that they're going to try and do this in whatever areas of life they find themselves involved with. And then Zinzendorf, he goes off for his university education, he goes off on what was effectively, it's called the "von de L" [*Speaker voice indistinct here*]. It was basically the 17th, 18th Century version of a gap year. You did the grand tour around Europe and saw the sites, got yourself a bit cultured, all that sort of thing. And at the end of that, he thinks, and then he gets a job as a junior lawyer in the court of the king of Saxony.

But he's trying to think, okay, how am I going to live out this commitment that I've made to be true to Christ, to be kind to people, to take the gospel to the nations? And because he's from the highest echelons of a very structured society, you have nobility and you have tradespeople and you have professionals and you have peasants and, you know, everything.

Jill Weber

He's the posh of the posh upper class.

Phil Anderson

He is very much the upper class end of things because of that. There's money available in the family. There's almost this expectation that you'll have your life in the court and your life on your country estate. But rather than just indulging in that, as most of his generation would have done, he thinks, okay, I'm expected to be the lord of the manor. The kind of manor that I'm going to have will not be a place that's built for architectural elegance or my own importance or my social status. I'm going to try and build some kind of model Christian community here.

So he starts in his estate at Berthelsdorf in Saxony in Germany, he starts the steps. So he brings in a pastor who shares his values, shares his ideas, tries to start building up the church that's on the estate, and starts thinking of, how could I create a community that looks like what I think a community of Christians in my day and age ought to look like. It all gets slightly disrupted by a group of refugees from Moravia in the modern day Czech Republic, who arrived, having been persecuted, and say, can we settle? And we actually read that Zinzendorf specifically thinks, I really wasn't sure who they were. I wasn't sure what their credentials were. I didn't know if they were going to upset all of my plans, but I felt compelled, as a knight of the Order of the Mustard Seed. That's his own words. I had to receive them. If being kind to people means anything, it means being kind to these people who have nothing.

So he allows them, settled by the main road just up the hill. There's this almost prophecy release that the hill is going to be a place where the Lord's watch, which in German is the [*speaker voice indistinct here*], is going to be kept both day and night. And somebody randomly comes up, prophesies this and moves on almost. But the community gets the name Herrnhut as a result. And to be honest. So this is Zinzendorf now his early mid twenties, he's the lord of the manor, a bit immature and to be honest, things aren't going desperately well.

Jill Weber

So what's not going well? What's the problem?

Phil Anderson

So word soon gets around that on this German nobleman's estate, there's a place of refuge for persecuted Protestants and he starts attracting this whole thing of, you know, genuinely persecuted refugees, misfits, cranks, people who've been chucked out of other settings for pretty good reasons, to be honest.

Jill Weber

That sounds like David and the guys in the cave of Abdullah, isn't it?

Phil Anderson

It pretty much does, yeah. And actually you sense some of that gift of leadership in uniting this group of quite broken people, refugees, misfits in Zinzendorf. But anyway, initially they get together, they drag themselves up out of grinding poverty. It moves from being a refugee camp to being a village and they start falling out with each other. They all come from different backgrounds, slightly different beliefs. These Moravians actually are quite flexible in terms of doctrine. We can only push them so far and they all start falling out with each other. There's a guy comes into the middle of that who is a very charismatic but really into division and factions, has them all divided, they're all fighting and arguing with each other.

Zinzendorf's pastor won't have anything to do with them. He's telling his villagers to stay away from the fanatics. Up on the hill, it all seems to be going wrong, it's a mess, it's a mess. And it is a million miles away from the kind of Christian community that he had this vision as a 23 year old that he wanted to build. But actually he does something really brave. So rather than getting rid of them, which it would have been in his right to do, he moves his wife and his young family into the guest house right in the middle of the village.

Jill Weber

So he moves into the mess.

Phil Anderson

He moves right into the middle of the mess. Now, the idea of the nobleman moving out of the manor house and into the middle of the mess is almost unheard of. But he starts to bring some leadership, starts to bring some modelling to this and out of that comes a remarkable season where things start to change. Andy.

Andy Griffiths

So on the 13 August 1727, this ragtag group of refugees who can't get on with each other, who don't know what they're doing get together for a communion service.

Jill Weber

So they just go on their own, or Zinzendorf dragged them into the space.

Andy Griffiths

Well, I guess he's been exerting a bit of pressure on them. We're not entirely sure. But one way or another they're together and they're worshipping God. And they're told they would be in a service of that time to prepare their hearts to meet with Jesus. And that's when it strikes them. They cannot go on living like this in division. And so there were two things that seemed to happen at that point. One is that the presence of Jesus comes in the community in a way that is so tangible that somebody talking about it later said Jesus felt so close that it felt impossible. He could have been anywhere else on the planet except here with us. That's how close Jesus felt to them. They were all meeting for their service of communion.

But there were a couple of people in the community, out in the fields nearby. They didn't know that the communion service was happening, so they just carried on with doing whatever farmers do. I'm a townie, I don't know. But the presence of Jesus came so strongly on Herrnhut that they became aware of Jesus close to them out there on the field at the same time. So that's the presence of Jesus.

And then the second thing that happened was an extraordinary joy. Zinzendorf, writing about it, said that Jesus turned their misery into the oil of gladness and assured them that he would be their pastor, their. Excuse me, he would be their patron and their priest. And he goes on to say, and into the happiness which they felt at that moment. They have since drawn many thousands of others. He had that sense, that joy that comes from knowing that Jesus is their patron and priest was the thing that made all the difference to their lives. And then of course, what came out of that was the Hundred Years of Prayer that Phil's mentioned and the sending of that group of people now as a unified missionary force all over the world.

Jill Weber

So there was a service. They're laying their hearts towards Jesus, inviting Jesus to come. And he manifests his presence in a way in their midst that changes everything.

Andy Griffiths

They were confessing their division. And that was the thing. It was at that moment that Jesus chose to come and be present. And of course, if you and I don't get on, we could find all sorts of ways to find a compromised solution between us. But much better if we both admit that we're wrong and let Jesus come and then somehow all of our divisions can be seen in perspective and we discover that what we're both interested in is Jesus.

Jill Weber

Anyway, he came right to the centre. Do you have anything you want to add to that, Phil?

Phil Anderson

Yeah. It's amazing how, when our hearts are in the right place, we do all we can to try and get ourselves to where we know we ought to be in Christ. But actually it's only the coming of the Holy Spirit that completes that work of transformation. So Zinzendorf had done his best in that time. In the run up to this, he put in place a thing called the manorial injunctions and prohibitions, I think

it was, which is basically a set of civic rules that basically put a swift stop to the worst of the bad behaviour that was going on. Beyond that, they had a thing called the brotherly agreement and compact, which was a much more spiritual set of this is what a Christian community should look like. Can we at least commit together to try and aspire towards that? And again, people signed up towards that and they actually spent quite a lot of time together studying John's first letter. John very much the apostle of love.

The deliberate point was, how do you love one another? So they'd come to this point of, I suppose there was a degree of repentance there, there was a desire to change, but they still, in their hearts, knew themselves to be divided. There was a lot of bitterness, there was a lot of old hurts and that kind of thing. And 13 August 1727 was about that they'd shown their hunger for reconciliation, they'd shown a willingness to change, but actually they knew it had to be more than a change of attitudes or even behaviour, it had to be a change of heart. And what they could not achieve, there was this sense of the presence of Christ coming, the Holy Spirit filling that place, the parish church in Berthelsdorf. And God working the change deep within their hearts an incredibly deep and personal experience which they'd reached out towards. But only the presence of God could actually affect and do that in their lives.

Jill Weber

So tell us the ripples. So if that was the stone hitting the water, we see the hundred years of night and day prayer, as you said, we see this mission movement of lay missionaries going forth.

Andy Griffiths

These weren't the first missionaries in the modern world who'd ever been sent out, but the difference was now it was entire communities that were being sent, not just specially trained clergy and perhaps their wives. Now, it was at one time 50 people being sent to bring about new Christian communities across the country.

Jill Weber

So regular ordinary people.

Andy Griffiths

Ordinary people, absolutely ordinary people who'd had this experience of Jesus having come in a way only he could choose to do.

Jill Weber

And forgive me if I'm wrong, but in terms of the actual Moravian denomination of the Moravian church, do they not set this day as a start date for them? Do I remember that? Yeah.

Andy Griffiths

I mean, it's a renewal, of course, because you could go back and see the Moravian churches coming from something several hundred years before that. But no, this is a renewal and a new start. And now there are three quarters of a million, we're not quite sure, but let's say about three quarters of a million Moravians across the world and I suspect all of them will on August 13 have had this

thought that, yeah, today happened a thing that set into motion a chain of events that led to me being where I am now.

Jill Weber

So we can learn from that, I guess. I mean, there's a few things that we can pull threads that we can pull from that story, I think, with Zinzendorf moving into the mess, right? And so when we see the mess, when we see the conflict, when we see the division, probably none of you in any of your communities have never experienced or seen conflict and division and mess, but just in case we ever should, there's that temptation, of course, to pull away from conflict, to pull away from the mess that inevitably comes. Where two or more are gathered, there's mess, right?

This is the story of the Christian community over the history of the faith. But what we see in this story, where two or more are gathered in humility, in repentance, when we move towards the mess and we invite him to come, then he comes and does what only he can do. So this we learn from that story and I think the other thing that we learned from the story, it's coming together, moving towards the mess, but with humility and dependence and in the posture of repentance and just saying, "we actually can't figure this out ourselves, we need you to come and do something that we can't do." What else do we learn from this chapter?

Andy Griffiths

And there's something special about the action of God with refugees. So on the 13 August, there are those who act not only in prayer and remembering, but in doing something about the refugee crisis that our world is seeing at the moment. So, 13 August 2018 for a group of us in Chelmsford, what we did was we did up a house that we were given the keys on the 13 August by the estate agent and we found a local church that would find its members to give us some furniture. And we scrubbed a few walls and cleaned a few corners of rooms and bought some food to fill the fridge and got a freezer operating and tried to do a little bit to the garden and put a flowers everywhere. And then the following morning, the 14th, one of us drove to the airport to pick up a family from Afghanistan. They'd been travelling for 48 hours, including some children who hadn't slept in a bed for a number of days. And they were driven to that house, the door was opened and they were told, you are safe now, this is, if you want it, your forever home. Here in the UK there's a whole community of people who will support you, help you learn English, help you do the paperwork, find school places for your children. But we care about you and this door is open for you. And there's lots of ways to commemorate the 13 August, but that seems to me a pretty good one.

Jill Weber

Wonderful. So I'm wondering if just in our last two or three minutes here, the two of you can pray for those who be listening to this podcast. So that will be the members of the Order, people who are interested in the Order of the Mustard Seed, candidates who are in preparation for taking their vows.

So what out of this celebration of this historical moment that's changed the course of history and Church history, certainly, and the lives of so many, how can we pray out of this story into the lives

of our listeners? So I'll leave it to you to pray.

Andy Griffiths

Come holy God, fill the hearts of your people, kindle in us the fire of your love, send forth your Spirit and we will be recreated and you will restore the face of the earth.

Phil Anderson

Holy God, you have never given up on your plan for salvation. You are the one who hung on that Cross for us, and you're the one who has been reaching out to every generation, to every people, to every nation since then. Thank you that we stand in an incredible line of salvation history. And we look back 300 years at a group of people whose desire to be true to you afresh in their generation, to be kind to people and love their neighbour and love their enemies afresh in their generation, to take the gospel to nations who had simply never heard in their generation.

And we see in that a continuity of your great commandment and your great commission to your first disciples to go. And we sense ourselves standing in that continuity. Thank you Lord, that you have given us ways to reach out to you, ways to lay our lives before you ways to call on you, saying, "Lord Jesus, please take me as your disciple, and please disciple me in what it means to follow you more nearly and to hear your voice and to see your face." But, Lord Jesus, we know that ways of discipleship are not enough. We need your power and your very presence to come and fall in our lives and in our communities and in our nations.

So, just as they came to that date on the 13 August 1727, in repentance, in having reached out for a new start, in an eager expectation of what they dared to believe you might possibly do, we come with that same sense of expectation, saying, "Come, Lord Jesus, fill our lives afresh, fill our communities afresh, fill our nations afresh, do more than we could ask or imagine. Come and take our feeble willingness and transform it by your presence in order that we might be filled afresh with a burning desire and with the strength to follow you every day of our life and make you known to men and women in every part of this earth to reveal Christ in our time and in our generation." Amen.

SEASON 2 EPISODE 1:

PETE GREIG

Published: 14th November 2018

Jill Weber

I'm here today with Pete Greig, who is the accidental founder of 24/7, member of the Order of the Mustard Seed, and a proud dog Daddy to Crumble. Crumble's here with us as well.

Pete Greig

Yeah, you might hear the old snuffle or squeak.

Jill Weber

And we're going to have a conversation today about the question of vows. People who are looking into the Order of the Mustard Seed and just inquiring often ask the question, why take a vow? And so we just thought we would have a chat about that. So, Pete, why a vow?

Pete Greig

The first thing to say is, it's a really good question. Because the Bible says we shouldn't enter into covenants or vows lightly or unthinkingly. And of course, we live in a culture where fewer and fewer people do make covenant commitments. And sadly, many people break their covenants when they do. Marriages increasingly are falling apart. Doctors, fewer and fewer of them take the Hippocratic oath. So wherever we look in society, I think, particularly amongst millennials, people are scared of commitments. And a vow is the big, ugly, gnarly commitment. It's a promise. So I think it's a good question to ask and an understandable one. Shall I say why?

Jill Weber

Sure, give us the lowdown.

Pete Greig

Well, first of all, I think covenants are biblical, and we want to be rooted in a biblical paradigm. (These are dogs barking. Should I get them in or should we just keep talking? Well, let's keep talking. It's like Doctor Doolittle right now.) Covenants are biblical, and of course, you'll know that right the way through the story of God, you find it is shaped by covenants. One of the hermeneutical tools we can use for interpreting the Bible is covenant. The promises of God, the promise to Abraham, the promise to Noah with the rainbow, the promise to Moses, the promise to David, and ultimately Jesus himself on the Cross opens covenant relationship for us. So this is a really biblical thing. And then beyond Jesus, you see that Paul shaves his head. The apostle Paul shaves his head in Cenchrea in Acts 21 as an oath, a covenant with God. So this is a really normal and biblical thing to do.

Jill Weber

Well, also the Nazarite vows as well. And we see that the Nazarite is not drinking and not cutting.

Pete Greig

And there was one other. What was the other?

Jill Weber

Not cutting their hair, not drinking, and no, I don't remember.

Pete Greig

They weren't allowed to touch dead bodies.

Jill Weber

Okay.

Pete Greig

But that's not one that most of us struggle with, so we don't bother remembering that one. Yes, it's right the way through the Bible. And in fact, there wouldn't be Christian faith without covenant. And I love to think, and I think it's pretty helpful as we think about vow taking in the OMS context, that the Hebrew term for a covenant is about "cutting a covenant" because they did this very gory thing back in the days of the Old Testament. They would take an animal, a dead animal, a sheep or a bull or whatever, and they would cut it end to end in half and lay the two halves out. And then when they were striking a covenant with someone, they would walk between the two sides of the halved animal through the blood, and then they would cook it up and they would give one half to God as a burnt offering and eat the other half and have a feast.

So fast forward that image and think about Jesus breaking the bread in half and saying, "this is my body broken for you." The disciples understood this was covenant cutting language. And then he makes it explicit, and he says, this cup is the new covenant of my blood. So he was saying, "I am going to reenact this". And then Jesus himself on the Cross is torn apart, and we walk through his body, through his blood, into covenant relationship, by which we worship God in burnt offering, and we feast together with God at his table. So it's a beautiful biblical concept. And I'm not talking specifically about the OMS vow, but we've got to understand, bottom line, to be a Christian is to be caught up in a covenant making, covenant keeping enterprise.

Jill Weber

So it's biblical to begin with.

Pete Greig

Secondly, yes, it's also countercultural. I mean, this stuff is terrifying. As I said at the start, for many of us millennials, the cliché is that they're afraid of missing out, but also millennials are afraid of commitment. So if you put those two together, it's a funny old mix. And I think there's something prophetic, therefore, about saying I believe a thing enough to make a promise to it. And I think the world is increasingly so chaotic that a covenant commitment puts boundedness

on the chaos.

You said a thing, Jill, when we were in Vienna last month, about how sometimes God calls us to take a vow, not just for ourselves, but actually for other people. And I suppose I can talk in a minute about how meaningful my own vow has been in my own spiritual formation, but maybe even out of my vows. And I was so scared when I first made those promises. I was terrified. I thought, what am I doing?

Back in 2005 in Holy Trinity Church, Clapham, 100 of us took the vow for the first time. But I think we were doing something that has sent out ripples and has been maybe valuable to other people and not just to ourselves. We definitely didn't understand that at the time.

Jill Weber

So it's counter-cultural and it's biblical. How is it transformational?

Pete Greig

You know, we have to build our lives on the rock, on things that are solid and absolute. And so we have to work out what are those actuals, those solid things. Otherwise we're just the victims of caffeine and the weather and hormones. Right? And vaguely trying to be Christians, but actually to make promises, gives, if you like, bed and banks to the stream. It helps us work out how to live day to day. And so I certainly audit my life around being true to Christ, kind to people, gospel to the nations. And the one I fail at most is definitely the second one. How about you?

Jill Weber

Yeah, always. Kindness is the most difficult, isn't it? Yeah.

Pete Greig

And sometimes my wife, Sammy, she actually just became a member of the Order a year or so ago. But before that, she would sometimes, if we were having a row or whatever, she'd say, that wasn't very kind. And she knew that word kind was like, loaded for me, and I kind of winced. But now she can't do it because I could say it back to her, which I'm too godly to do, of course, but those three things affect the way I live, the way I pray.

And then, you know, we've got those six outworkings of the vows. And I think that's where it gets really practical for me, because when I start talking about being true to Christ is about my prayer and worship life and it's about creativity. I love that I don't have to justify creativity. Actually, this morning I spent half an hour doing something that was basically creative and there was an inner Pharisee going, "you're wasting your time." But this is part of my vow, really.

Jill Weber

So you've been permissioned?

Pete Greig

Yes, that's right. It's giving me space, I think. So hospitality, mercy and so on. And I think in my leadership responsibilities, and I think this would apply to someone leading in a business

environment, not just the church. I am able to audit and even budget around these values. If someone wants to spend money on hospitality, I'm predisposed. I don't need that to be justified to me. I know that is a core value for me. Or if there's one of the six practices that are consistently missing from our church life here at Emmaus, then that's a red flag to me. I don't mind them being missing for the odd year. You can't do everything full on all the time, but you do want to keep coming back and saying, how are we doing on those six practices? So it's been personally very helpful and helpful for me as a leader. And I, you know, I've entered into four covenants in my life. One was when I got married. In my covenant to Sammy and that has definitely helped me stay married.

Jill Weber

It holds us, doesn't it, when we feel like we're falling to bits or, you know, it's.

Pete Greig

Yeah, yeah, there are times where it's not a very biblical phrase, but it's very biblical concept that real faithfulness is just pure bloody mindedness sometimes. You know, Eugene Peterson took that Nietzsche line as the title of one of his books – *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. You better know, you better have some compass points. If you're going to keep going in the same direction, you better know you're walking in the right direction. I think Covenant helps us to do that then. Secondly, I entered into a covenant, obviously when I became a Christian. The trouble is no one told me it was a covenant. And that's one of the reasons I find my OMS vow helpful because actually I'm, if you like, activating or acknowledging the covenant that I've come into when I got saved. But we tend not to talk in these terms and I think some of that's understandable. Our culture doesn't really understand covenants, not in that carcass cutting way anymore.

And then the third covenant that I entered into was I made a thing that was called my Joseph Covenant and it was in a particular place that I'm actually going to be walking to in a couple of weeks time. It's going to be a full day's walk from here. But there's a bench on a hill where when I was 18, I made a promise to God and I said that he could do anything he wanted to help me get straight in my life, but I wanted to be like him. I wanted to resemble him. And that was deeply painful because he took me seriously and definitely took me in some challenging places. And so I'm going to journey back to that bench on a little pilgrimage in a couple of weeks time for my 50th birthday alone, even if it's raining, as it does sometimes in November in England. And then the final covenant, of course, is my OMS promise and in a way that sums all the other covenants up, actually.

Jill Weber

So what's it been like for you, not only to have made covenants, but to make covenants within communities. So you're not the only one who's taken the OMS vows. You're amongst probably now a couple of hundred men and women globally who've stepped into that shared commitment. What does that, what does that mean for you? How does that strengthen you on your journey?

Pete Greig

I think it's essential, isn't it? You remember that lovely old youth group analogy of, you know, coals in a fire go red hot. You take the coal out and it stops being red hot. And we need each other. I think a lot, Jill, about the juxtaposition of that verse in Ephesians that says, "speak the truth in love, stir one another up" and then 1 Peter, I think it's Chapter 4, that says "love covers over a multitude of sins." And as I try and outwork my vow in community, I'll often be thinking, is this a *love covers* or a *love confronts* moment? Is this a time to go to someone else and challenge them? Or is this a time to be kind and just say, I love them, I don't mind, they're not perfect. And I think people do that for me as well. And I have a little, tiny little cohort that after all these years, since 2005, I still meet with on the anniversary. And we always apologise where we failed and renew our covenant each year. And that's deeply meaningful.

Jill Weber

I wonder sometimes, too, when I think of the larger commitment or the larger community around the Order of the Mustard Seed, when you think about communion of saints and what does it mean for us actually coming into agreement with Zinzendorf, back in, I guess in 1716, when he started the Order and gathered his friends around him and stepped into this place of these shared commitments and these shared practices, in a sense. What we saw through that, how God used that to create this beautiful, prayerful, missional community of Herrnhut and to take the gospel beyond, and it feels for me a little bit like we get to access the grace that was poured out in that moment. There's something for us there, beyond even our own experience, beyond even our own generation. It's almost like an ancient well that we get to drink from as we come into agreement and pray, in agreement with Zinzendorf and join in agreement with them the commitments that he set for his life.

Pete Greig

That's beautiful.

Jill Weber

Yeah.

Pete Greig

I think maybe one of the reasons there's such spiritual warfare around making covenants is that they're so powerful. And frankly, the enemy doesn't want us to make promises. But I think if we get the architecture of our own hearts right in covenant making, that then spans out into sometimes literal architecture, as it did for Zinzendorf, with villages, literal communities, not just in Germany but in America, that he designed, really an extension in physical form of this vow.

And then obviously there was a communal architecture in terms of the way their whole community life operated. And then there's an architecture in time as well, that here we are, all these hundreds of years later, still in the halo effect of the promises that those students at Wittenberg made. And so we take our place, as you say, in the communion of saints, not just stretching out around the world, but stretching right back, actually, before Zinzendorf, to Christ holding up the cup and

saying, this is the new covenant in my blood. And we activate the power of that. So it's no wonder there's a battle around the architecture of the heart when the potential of that is to create vast architecture into many lives that is very physical, very tangible, and can actually outlast our own life into the next.

Jill Weber

Into the next, into the next generation. World without end. Amen.

Pete Greig

Amen.

Jill Weber

So, Pete, can you pray for us?

Pete Greig

You're so liturgical. It's like a conversation with you ends up in liturgy. Yes, I'd love to pray.

Lord Jesus, this stuff we understand it's biblical. We understand that it's powerful, but it's also scary, especially in the culture that we live in. Lord, if we're honest, we're afraid of failing you. We're afraid of breaking our promises. We're afraid of getting controlled. Please help us to understand that the safest place we can possibly be is in the heart of your covenant commitment to us and help us to respond to your absolute promise with our own. Amen. And would you bless these dogs barking all around us? Amen.

SEASON 2 EPISODE 11: CATHERINE ASKEW

Published: 17th October 2019

Jill Weber

Well, hi there, everybody. I'm sitting here with my friend Catherine Askew, and we are at a conference centre north of London, and we've been hanging out with leaders of traditional and new monastic communities for the last three days. We've been praying and playing and eating and having all kinds of fun together, just exploring our differences or commonalities and the threads of the gospel that run through all of our shared lives together.

It's been really beautiful. And so I thought, Catherine's here, and I just happen to have brought my little recorder. So we're going to have a little chat today about Catherine and about her community and about a dispersed religious order. How on earth do we live life together apart? And we're gonna learn from her life and her community experience. So, Catherine, tell us a little bit about yourself.

Catherine Askew

Well, thanks for grabbing me, Jill, and it has been a wonderful few days together with all these other good folks.

Jill Weber

Do you know, I have to interrupt, though. Our friendship went to a whole new level yesterday. We went charity shopping together. It was like, all right, this has cemented the friendship anyway. So she likes charity shopping and other things.

Catherine Askew

Yes, and other things. I grew up in east Tennessee, in the States, and in 2005 had a life changing experience that meant that I started on a year of pilgrimage and explored different types of communities, because I felt some kind of calling. And that led me to England and to the Northumbria Community, of which I'm a part, and also to my husband, Pete, who I met whilst visiting the mother house of the Northumbria Community. So I moved over in 2006, and I've been part of this community ever since.

Jill Weber

Ever since. You have a new role in this community as of the last two months. So tell us about that.

Catherine Askew

Well, we've just had a period of interim leadership and a time of discernment. And August 1, three of us started as the new overseer leaders, guardians of the Northumbria Community. And it says myself and Sarah Piller and Sarah Hay are in new leadership seats. And it's a real joy and privilege

and, of course, slightly daunting as well.

Jill Weber

I guess there's nothing the Lord can't handle.

Catherine Askew

Exactly.

Jill Weber

So, Northumbria Community how old, how long has it been around?

Catherine Askew

Well, we had official beginnings of merging of two different groups in 1990, but its roots are late seventies. And then throughout the eighties, the community was forming, even though it wasn't officially what we know now as the Northumbria Community. But I'd say 1990 is an official beginning.

Jill Weber

Okay, so those of you who might not even be familiar with the Northumbria Community, most of us are familiar with these beautiful Celtic Daily Prayer books that are tucked away in prayer rooms all over the world. That's been part of your gift to the body of Christ. But the Northumbria Community isn't. You have a mother house, but you're a dispersed community. So talk about that a little bit. What does that look like for you?

Catherine Askew

Yes, so we've had a mother house since 1992 and we offer hospitality from that place, and there's a monastic rhythm and always some residential community holding the space there. So I've lived at the mother house for most of my time, since 2006. Not all of it, but most of it. But maybe there's six to ten people living at the mother house, and there's 400 companions and 100 novices. So the vast majority of our folks are seeking God in this way, in their ordinary lives, wherever they find themselves. So most will make a visit to the mother house and some quite regularly. But it is really about living it out in wherever you might find yourself.

Jill Weber

And you're all over the world, aren't you?

Catherine Askew

We are like you. Not in every place.

Jill Weber

Not Antarctica yet.

Catherine Askew

Not Antarctica. And not many in South America at the moment. But our office, our prayer office is currently being translated into Brazilian Portuguese. Okay, that request has come through, but

not everywhere. But I think the early founders, who were all located in the northeast of England, are still rather gobsmacked that this small thing of some people seeking away has ended up resonating with people, people all over the world.

Jill Weber

All over the world. So that takes us to the work and the task. So, like you, we're a dispersed community and we've got members in far flung places. And so, particularly in this season of the OMS, we're having a little bit of a little growth spurt, which always a growth spurt involves some growth discomfort. And we're just realising we need to do some work around how do we, in the midst of growth and being dispersed, how do we help hold the members and how do we maintain that sense of the shared way of life, some community, when we are so all over the place? So I'm really keen to have a conversation with you about what that has looked like for you. What's been helpful, what have you learned on your journey, really? The word I'm looking for is cohesiveness. Right. To have some cohesiveness and a sense of shared life in a dispersed community.

Catherine Askew

So there are things that bind us, that cohere us, that keep us together, I think, across the miles. And I would say, we've already mentioned it. Celtic Daily Prayer. The first would be our daily office. So we have a fourfold office and these prayer books. And people pray. I think most companions would pray Celtic Daily Prayer in some way most days, but beautifully for some people, I think that would be. They put the CD on a morning prayer in their car on the way to work.

Jill Weber

So you have a CD version as well as the book?

Catherine Askew

Yes.

Jill Weber

You're so high tech.

Catherine Askew

And even more amazingly, we have that ebook on Kindle which has app like features, so another person might have it on their tablet or something on their commute to work. But also, of course, we'll be keeping the rhythm and the prayers. At Nether Springs, our mother house, Andy Raine, one of our founders, would be praying morning prayer most days in the Roman Catholic Church on Holy island on Lindisfarne. I would say the vast majority of people have the book and they're at their kitchen table, or they're in their favourite prayer chair in their living room, what have you.

And keeping this office, many of them will have sheds and the little *poustinias* in the back garden, or maybe they've memorised it and they're praying it while they walk the dog in the morning. So there's all kinds of ways to access the prayers. You're praying, there's a sense that even if you're absolutely alone and you don't see another person while you're praying it, there's such a sense that all around the world, other people will be joining in these prayers. And there's a shared story

and there's shared language and there's shared worship as we do this together. So that is a very wonderful gift of cohesion. Should I carry on?

Jill Weber

No, carry on.

Catherine Askew

A second gift, I would say, would be our Rule of Life, which for us, it's a twofold rule. And it's availability to God and others and intentional, deliberate vulnerability to God and others. I add myself especially for the availability that I want to be available to myself and my own needs in the mix of that as well. But that's our Rule of Life. And so every companion we say of community has taken a vow to have availability, and vulnerability is their way for life and living. Their vocation within the larger vocation of following Jesus is this way. And every companion is challenged to find out what that means in their own context. So we say that our Rule of Life is provocative and not prescriptive.

Jill Weber

Yeah.

Catherine Askew

And because availability and vulnerability, I don't know how you feel about it, but it's like, oh, do I have to? Jesus, I know you were. But we say this because we think Jesus was like that and we want to be like him. So it's the vow keeps us on that path, even when it's hard. And for me, I would say, and perhaps for many others, just knowing that other people are out there committing to this way and their own vocation, it gives me, it fosters perseverance in me to stay with it, especially on days when it's hard. It gives me courage as well, when I'm having to be brave and to make sure that I keep showing up to my own life and following Jesus wherever he might lead. It gives me great courage to know that my fellow companions are on that same way. So the rule gives a lot of cohesion as well.

Jill Weber

I think there's language. I think there's a language piece in that, too, which actually, I noticed both in your rule, you know, talk about availability and vulnerability. So that's a common language, everybody. There'll be all kinds of nuance in how people would interpret that, but there are two big rocks. One, they would hold in each hand and feel the weight. But then also the language in the Celtic Daily Prayer book you have deliberately crafted, and thanks be to God for your team that put that together. But through story and poetry and language, you've just painted this beautiful, attractive, winsome invitation into the life of Jesus. You know, so the language there has been something that I think creates cohesion and unity as well, because language creates culture. Stories create culture. Right. And that's something you guys have done so well. So what else. What else holds you together?

Catherine Askew

Well, as you just mentioned, stories, I would say we are inspired by the Celtic saints. And the stories, the stories of the good men and women of old inspire us. And we find a home in these stories and in the ongoing story, really, of our life together. But there is a wonderful sense of home. I don't know how this must be a charism or what God has done for us, because most companions will have some sense of encountering community, either through the prayers or the mother house or a gathering or something. And they, you know, they're surprised to say, oh, I feel like I've come home.

And there's a shared heart and shared home as well as the shared way in this shared prayer. So even people who've never met each other. When they do meet each other, there's a sense of knowing each other or a common heart, a common home. This doesn't always make sense to me, that you would see, meet somebody you've never met before and they would feel familiar to you. But it happens again and again and again.

Also, we commit to praying for one another. So we have a prayer guide, and every quarter we'll be praying for every companion and other prayer requests that might come through. And I'm amazed at how interceding for people you've never met actually is a kind of meeting. So interceding for someone, sometimes I've interceded for them for years, and then I meet them and say, you're the one. You're the one, you're, you know, whoever you are. And, oh, yes, I brought you before God, you know, month after month, year after year, and here we are finally meeting. So there's an invisible connectivity that happens. It's not normal relationships, although that happens too, you know, hey, Jill, let's go to the charity shop, talk about our souls and how it is with us as we go. But there is also this web, these almost invisible threads that connect us all across the miles. And I say that just to encourage you. It feels woo, woo. And it feels maybe like, how could it happen?

Jill Weber

This be a little bit mystical?

Catherine Askew

A little bit mystical. But it is our experience. And you might find, as you go on as well, that in your ways of praying for one another and on this way together, you find, oh, I know I'm connected to people that I've never met, but I know have taken these vows that I know are in prayer, I know are following in the way of Jesus. So we're grateful for that shared home, this shared mystical, if I might call that connection. We have some friends in a community in the Netherlands called the De Spiel [*name uncertain*] community, and they have, I don't know if they've written this quote or if it's up in their house, but we've adopted it for ourselves as well. And it says, we eat together even if it isn't at one table. We live together even if it isn't in one house. We pray together even if it isn't in one chapel.

Jill Weber

That's wonderful.

Catherine Askew

Yeah. And it's how we feel, I think, a lot of the time, which is great.

Jill Weber

Can you talk to me really briefly, because I know you've got some other thoughts there, but what's the role of the mother house as it pertains to the dispersed community. Yes, I've been there at Nether Springs. It's so great. The bell goes five minutes before prayer and we all come and we do prayer. We take names of members out of a basket and we pray over the members.

Catherine Askew

Yes.

Jill Weber

Yeah, it's great.

Catherine Askew

It is great. We found it was really helpful to have, well, I don't know if you found this, actually, what is the Order of the Mustard Seed? What is the Northumbria Community? And it's very hard to put words on. And even Jesus, when the disciples ask him about himself, he just says, "come and see." And it's really been a gift to us that we have an outward visible expression of our way of life. So we hope we know the mother house isn't the centre and the end all, be all of the community, far from it. But we hope that when people come to our mother house, Nether Springs, that they would glimpse and see and experience our ethos, our values, our way, our prayers at work. And it's a gathering space, it's a place of encounter, I would say. In fact, that's the strongest thing, a place of encounter with God and with others.

Jill Weber

And a pilgrimage.

Catherine Askew

Yes.

Jill Weber

So many of us have gone on pilgrimage there to Nether Springs, whether we're part of your community or not.

Catherine Askew

It's definitely not a members only thing. It's open hospitality, but at any given time, there will be companions for whom it is their spiritual home and a very significant place in their own journey with God. So I think the mother house is a key aspect of our cohesion. There's a focal point. We have other houses as well, and other places of hospitality. But the mother house is special, but mustn't be confused with when you come to the mother house. You're coming to the mother house of the Northumbria Community. You're not coming to the Northumbria Community. That's an important distinction. Yeah.

Jill Weber

Good. Anything else that's been helpful for you in terms of cohesion and culture and holding the members?

Catherine Askew

Well, I think I wanted to talk just about one more thing that's emerging for us, which is called the School for Monastic Living, and we're wanting to form more opportunities to gather around our treasures, to learn together more and to learn in the ways of love. So you all, I think, are ahead of us on the ways that you're able to connect online in various ways and receive training and offer teaching to one another. But we're on the cusp of trying to learn how to gather together, not just at the mother house for retreats, and not just at Easter for our Easter workshop, which has always been a big gathering time, but creating multiple opportunities to experience pilgrimage together, to do reading and learning together in various forms. So that's emerging.

And we do, of course, have various local groups, we have gatherings and so forth in local regions. So there are times that we are together, but predominantly, it's this dispersed, invisible way that we're all living alone together. But what I find is that these connections are extremely meaningful, even if they aren't relational in everyday ways. That people's everyday relationships and their families, on their streets, at their workplaces, in their churches, if they go to church, those relationships are enriched by having this network of praying companions on the way.

Jill Weber

Wonderful. Now you're the lead team of the community and one of the three. And as you look over the community right now, the Northumbria, what do you see? What makes your heart glad?

Catherine Askew

Well, one of the extraordinary things that actually Julia and I both just heard is we had a speaker yesterday who's done research on communities across Europe, and she was saying that they found the shifts, and there's a shift toward union with God and others and created world.

Jill Weber

Can I just interject this? I think one of the things she said, there was a shift towards union, the shift from saying prayers to praying, which I thought was interesting.

Catherine Askew

That's part of the union shift, actually. You're not just showing up to say your prayers, but you're praying. So the shift toward union, a shift toward the ordinary, even ordinary mysticism and that ordinary. A shift toward communal and more expressions of life together in a shared life, even in a dispersed way, and a shift towards transformation and becoming transformed transformers in the world. And as I look out over the Northumbria Community, I see those, all four of those aspects at work, and it made me feel so excited. And one of the things I felt is that I feel like the Holy Spirit is up to something.

Jill Weber

Don't know what.

Catherine Askew

Yes. And whatever it is, there's a sense that we're in it together, and it's a work that God is doing across various expressions of community life and monastic life and so forth. And the transformative aspect is the part that is the sweetest thing to me.

Jill Weber

So tell me more about that. Why is that so sweet for you?

Catherine Askew

Oh, it still amazes me that we can change. And the change that God brings doesn't make you less yourself. It makes you more yourself. It makes cities more the city God always dreamed it to be. It makes neighbourhoods and workplaces. It's not a change that takes away away the real stuff. It just brings it out more. And the discovery of that and seeing transformation excites me tremendously. And we are seeing that and I feel like with the School for Monastic Living and what happens at Nether Springs and all of the ways our companions and novices and friends are sharing life together, we begin to change. I need better language for how, why that excites me so much. But it feels like a miracle. It feels like a miracle. It is a miracle every time. Even someone comes on retreat on a Friday and they leave on Sunday and they're more themselves, they're more alive, they're more free, they're more in love with God and more aware of how much God loves them. And I'm never sure how it happens because it's never us that's making it.

Jill Weber

You just hold the space.

Catherine Askew

We just hold the space and say, wow. Wow. And even for myself I think, wow. I'm more myself than I was before that encounter and more like Jesus both.

Jill Weber

Isn't that a beautiful bit? We get more like him and more like us all at the same time.

Catherine Askew

Yes.

Jill Weber

That's a mystery.

Catherine Askew

That is a great mystery and it's thrilling.

Jill Weber

Yeah.

Catherine Askew

Yes. So I look out and see those things.

Jill Weber

That's so good. Catherine, can you pray for us? So probably it's not just OMS folks who are going to be listening in, it's probably other communities and stuff. Can you just pray for all of us, new monastics and people interested in new monasticism and just whatever's on your heart?

Catherine Askew

Yes, I'd be happy to. Thanks, Jill. Let's pray.

Loving God, we praise you and we bless your holy name. We thank you for all the ways that you call us together as your body. We thank you that we are alone together on this way with you. I pray blessing upon all of us seeking to live this life, this life of following you and seeking you as the one thing necessary. We pray that you would be at work as only you can, to connect us across miles, across mountains, across oceans. But heart to heart, mind to mind, middle to middle, that we would know that we are knit together as your body. May that give us hope. May it give us courage. May it keep us faithful to the lives that you have called us to. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

SEASON 2 EPISODE 12:

GRAHAM TOMLIN

Published: 11th November 2019

Graham Tomlin

What can I say? What a real delight it's been for me to be a friend of the 24/7 family for a number of years now. I was with you in Geneva a couple of years ago and it's been great to be with you today. And a couple of years ago, when I got a phone call or an email to ask me if I'd consider being a visitor to the Order of the Mustard Seed, it didn't take me long to decide the answer. And it's a great privilege for me and for Billy to play this role and particularly to see you make the vows you've made today.

And it's a really great delight for me to do this in Ireland. I come from a long Irish family and so being able to pray for the church here in Ireland, thinking of those saints who made vows like the ones you've made today in this island and from which Europe was evangelised in the years gone by. And it's good to be part of that spiritual heritage today.

This morning, I just want to offer a few thoughts on an issue which has always been at the heart of monastic movements through the history of the Church, which is the relationship between movements within the Church, where people make vows to religious communities, whether localised or dispersed, like this one here, and the Church itself. And right away from the very beginning, when people gathered together to make special vows in the Christian faith, that was always a little bit of an issue, how you relate monastic communities to the Church itself?

Back in the Middle Ages, they used to ponder this one quite a bit. Very often the story was used of the Mary and Martha and Jesus' interaction with them. And sometimes the image was given that those who committed themselves to a life of prayer and devotion and poverty and simplicity were like Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus, whereas those who were out in the world earning their crust and who were doing jobs and keeping society going, they were like Martha, they were doing the hard work and graft out there and that worked a little bit.

But it slightly gave the impression, because you always feel in that story, Jesus has a bit of a soft spot for Mary, doesn't he? She has chosen the better part. And so it always slightly gave the impression that those who were made the vows and who were part of monastic communities were somehow slightly better than the ones who were out there in the world doing the stuff out there. At the same time, they were somehow superior to those who were like ordinary members of the baptised and I guess one of the things that we have to say in the Christian faith is that the highest Christian calling, the highest Christian calling is not to be ordained, it's not to be a member of a monastic order, it's not to be a bishop. The highest Christian calling is to be baptised. There's

nothing higher than that. Everything else is subject to that. It's the highest thing you can ever do is to be baptised into the name of Jesus Christ, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

So if the Mary and Martha thing doesn't quite work in quite the same way that it should, how is this going to work out? And there's a bit of history in this for a moment, because in the 12th Century, this became a real issue. In the 12th Century, there were a lot of these groups emerging within the Church. And if you look across the 12th Century Church, you see all kinds of groupings that were part of the Church, but going off in this direction or another. There were the Waldensians from the *[name indistinct]*, this very remarkable Christian who abandoned his own wealth and his family and who had gathered a whole set of followers around him. And they used to travel barefoot around Europe preaching the gospel.

The problem is, none of them had any training. Sometimes they came out with some really weird ideas about Christian faith. They were not very well educated, and so they were part of this group. They were the Poor Lombards, an Italian movement. Valdez was in Switzerland, Austria and the Alps. But the poor Lombards were an Italian version of the same thing. Again, they were a little bit rough and ready. All kinds of weird things happened. Stories went out around them. There was one particular story that went out around them, the poor Lombards, where they were holding a communion service in a farmyard and somebody knocked over the chalice, and you can imagine what that meant. And it was the hen started coming up and picking up the wine and the bread and so on. That was a bit of a scandal, as you can imagine, in the Church.

There was the Humiliati in northern Italy. Now, these humble ones, very often married couples or individuals, taking vows of simplicity and poverty, wearing coarse habits and wandering around like wild men and women in the streets. And then there were Cathars, the Albigensians, as they were sometimes called. You again, have a very odd kind of gnostic theology in southern France. And at the time there was a very wise, one of the greatest popes of the Middle Ages, Innocent III. He became Pope in 1198 and he inherited a situation in the Church where all these groups are emerging and he had to work out, what do you do with them? If you're a pope, what do you do with these movements? Do you accept them? Do you reject them? So far, people attended the Church, attended to say, no, no, no, these are all a bit risky. Let's keep them out. And Innocent had this real issue as to what he was going to do with these things.

Now, those groups I've mentioned so far, they don't really exist anymore. You don't meet too many Poor Lombards or Humiliati or Valdensians. There'll be a few of those around. Not many of them have really survived. But two groups that were around at the time have survived, the Franciscans and the Dominicans, because they arrived around the same time. And I guess the question is, why is it that the Franciscans and the Dominicans survived whereas the other ones didn't?

And the answer is very simple. The Franciscans and the Dominicans loved the Church. Amen. They loved the Church. There was something in all of those other movements that was critical of the Church. They wanted to leave the Church behind. They felt they were somehow better than the Church. Either their theology was better or the devotion was better, or they were more superior to the rest of the Church. When Innocent looked across this realm of different movements around

the Church at his time, he recognised this as the key mark of a real move of the Spirit. Does this group love the Church of Jesus Christ? Innocent knew that basic principle of the Christian life. But if you love Jesus, you have to love his Bride as well. And it was illustrated for Innocent. And he struggled to find this. He didn't find it very easy.

In 1209, Saint Francis had just founded his new Order and people were beginning to gather around him. He travelled to Rome to meet the Pope, to meet Pope Innocent III, to try and get him to recognise this new order that he started. And as he came near to Rome, he was fortunate enough to bump into the confessor, the personal confessor to the Pope. He was a bishop at the time and this guy was quite impressed with Francis and he managed to get Francis to have an audience with Innocent. And Innocent met him quite impressed, thought he was okay. So I think he will give you temporary permission to carry on doing what you're doing. Let's see how it goes for a little while, and then I'll see you in a while, in a short time. But he was, again, not quite sure what to make of Francis.

Then later, a bit later on, a gathering was arranged where Francis was to have an audience, a second audience with Innocent. And the night before Innocent was due to meet with Francis, he was a little bit reluctant. There's this slightly weird Italian small guy. He's going to keep on badgering me about his Order. And the night before, Innocent had a dream. And in the dream he saw the great church of St John Lateran, which was the enormous church in Rome, which was the symbol of the universal Church. That church was the symbol of the Church across the world. And he saw this dream. In this dream, the church, this great, solid church, was crumbling. It was teetering, it was sounding like it was about to collapse. And then he realised that somehow the church was being held back from being collapsed by someone who was just underneath the church holding it up. And as he looked closer, he saw this little man who was holding the church, had a little brown habit on him. And in fact, this was Francis himself, that Francis was somehow holding up and supporting this symbol of the Church across the world.

Now, Innocent was a deeply spiritual, prayerful man. He recognised this dream as a word from the Lord, from him, for him. And so the day after, when he met Francis, he recognised that this was Francis' calling, that this movement of the Franciscans was in fact something that was there to support and to strengthen and to give life to the Church. And in that little story, I think you can see what is the role of religious orders, of which the Order of the Mustard Seed is one. They are intended as a gift from Jesus Christ to the Church. They are called to love the Church, to strengthen the Church. They are renewal movements within the Church, not replacing the Church, not criticising it, not making the rest of the Church feel inferior because they haven't made vows like you have, but to spur the Church on, to be more truly itself.

Now, how do you do that? Just suggest three quick things, that as members of the Order of the Mustard Seed, those who've taken your vows in the past or today, ways in which you can exercise this calling, to love the Church of Jesus Christ.

First one, do everything you can to build up the Church. St Francis was one of those who found himself, as a young man, frustrated by the element of the crisis of the Church. The Church had

been through a tough time in the earlier 12th, 11th and 12th Centuries with schisms and doctrine controversies and so on. But the great thing about St Francis is that he never despised the Church. In fact, the movement was all about building up the Church. In fact, when the movement began in 1205, just four years before he went into see Innocent, Francis was praying in one of the churches around the Assisi. He was praying in the church called San Damiano, which was a derelict chapel quite near to the town of Assisi where he lived. And as he was praying in this chapel, he heard Jesus speak to him. And he heard Jesus say to him, Francis, go rebuild my Church, which you see is falling into ruins.

Now, Francis literally minded man. In fact, the church he was in was in a bit of a state, and the building was not very good. The roof was falling in and you may feel your church look a bit like this, but Francis' church was like this. He thought this was literally meant that he had to go and rebuild this particular church. So he used to go around the streets of Assisi, so trying to get people to give him a brick so he could go along and rebuild this church. But then he gradually began to realise that, no, no, God was calling him not just to rebuild this particular church of San Damiano, but his calling was to help rebuild the Church in Europe.

And when he heard that voice saying to him, Francis, go rebuild my Church, which you see is in ruins, Francis answer is this: He said, "yes, this is what I want. This is what I long for with all my heart." And that answer is why I think the Franciscans still exist today. "Yes, this is what I want with all my heart. I want to build up a Church. I don't want to build up the Franciscan order. I don't want to build up the name of St Francis. I want to build up the Church of Jesus Christ." And so the aim of the Franciscan order was always that it was never the glory of Francis, it was never the upbuilding of the order for its own sake. It was always for the sake of the Church.

And so when you go to your local church, your local church may be fantastic, it may be the best local church in the world, maybe. There are struggles and there are difficulties and there are fights and there are stuff that goes on in church and you might get frustrated with it, but you need that spirit. When you go to your local church, say Jesus, saying to you, rebuild my Church. And so that your answer is, yes, this is what I want. This is what I long for with all my heart, to see this Church built up in faith, built up in the knowledge of God, built up in the passion to see people come to Christ. So those are the first things, build up the Church.

Second thing, I think that religious orders like this can do is to remind the Church of the call for discipleship. Monastic communities like this are always one that said, let's take vows. Traditionally, those vows have been poverty or obedience or simplicity. For you it's the vows that you've taken just now. One of the things about Christianity, Christian life, because sometimes we can think that those who take those serious vows for some poverty and simplicity and obedience, they're a little bit odd. They're a bit weird. Whereas, you know, real discipleship is just, you know, tame, really. Just, you know, give a little bit of money on a Sunday, turn up to church on the Sunday morning. But that's basically about it.

But actually, when you read the words of Jesus, it's actually the other way around, isn't it? When Jesus says, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. It's that

radical call to be a disciple. That's normal discipleship. Now, we're all on different roads on this. Some of us find this a little bit easier than others. Some of us have, you know, our different callings make that harder or easier. But the monastic call was always that reminder that spurring on of the Church to radical discipleship, recalling the whole Church, the disciplines of the Christian faith, those disciplines of silence or the reading of scripture or prayer or work, or in your case, to live prayerfully, to celebrate creativity, to practice hospitality, to express God's mercy and justice, for lifelong learning, for mission and evangelism.

Now, in a sense, every Christian is called to those things. The vows you've taken today are things that are, in a way, standard discipleship. And your calling is to live the life of a disciple just that little bit more intense in a more focused way, in a more publicly accountable way, because you've made your vows in front of all of us. We've all seen it. You're publicly accountable for the vows you've taken. But you do that for the sake of the Church, to remind the rest of the Church of the disciplines that in the way we all need, whether or not we've taken vows to follow Jesus Christ. So one of the ways in which you can help and support your local church is not enough, you know, not in that kind of boastful way, "Hey, I've taken vows," but just simply reminding people of the disciplines of faith and showing people the benefits of living a disciplined life, not insisting that everybody takes the vows that you have, but encouraging every Christian to live disciplined vows in whatever way God has come them to do that.

Because the Christian life cannot be lived without discipline. It cannot be lived without, in some way, disciplining our desires and our thoughts and our feelings. And by taking these vows, we spur each other on to holiness. So that's the second thing, which is to remind the Church of the call to discipleship.

And the third and the last thing, ways in which you can support your local church and the wider Church, is by praising humility above all else. Humility was always one of the great monastic virtues. When you read the Benedictine Rule, you realise how important humility is. There's a big section on humility in the Benedictine Rule, and I think the reason for that is because Benedict, like any leader of a monastic order, of any order like this, knows that probably the number one temptation of those who've taken vows is pride. It's to think I've taken vows, therefore I'm somehow special.

So that's why the great virtue of the monastic life is humility. Benedict calls it the highest state of heavenly exaltation. Because humility is about knowing who we are in the world. It's knowing that we are not God. God is God, and we are his beloved creation. Pride is the lie of thinking that I am the most important thing person in the world. It's self deception, and humility inverts the way of the world. The way of the world is one where we go up through pride, we go down in humility. In fact, what Benedict says, it's a bit like a ladder, but it's the ladder the other way around. We go down through pride and up through humility. We usually think self assertion is the way to get on in life, to progress, but actually to step back, to give space for others. That kenotic attitude to life where we hold back our ego, we try not to fill the room. We allow others the voice, the space. That's true humility. So approach your local Church with humility.

As it says in Philippians 2, do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility, regard others as better than yourselves. And as Paul says in Romans 15, let us therefore no longer pass judgement on one another, but resolve never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another. Let us pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding. The faith that you have as your own conviction before God, as God has called you to make a vow. That's a wonderful thing. It's a great thing. Not all are called to what you have done. Others are called to different paths. And yet the calling you have made today is a call to love the Church and to serve the Church.

I've often reflected how particular times of crisis or need within the Church God seems to raise up monastic orders at those very points. At the end of the Roman Empire when civilization was falling apart across Europe, that's when he called out the Benedictine order that basically held and kept Christianity and learning alive during those dark days as the Middle Ages began. In the 12th Century, this time of great crisis again for the Church, that's when he called out the Dominican and the Franciscan movements in the 18th Century at a time of great upheaval within Europe. He called them Moravians, groups like that.

Maybe today he's calling out groups like this to do that same thing. So your call, I would suggest, is this to love the Church, to build up the Church, to model the disciplines of Christian faith and to prize humility. And if you do that you will be a great gift. You will be a fragrant offering, as it were, not just to Christ but to his Bride, the Church.

SEASON 3 EPISODE 3:

JILL WEBER

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Jill Weber

Thank you, Pete. Thanks, everybody. I love that spring comes in February here. You may have not realised it, but I'm not from around here. I come from faraway Canada and this is the time of year that I send my gloating photos. So I take pictures of snowdrops and daffodils and I send them back home to my Canadian friends and family saying, wish you were here because they still have two more months of winter.

Anyway, so I want to show you a picture of Canada two weeks ago. You ready for this? So that's a garage and a snow blower that's looking rather intimidated. So that's actually Newfoundland. They had a huge, huge blizzard there. I'm from another part of Canada. I was originally from Winnipeg, which they call Winterpeg, where the average temperature in the winter is between -20 to -30 dipping down to -40 and then every so often we would have blizzards. And I realised I needed to define blizzards for you non-snow people.

Blizzards are when the heaven opens. Oh, it's like your rainstorms, but snow. And, you know, sometimes the rain goes sideways, right? You get the really big ones coming off the ocean. Same thing, snow blowing sideways, blizzards. We have them in Canada. And what Canadian farmers need to do during a blizzard, because in the morning you have to get up quite early to feed the chickens and get the eggs and milk the cows. So in order to stay safe in a blizzard, they have to tie a rope to their back door and tie a rope to the door of the barn. Because in the middle of a blizzard you can't see anything. You can't see anything. And it happens that farmers go out and they try and make their way to the barn and they get disoriented in the snow and in the dark and in the noise and in the chaos. And sometimes they freeze to death in their own backyard. So they need the rope. They need something to hang on to to get them from point a to point b.

So I wonder how many of us feel like we're in a bit of a blizzard. Sometimes you roll out of bed in the morning and you feel like you step into a flurry of competing demands and expectations. Anybody or you step into the office, probably. This has never happened to you. You step into the office and you could feel the atmosphere in the room and you realise overnight a storm has blown in somewhere, somehow. And that if you're going to get through your day at work, you just have to batten down the hatches and hide in your office cubicle until it blows over. Maybe sometimes some of us were beleaguered by electronic white noise from our phones, and others simply are blown this way or that by the storms of life. So we're trying to get from point a to point b, the beginning of my day, to the end of our day.

And we sometimes we feel like we're just putting our head down and we're trying to find our way in the craziness and the darkness and the cold. We feel like we need a rope to hang on to, a lifeline of sorts so we don't get lost and lose ourselves in the very swirl of it all. And I don't know about you, but last week when they showed all the symptoms of hurry sickness on the screen, it was a terrible slide. Terrible. You looked at it and you went, oh, yeah. Tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, anybody. You're just like, oh, Lord, have mercy on me. I am sick. I've got hurry sickness. We see ourselves and our lives reflected in it. We feel that way in the storm.

I am back at home. Not in the winter, but in the summer. I had got a monstrous rose bush in front of my house. I called her Audrey. You know, Audrey, the man eating plant in *The Little Shop Of Horrors*, Audrey. And Audrey was huge and sprawling, and she just flopped over the front and just spread all over our front parking pad, and she'd just get all covered with dust and dirt, and the garbage would get all caught up in her thorns and brambles, just a sprawling mess.

How many of us feel like Audrey? Sometimes we feel like we're just floppy and sprawled out, that our lives have expanded in every direction without any shape or form. A recent study showed that the average iPhone user touches his or her phone. Are you ready? 2617 times a day. Day. And that's for all smartphone users. If you're a millennial, are there any millennials in the room? Put your hand. If you're a millennial, your numbers are double, double. But in every study, people had no idea how much time they were on their phone. I was completely oblivious to the fact. 2617 times a day.

There's a book called the *Demise of Guys* by Philip Zimbardo. He did some research on the crisis of masculinity in western culture. He's concluded that the average guy spends 10,000 hours playing video games. By the time they're 21, 10,000 hours. What could you do in 10,000 hours? You could go and get your master's degree. You could become a concert pianist, you could become a guitar player like Peter Dinklage with 10,000 hours and we're playing video games.

Our lives are floppy and sloppy and sprawling sometimes. How many of you got to the end of the weekend and thought, "did I do anything this weekend at all?" Did I get anything done? And you try and remember, and it's like just this mist. I can't remember any of it. Time management expert Stephen Covey says this, "We get caught in the thick of thin things." Caught in the thick of thin things. We waste so much time and how we spend our time, says John Mark Comer, how we spend our time is how we spend our lives.

So Kirk came in one day after having a wrestling match with Audrey the rose bush, and he was a little bit scratched up, and he finally said, jill, you've got to do something with this rose bush. We just have to deal with it. I'm sick and tired of our friends being afraid to come over because they can't get up the stairs. So I went out one day with my pruning shears, little bit of rope, and we cut her back a little bit, we wrestled, but I prevailed and we tied her back to a trellis. So the next picture, this isn't Audrey, this is her cousin, I think. And it lifted her out of the dust and the sprawl and the mud gave her a little bit of shape and structure so that her beauty could be revealed. With a little bit of pruning, with a little bit of shaping, with a little bit of supportive structure, our lives can take shape and become even more beautiful.

In the tradition of the early church, going back as far as the third century, communities of Christians, they explored this. What does it look like to give our lives a little shape and a little structure, to do it together? And they formed something that we now call a Rule of Life. And so it's singular Rule, not rules. It's not like a bunch of rules to follow for your life, but a Rule. And the latin word for it is *regula*. It means "stick," or it means "show this." Here we go. Spiritual formation educator Ruth Haley Barton defines a Rule of Life this way: "A Rule of Life is a way of ordering our lives or our lifestyle around values and practices and relationships that keep us open and available to God." Values, practices – things that we practice, things that we do and relationships.

So simply put, a Rule of Life provides structure and support and space, for our growing and our transformation, for our flourishing, not only for our lives, but for the lives of everybody that we touch. A Rule of Life is not a box of things to tick, tick, tick, done this, didn't do that, did this. That's not what a Rule of Life is. And a Rule of Life is not a measuring stick that we measure our own spirituality and our superiority or our inferiority off other people. Rule of Life is not a measuring stick. And a Rule of Life certainly is not another kind of stick that you beat people with. That's not what a Rule of Life is. Practices, values, relationships that give structure, support and space.

As I look back in my life through starting my early teens, I realised even before I met Jesus, I was on a quest for a way of life that works. How many of us are on a quest for a way of life that actually works? And for me, it wasn't all of my life that was sprawling, it was just my waistline. Initially, I was just getting a little plump around the middle and I thought, okay, well, I need some support and some structure and some community around this. And I found it in Weight Watchers. So I had some structure and I had some support and I had friends and to do it with, and it helped for a season.

And then when I turned 20, I discerned, I came to understand that I had a call of leadership on my life. And, you know, 80% of leadership is personal leadership, 80% of leadership is leading yourself. And as soon as I realised that, I thought, oh, no, I am in trouble. I'm in big trouble. So I started to look around. How do I lead myself? How do I bring shape and structure to my life? And I found Stephen Covey. I don't know if he's famous here, but back in North America, he was the guru of time life management. I read *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and *First Things First*, and I realised that I could actually build my life around principles. And in the quiet, I could listen for what's the most effective thing I could do with my time. It was the beginnings of a Rule of Life.

And then I read a book by a friend of mine. I saw him in the Woking service this morning. His name's Andy Freeman and he'd written this beautiful little book called *Punk Monk*, which described community, rules of life, ways that we could walk the way of Jesus together, and having shared values and practices in this community together of prayer and mission and justice. It was part of my 17 year journey of being a new monastic or an urban missionary, whatever you want to call it, back in Canada. And we shaped a whole community around these common practices.

You know that you've got common practices, a common Rule of Life here at Emmaus, right? Hospitality. 100 parties in 50 days. It's your practice of hospitality, prayer. We have prayer weeks in Woking - they prayer walked the whole town. Right. Mission and justice. If we want mission

and mercy and justice, that's a core practice for us and Emmaus. Just go over to the Lighthouse, we get to practice it together. Common Rule of Life. Last week, Hannah read one of my favourite scriptures, but she didn't read my favourite translation of it. So I'm going to fix it and I'm going to read it this week. It says, from Matthew 11:28–30, Eugene Peterson wraps beautiful words around Jesus invitation to us: "Are you tired and worn out? Are you burnt out by religion? Come to me, get away with me and you will recover your life. Walk with me and work with me. Watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you will learn to live freely and lightly."

I love that. The simplicity of it. Walk with me, work with me, watch how I do it. I think most of us in this room probably would like to become more like Jesus. Does anybody want to become more like Jesus? Yeah. And I would love to have more of his joy. I'd love to have more of his peace in uncertainty. I'd love to be the way he was, a non-anxious presence in a room. The conduit of the love and healing of God. We want to be like Jesus. There's also, you know, there's other folks in this congregation that I really aspire to be like as well. You guys are a really inspiring bunch.

I don't know if you know that, but one of them is Nikki. Okay, who's that? Nikki is absolutely amazing. Nikki is like an energy drink bottled up in a person. Right? Anybody who knows her is like, of course, right. Nikki is full of vitality. She's lean and she's strong and she's fit. You're running and cycling and swimming and racing. If you show up for a race and Nikki is there at the start line, just go home and have a doughnut. Right. She's completely unbeatable. It's not going to happen. And I follow her on instagram I love to follow Nikki on Instagram. I sit on my couch, wrapped up in my quilt, got my feet up, watching Netflix, scrolling through Nikki's Instagram, eating crisps. I want to be just like Nikki.

Many of us want the life of Jesus, but we're not sure that we want to adopt the lifestyle of Jesus. Lifestyle being rhythms and routines that make up our daily existence. The way that we organise our time, prioritise the time that we have, the way that we spend our money. I want to live my life on purpose. I don't want to live my life on automatic pilot. I don't want to live my life by accident. I am this year, big year for me, turning 50. Thank you. Now, this is the part where you all go, you don't look like you're turning 50. You missed it, guys.

But as I tick over into the second half of this century, I become increasingly aware of my limitations because the reality is I am a finite human being. I know it's hard to believe, but I am. And I get tired and I get sad and I get vulnerable. I actually spent like an hour crying this morning. I was sad about something. I'm finite. I am frail. I only have so much time, energy. I only have so much capacity. So the question I have to ask myself then is, in light of my being so finite and small, how am I going to spend the capacity I have? How am I going to spend it? Back when I turned 20, I wrote, as I was reading Stephen Covey, he said, write a mission statement for your life. That's what I did. And I wrote a mission statement that I thought, okay, you know, it needs to be large enough, expansive enough that it will take my lifetime to live into. I wrote it 20 years ago. No, 30 years ago. Oh, dear. And I'm still living into it today. You want to hear it? Yeah. You do. You do? Yeah. Here's what I wrote: "My life will be characterised by the presence and the personality and the

purposes of God. My life will be characterised by the presence, the personality and the purposes of God. I want to live a life that gives glory to goddess. I want to live a life that points people to Jesus. I want my. Not only my life and my lifestyle, but the essence of my being. To point at how good and how glorious God is and how my deepest good is found in belonging to him and inviting others on that journey as well.”

That’s what I want. It means I need to live on purpose, not by accident or on automatic pilot. And a Rule of Life for me helps me. I’ve been living under a Rule of Life, or with a Rule of Life for, gosh, almost 20 years now. And it really, truly is like a rope in the snowstorm and a trellis for me when things get fluffy and sprawly. As Jesus offers us this, he offers us. He shows us a way of life that works. Jesus had margin. We learned last week from Hannah that Jesus was interruptible. That means Jesus had space in his day timer. I would have hated to be Jesus’ executive assistant. I’m like, come on, Jesus, we gotta get there now. And off he goes. Has anybody seen Jesus? Oh, he’s over there, you know, imagine trying to corral Jesus and keep him on track.

But he had space, he had margin, he had time. Jesus would get up regularly, early in the morning and go away to a quiet place to be with God. And that wasn’t enough for him. Sometimes he would go away overnight or even for a few weeks at a time, stepping away from the front lines of his life to gather himself to his Father. Jesus had lots of long meals with friends. Can I get an alleluia? Lots of long meals with friends, talking about stuff that really mattered. Jesus went to parties. He went to parties. I know, yeah. A little whoop there. Yeah. So much so they thought he was a glutton and a drunkard. Who’s this party going guy? He had space and time for people. Jesus lived simply his life had room for God, for loving God and being loved by God. And his life had room for others. He lived his life on purpose, and his life showed the goodness of his father.

And so over the next five weeks, we just invite you onto a journey with us. And I say with us because we actually, as a core team, as a staff team, are going on the journey too. We’ve set out some spiritual practices for us as a staff to explore together. Some of us are going away to a monastery on a silent retreat. On Tuesday, we found out that monks really like home baking, so we’re bringing them some home baking. And others of us have taken our email apps off of our phones, finding ways to make space. And over the next four Sundays, we’re going to be exploring some spiritual practices that you might want to try as experiments. So solitude and silence, simplicity, slowing, slowing down just a bit. And then Sabbath as well, with some teaching. And then in your collectives, there’ll be some activities that you can try and you can reflect together on your practices. It’s just an experiment. We’re just going to try.

I love the word practices because it means we can just practise. Like, what could happen if we try something? And you’re like, well, that didn’t work. Like, oh, that was terrible. I’m definitely not trying it that way again. Or like, wow, that was amazing. Here, I’ve got one spiritual practice. Do you want one spiritual practice? Little teaser that will change your life forever. You ready? Put your phone to bed before you go to bed. Keep your phone out of your bedroom. Guarantee 100% that will change your life. Anyway. Just one, that’s a freebie.

So practice. Does it help? What's God's invitation? We're just gonna take a minute or two. Just at the end, I just invite you to close your eyes. Some of us feel like we're in the blizzard and we're looking for a rope in the snowstorm. Others of us feel like our lives are floppy and sprawling all over, needing desperately some shape and some structure. Where am I? Just ask God this yourself. Is there something that you want me to do this week? Some little spiritual practice? Some little habit or experiment that might bring shape and support to my life, that might help me unhurry and I make room for love? Would you bring something to mind, even now? Jesus. We just say that we love you. We want to watch you and walk with you and learn from you. We want to discover you as our way, our way of life. Amen.

SEASON 3 EPISODE 6:

MARK SCANDRETTE

Published: 20th May 2020

Jill Weber

All right, well, here we're here at our Order of the Mustard Seed podcast and I'm so excited. I am here with Mark Scandrette. Mark I met probably personally, 2003, but he has been a massive influencer in my life. It's funny, when the student is ready, the teacher comes in. And Mark's writings at first appeared in my life at just the right time. He's an author. He's written a number of amazing books, *Belonging and Becoming*, *Creating a Thriving Family Culture*. Another one called *Free Spending Your Time and Money On What Matters Most*, most recently one called the *Ninefold Path Notebook*. But the book that got me right at the beginning was this book, *Practising the way of Jesus*. So welcome, Mark. Happy to have you here in the conversation.

Mark Scandrette

Yeah, great to be talking with you, Jill.

Jill Weber

Yeah. So, Mark, you're from San Francisco, but Mark travels all over the world teaching and training in Australia. Spends lots of time in the UK, teaching at churches, seminaries, all kinds of things. And Mark, I just wanted to say, before we get into any kind of conversation, I just wanted to say thank you, because I remember when we first got this, we were this little prayer community trying to figure out how do we live this life together?

And I got together a group of young people, young leaders, and this was 2011, and we started a small group. It was so funny. A whole bunch of their wives were pregnant. So all the wives just sat on the couch together with their big bellies and coffee cups on their bellies. I was the only non-pregnant woman in the room. And Kirk was so afraid. He was like, Jill, don't drink the water. Like he was really nervous about this. And we sat down and we read and we studied this book practising the way of Jesus.

And not only did we read it, but we started doing stuff. We started practising. And so as right now, that's taken us, taking me, our community, and me personally on a long journey around a practical approach to spiritual formation. And I remember an early quote in your book, I was revisiting it and so intrigued. I want to start with this quote and we'll take the conversation from there. You say in your book, "it's impossible to understand Jesus without attempting to practise what he said". It's impossible to understand him. So talk to me about the. Like, what does that even mean?

Mark Scandrette

Yeah. Well, in context of the New Testament, the primary message of Jesus, according to Mark 1:15, was “the Kingdom of God is at hand.” So dream up, rethink everything about your life, reimagine it and believe the good news. Step into this. And so I think many of us in the Western world got the idea that Christianity is primarily about the afterlife or one segment of your life. And it’s clear from the way Jesus proclaimed Kingdom reality that he was talking about how life actually works and how it works best.

And so the best summary we have of that is the Sermon on the Mount. And at the end of it he said, “anyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is wise.” Yeah, that’s why we need practice is because it’s because of the amazing vision of life with God in the here and now. And I think that in the Christendom era, we tended to locate God in buildings and in the future or the past. And actually Kingdom reality is all around us. In God we live and move and have our being, and so we have to learn to live, and live in reality. And the only way to do that is by walking out a way of life, experimenting, testing things out and seeing if what Jesus said actually works in real life.

Jill Weber

Yeah, yeah, yeah. The great experiment. I love that language. I think that word has been so helpful for me over almost a decade of exploration. Spiritual formation is that word experiment. And I think you used another term that I really enjoy. You talk about learning labs and so talk to me about why you chose that kind of language experiment, learning laboratory.

Mark Scandrette

Well, I looked at first of all, I would say I came to a point in the early 2000s of great frustration in my own personal spiritual life. And we’d moved to San Francisco to start a new faith community as church planters. And if I mentioned that I was a pastor or just a Christian, most people that I met would basically say, Jesus is cool, but you Christians suck.

Jill Weber

And you probably would get that from anybody you chat to on the streets in London as well.

Mark Scandrette

Yeah, yeah. And that’s actually not a direct quote, that’s a kind summary of what people actually said. But I realised I hadn’t learned very well how to practice the way of Jesus. And I think a watching world longs to see people who identify as Christians actually looking like little Christs, you know, like the nickname from the Book of Acts. And so we first started naming, these are qualities of Kingdom living that Jesus seemed to embody. And we came up with seven vows that would put us in that direction. But they really didn’t have any teeth to them. They were just sentiments, inspiring things.

Jill Weber

So there was inspiration and aspiration, very abstract, woo woo up there somewhere.

Mark Scandrette

Yeah. And so at a certain point we looked more closely and we said, we need to test these things out and not just feel some inspiration, but actually support each other to try on some new things. And I use the term lab because I think it relates to the rabbi-apprentice relationship that Jesus had with his disciples. And it was assumed in that culture that you followed the rabbi, you listened to what they said, you watched what they did, and you tried to emulate their life and you took on tasks based on their instructions.

And I think the dominant form that faith has taken in the modern world is information download. You go into a special space, you get information and you're expected to go work it out on your own. Or maybe you have an experience in the room that inspires you and lifts you for the week, but that doesn't get to the depth of the rabbi-apprentice relationship.

And so we thought we need something more like the way Jesus made disciples is more like a karate studio than a college lecture hall. He wasn't just giving information. There was this trusted relationship and going out and doing things. Hey, look at all these people gathered. They need some food, you give them something to eat. That was a huge test. Or I want you to go to the village in front of me and proclaim the Kingdom of God and heal the sick, care about the poor.

And the disciples weren't good at those things, they failed. But the way we learn is by taking on a practice, taking a risk, and then noticing what we experienced and reflecting on that. And a lot of times failure is involved in that and then saying, "what else do I need to learn or know in order to take my next step to live in Kingdom reality." So I love that testing laboratory, experimenting, otherwise it's just the theoretical knowledge.

Jill Weber

Yeah, I think that the language of experimentation, I think it takes a lot of pressure off, right? I just think you're going to learn, as you said, you're going to learn as much from what doesn't work as what works. Like give it a go. That part of your teaching really set culture in our prayer community. One of our joking mottos was, you know what? If you're going to blow it here, blow it big, do it with style and panache, because if you're not failing, you're not actually taking any risks. And we want to have the kinds of communities where we're really like, we're just going to go out there and try something crazy that Jesus happened to have said. And I think there's something about that. We're so risk-averse, right? Do you find that? I mean, you teach lots of places.

Mark Scandrette

I think we've been enculturated into passivity. But most places I go, well, let me say this: I'm conscious that I have to invite the possibility of renegotiating the contract. So when I'm with a group, I'll say, let me just state the way this normally goes. My job is to inspire, to say some wise things, maybe be entertaining and funny. And your job is to nod, maybe take some notes and come up to me afterwards, shake my hand and say, good on you, or whatever, or in Australia to insult me as a compliment. But I said, let's be honest, that doesn't change either of us.

Jill Weber

Yeah.

Mark Scandrette

So what if we tried something different where I'm not gonna talk so long. I'm gonna make space for you to interact with one another and with the Creator who's here with us and that we might take on some risks to see how to get this truth deep into our lives. We want to live in the truth, not just know the truth. And most places I go, sometimes the leaders will say, our people, this is like an attractional gathering. They're not going to want to participate and so don't try it. And I'll say, let me just see. And inevitably, I'd say 99% of the time people go, they never forget that the time we were together. And they go, I really connected in a deeper way to myself and to others and to God.

Jill Weber

Oh, that's beautiful. I love that phrase, renegotiating the contract. You know, I think one of the challenges that certainly is churches are wrestling through discipleship, and that's the language that they're using. How do we make disciples? And so, and as you said, the Sunday inspirational, you know, there's an element there and then if we're not getting enough on Sunday, let's do small group, right? And I think it's that point of renegotiating who we are to one another and what we can invite one another to.

I think the other piece that I see and what you've done is what's been really helpful for us in terms of how we've shaped discipleship. Back at my house of prayer was the reflection on our practice. And I think that's the missing piece. So often you'll go into your small group, your church small group, and you'll be like, okay, so what do we learn? And then how do you apply it? And then the next week you meet and you're like, what do you learn and how do you apply it? And it's that missing, that actual. All right, everybody, what happened this week?

I remember an early course I took in seminary. And they likened it to a railway track. And they said that one rail is the learning. Right? This is how formation happens. One rail is the learning. One rail is practice. But the only thing that's going to hold those things together in a long term parallel track is the reflection on that practice in a supportive environment. And so I think that's the piece that your work has brought into my world that has really upped the ante for all of us. Right? It's that checking in, saying, Did you do it? How did it work for you? What didn't? And creating that space. Define for me, just in terms of language, the phrase community of shared practice. And we've used that. What does that mean to you?

Mark Scandrette

Yeah, I. It's another term phrase that I use is that I said, "you guys were trying to create a Jesus dojo." And dojo is a Japanese word that means place of the way, and it connotes a practice space. So you could have a muffin-making dojo, you could have a knitting dojo. We understand there's these spaces where you do things together and they're not theoretical spaces. Imagine if you went to a karate studio with a notebook and a pen and street clothes.

Jill Weber

Point of karate.

Mark Scandrette

Yeah. And you sat in the back. The sensei is going to say, what are you doing? Like, get geared up here. Get your clothes, your proper clothes on. We're going to be practising together. And so I think a community of practice is where a group of people look at the teachings of Jesus and connect it to aches and longings and gaps in their own lives and the needs of their community, and then take on a specific practice for a period of time and then reflect on how that experience might shape the ongoing rhythms of life. So a couple of the elements that are really important. One is that we're honest. And me as a leader, I need to be ruthlessly honest and self-aware myself.

Jill Weber

And you need to be practising yourself.

Mark Scandrette

Yes. And other people and I want to invite others to be honest with what's really going on in their lives as well. We want to look at what the alternative vision of Kingdom reality is for us and then we need to have – I think this is as important as reflection – people need an opportunity to opt in to the practice. So sometimes, typically today, if a good communicator is going to make some application or suggest some, but if every time you gather there's another things that you should be doing or could be doing that you're not doing, it feels like a pile of shoulds on your shoulders.

Jill Weber

Yeah.

Mark Scandrette

And the net effect is we end up feeling really discouraged because we know we should be doing, could be doing something different. So I think that the term *invitation* is super important. I don't tell people what they should do. I say the gospel is inviting us into this. Would you like to do it together with me and others? And that consent part is super important. Sometimes when people are trying to make a more practical formation environment they throw out a lot of ideas about practices, but until I consent to it, it just is a pile of "shoulds." So giving consent and then we take this into our life. I like seven day practices, 14 day practices, sometimes up to about 40 days where we say let's deal with this, let's do something in our life. So you and I are going to be in a practice group in June.

Jill Weber

I know, I'm so excited.

Mark Scandrette

We're going to do a journal entry once a week. We're going to take on a daily habit and then we're going to do one experiment each week in our lives. And then when we get back together, the next time we meet, say what did you notice, what came up in your journal exercise? What did you

notice was different because of the daily habit? And what happened when you took that bigger risk to follow the teaching of Jesus in your relationships with others this week?

And that process of reflecting brings up a lot. It like elevates the energy of any group that I've been in. Some people will say, yeah, wow, I felt more peaceful this week because of that practice. Or I did ask, seek, knock prayer and I saw where Creator was providing for me in ways that I had missed before. Or it could be that I really struggled to do this and it sounded like a small thing. All I had to do was sit in a chair for ten minutes in contemplative prayer in the morning, and I just didn't do it.

And we're not hard on people, but we'll say, let's be curious about that. What do you think? What kind of resistance did you face inside of that made it difficult for you to follow through on something that you said that you wanted to do? Let's explore that. And sometimes it takes more. When we're beginning to take on a more practical approach to formation, we're just learning to exercise our will, maybe for the first time in our lives.

Jill Weber

Tell me more about that. That's an interesting.

Mark Scandrette

Well, it's suggested that most of what we do is based on habit. So your life right now, my life, they're perfectly explained by what I've been practising every day for 20 or 30 years. Patterns of thought, ways that I live in my body, patterns that I have in how I react to other people. And so if we want to see something different in our lives, then we have to change, like make a conscious choice to change the pattern of thought, or to change the pattern of how we live in our bodies.

And a great place to summarise, this is in Romans 12:1-2, where Paul says, "brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice. This is your spiritual act of worship." And Paul's clear on this, that true worship is the systematic surrender of the body back to the rule and reign of the Creator. Earlier, he says, you used to use the parts of your body as instruments of wickedness. Now choose to use them in a new way. So with my tongue, I curse people, I speak contempt, I speak jealousy. I need to learn. I can learn to use my tongue in a different way. With my eyes, I judge, I lust. But I can learn to use my eyes for a different purpose. So I'm getting lost because, you know, I'm on a run here, what was the original question again?

Oh, so the other part of Romans, the other part of Romans 12:1-2 is he also talks about renewing your mind. So if I want to break the patterns or the habits that I've had and discover a new way, the way of the Kingdom, this new new creation life, I need to try new things in my body and practice new habits of mind. And the key to doing that is giving my consent to saying, I'm noticing myself worrying, I'm noticing myself being jealous. I want to do this with my body and have the space to reflect, to say, do I want to just go with the pattern? Or would I like to take a new step and to make that choice now? It'd be exhausting to do all of that forever. And that's why the term "experiment" so helpful is to go for seven days or for 14 days or for 21 days. I'll try this. And most of us, even if we find it, have found for things that we found quite difficult to change. If there's a time bound

space, bookended. Yeah, yeah, that's bookended. We can have a lot more success than we may have expected.

Jill Weber

So talk to me just really briefly about the work of the Holy Spirit in the midst of all of that. So there's an invitation to think or to do differently. There's an aspiration in our heart, there's a willingness and there's a desire. So how does the empowerment of God factor into that whole configuration?

Mark Scandrette

So, in Philippians, Paul says, "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God who works in you to will and to act according to God's good purposes." So this presents a cooperative or participatory understanding of spiritual formation. The Holy Spirit is 100% here available to renew my life, to call me up into the bigger, greater purposes of God's Kingdom.

But my life is conditioned in resistance to the Spirit's purposes in many ways. And so I need to do what I can to join in what God is trying to do inside of what the Spirit's trying to do inside of me. And one of my mentors, Dallas Willard, used to say, practices or disciplines are our part, and God will do in us what we are not able to do for ourselves. So the Spirit does that work. And ultimately we need a change of heart and we need our minds renewed. And so it's all about the Holy Spirit.

Jill Weber

Yeah, wonderful. Now, we've talked about this theoretically, in practice. Talk to me about one of your experiments that you've done with one of your Jesus dojos or your learning labs. Give us a particular experiment that you tried.

Mark Scandrette

One that I use, just because it's a evocative example from a long time ago. And it's when we first started, I got a group of leaders together and we read through the book of Luke and we were looking for places where Jesus gave his disciples instructions about Kingdom living. And we came up with about 30 or 40 potential experiments. And then we prayed together and discussed and said, which one do we want to try first? And we were young and maybe a bit gung ho and egotistical what really popped out at us was in Luke twelve, Jesus said, sell your possessions and give to the poor.

And we're like, we've never heard any group think that Jesus was serious about that, but we know that he was, because in the book of Acts, it says, "selling their possessions and goods they gave to anyone who had need." So they learned this habit of being open handed. So we did some chatting about it and said, why did Jesus say that? What was the Kingdom reality that he was pointing us towards? And I think it's God's provision and abundance, and what would that look like for us? How could we respond to that?

And so we thought, what if when John the Baptist was proclaiming Kingdom reality said, people said, what should we do? And he said, if you have two coats, give one of them away. If you have food, give to the one who doesn't. And we thought, great, we'll do an experiment called "have two,

give one,” all of us. We’re going to invite a group of people to join us and over the next two months, sell or give away half of what we own and to help the poorest people in the world.

Jill Weber

And it’s amazing that people actually signed up for it.

Mark Scandrette

I didn’t think anybody would, but we had 30 people who signed up.

Jill Weber

Wow.

Mark Scandrette

And what that said to me as a leader is people are probably more willing to try things than I’ve given them credit for. And I just haven’t had the courage as a leader to invite. So each week we would have a different category of possessions, and we’d actually bring what we felt invited to sell or give away and collect them at our Wednesday night or Thursday night gatherings. And now it’s real. Like, there’s a pile of clothes in my living room after.

Jill Weber

Oh, your vinyl, your albums.

Mark Scandrette

Yeah. And so then we, then it’s not a theoretical conversation about what Jesus might have meant. There’s this. We prayed, we went through our closets and drawers and then I asked the group what came up for you while you were doing this exercise? And people had a lot of insight into that. Somebody said, I found things that still had the price tags on them from years ago. I was doing retail therapy. I wasn’t trying. I wasn’t buying this out of necessity or other people said, I counted it up. I have enough outfits. I could wear a different thing every day for two months and not have to do laundry. But I only use the same clothes, like three or four things over and over. Why do I have all this other stuff?

And about partway through, we gotten rid of, you know, sold or given away a lot. And one of the guys in the group said, I don’t think we’re quite getting to it. This is actually easier than I thought it would be. I think I could get rid of everything within six months. I’d get it all back, because we live in such an affluent part of the world where if you don’t have something, everybody’s got a spare bicycle or an old laptop.

So I think we should also talk about how much we make, how we spend it, and what our debts and assets are, because they did that in the book of Acts. It says there were no needy among them. How did they know who had needs, and how did they know who had things to share unless they talked about it with everyone? This was like taking the experiment to a whole new level, but it ended up being one of the most powerful parts of it. We got together the next week, and each of us had a chance to share as much as we were comfortable with about that.

And some amazing things came out of it. Some people started down a road of getting out of debt and realigning their finances. Other people were able to choose more meaningful work. We found out one of the people in our group was really in financial struggle and couldn't afford their rent, and so others invited them to come live with them until they got their finances in order, all out of doing this scary little experiment. And it proved to us, wow, when we get really real with this stuff, in a kind and generous way, it accelerates both the change we can experience in our lives and also our level of intimacy and connectedness as a community.

Jill Weber

That's beautiful. And both of those things are just transformational, aren't they? Yeah. So wrapping up. You travel all over.

Mark Scandrette

Well, not anymore.

Jill Weber

Not anymore. But what have you been seeing in terms of the trends in spiritual formation in the last couple of years? What are you noticing in the larger arena?

Mark Scandrette

A couple of things. I think that when I started this work 15 or 20 years ago, there was a lot of silos in the spiritual formation space. So you had the contemplatives and you had the justice activist types, you had the contemplative theological types, and you had the charismatic types. They didn't talk a lot, and those were seen as different areas of interest.

And generally, what I see is a breaking down of some of those silos so that a person can be justice oriented and tapped into the Holy Spirit and contemplative and deeply committed to a life of economic simplicity like we get to be a part of. We get to have connections with all the different streams rather than just our one small one.

Jill Weber

Yeah.

Mark Scandrette

So I'm really encouraged by that.

Jill Weber

Yeah. Good. Anything else that you're noticing as you travel from country to country?

Mark Scandrette

I think awareness of even just the term spiritual formation varies quite a bit. I find in the UK and Australia it's a newer term than for many of us in Canada and the United States. I think one of the big questions that faith leaders have is, "what does the opportunity for holistic discipleship change about how we gather?" And some leaders even despair. They say, can we do it in this form or do we really need to interrogate how we gather?

Because the way the church gathers now in its various expressions, comes from a time where information was scarce. And now that we have platforms like whoever, anyone who's going to listen to this, anyone can create a podcast, post something up on the Internet. So all the ideas are there, all the great content is there. What seems more scarce is the honest relationships and the commitment to shared, a shared journey of practices. And so we've got our work cut out for us, figuring out how, especially in a hyper individualistic world like the one we live in and a hypertechnological world, how do we share enough life together where we can be honest and we can be taking steps of risk together to respond to the Holy Spirit and learn to practice the way.

Jill Weber

Yes, wonderful. And that could lead us into a whole other conversation about the role of new monasticism and how, you know. But that's another conversation. So, Mark, that's good. I think for me, as somebody who sort of, in my early days, my formation as a leader, began to take hold of these things that you were teaching. And we built our whole community.

Back in Hamilton, when they say, who are you? I would say, well, we're a bunch of friends doing experiments together. And actually, my definition of new monasticism is, it's "the great experiment." It's friends getting together, saying that these practices that have anchored communities for two millennia. What could happen if we explore and experiment with them in our culture and in our environments where we are here and now? And so we experienced the joy and the fruit of that back in Canada and are having a fun time going on that journey here in the UK as well. So I'm just so grateful and thank you so much for your time today. I'm hoping this will be the first of a number of conversations. Can you pray for us? Or any last words, maybe? And then you can pray for us on our way out.

Mark Scandrette

Well, I just want to say that because we've been talking about practice, what comes up for some people is an obligation of performance, and that's not what we're talking about. If you look at Matthew 11, Jesus looks out on this crowd of people who are tired and worn out, and he says, "Come to me, I'll show you how to do it and I'll give you a real rest. You're going to find rest for your souls." Jesus invites us into this dynamic of shared experiments and practices because it will help liberate us, make us more free, our lives more light than the lives that we've been living individualistically and theoretically, or apart from the true reality of the Kingdom.

And maybe just one other thing is I've been surprised at how well Zoom works for a practice group. The last couple of years, I've been doing a lot of labs online and that we really. It really does work to connect people in shared practices across geography and maybe just to reference the new monastic thing for a minute, or monasticism.

Historically, you were part of a monastic community that lived together, so it was really easy to share practices. And so those of us who don't live together or live all over the place, the challenge is how to stay connected enough that it feels like we don't just aspire to these cool words that are our vows, but they actually have teeth. And I think there's some method that can help us

to do that, that you and I are going to get to explore in that.

Jill Weber

I know. Yeah.

Mark Scandrette

Yeah, I'd love to pray. Great.

Jill Weber

Thanks.

Mark Scandrette

Lord, today, may we live with open hands, mourn what's broken, serve one another with self respect, use our power for good, look with compassion, walk in honesty, reach past differences, suffer for love, and live fearlessly following your way of radical love. Amen.

SEASON 3 EPISODE 11:

PHIL ANDERSON

Published: 15th December 2020

Jill Weber

I am really excited today in today's podcast to have a conversation with a friend of mine, Phil Anderson. Phil is a longstanding member, I was going to say an older member, Phil, but I'll say instead, a longstanding member of the Order of the Mustard Seed and quite importantly, author of the book *Lord of the Ring*, that all of our candidates have to study in their preparation to join the Order. We're really, really excited because *Lord of the Ring* had gone out of print, and we're like, oh, no, we need another edition made. And so Phil and his publisher, Muddy Pearl, worked really, really hard to get an updated version of *Lord of the Ring* ready for this next season of candidates and for all of you out there who were interested in the Order of the Mustard Seed. So it's just come available, and I thought now's the time to talk to Phil. And so welcome, Phil. Nice to have you here.

Phil Anderson

Thanks, Jill. And, yeah, the timing is great, isn't it? I've got a copy here with me. I can show it to Jill. I can't show it to everyone else, I'm afraid, because this is audio. But, I mean, it looks fantastic. They've gone with the kind of Tolkien vibe on the front, which obviously is the play on words. It's the title. It looks brilliant. The production Muddy Pearl have done is great. And it smells like a new book, which is lovely.

Jill Weber

Is that like the smell of a new car, Phil?

Phil Anderson

Yeah, I mean, slightly different, obviously. But there is that kind of smell, isn't there? New cars, new books. I don't know what else. What else is new and smells nice? Discuss.

Jill Weber

The thing that I found so valuable, Phil, is you're a total history geek. If we are looking for somebody within or beyond the Order who's really dived into the history of the inception of the first iteration of the Order of the Mustard Seed, you are our guy, and I would love to hear from you what drew you to this. Why the Order of the Mustard Seed? Why did you go on that journey of exploration yourself?

Phil Anderson

Yeah, I mean, there's several strands to that, aren't there? What is it drives me to be interested in the history specifically and the spiritual legacy that this really represents, what personally drove

me and continues to engage me and excite me about the Order of the Mustard Seed and then its particular place in the 24/7 prayer story, which increasingly, the OMS goes beyond that. But that was where it came from. And it's worth acknowledging that, I think if you just start with me and what drove me to explore the OMS and ultimately to become a member of the OMS, I think I've always been a practical person. You describe me as a history geek and I guess I must be, given all the stuff I've done on this, but a lot of things geek. I long for that period when you were allowed to be a Renaissance man or woman and could be interested in science and the arts and history and literature, and you could be a poet and a painter and a scientist, all at the same time, and fly aeroplanes, too.

Phil Anderson

Yeah, exactly. I mean, you know, Da Vinci wrote and painted and designed flying machines – if he ever got to fly one. It was not quite putting myself in that league, but, yeah, lots of things fascinate me. But I am a practical person and I guess that translates into the fact that I have always wanted to put my faith into practice and understand how my faith practically shapes my life, practically shapes what I do, practically shapes who I am. I remember as a teenager asking my dad after I'd made some kind of decision in the church that I wanted to follow Jesus. Put my hand up. And I think what was going on in my head at that point was, okay, what happens next? And I asked him, "So, look, dad, I've become a Christian. What happens now? What do I do? What does that mean in practice?" And he helpfully gave me some discipleship resources about reading the Bible and starting to live it out and that kind of thing. But I've always asked that question.

And then when I started to read and get to understand the original Order of the Mustard Seed in the 1700s, this vow or commitment that they made to be true to Christ, to be kind to people, to take the gospel to the nations, and how on the one hand, that's just being a Christian. That is just "love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, love your neighbour as yourself" and "go make disciples of all nations." That's all that vow is. But the way they translated that into practical expression in the world and the circumstances that they found themselves in, there was something about that was incredibly appealing to me.

And I thought I need this sense of structure, this sense of a compass to guide my walk of discipleship in my life. And what they did, translating those basic principles of what it means to be a Christian and really grounding them in practical expression of how you live out day to day. I think that was something that was really appealing to me when I first came to this, and it's something that I found to be incredibly valuable and really foundational to the last, I suppose, 15 years of my walk of discipleship as a Christian.

Jill Weber

Talk to me a little bit more about how they did ground it, practically, that first Order of the Mustard Seed, way back in the 1716 and beyond. What did it look like for them?

Phil Anderson

Well, I guess people might like to think in some ways that they had this Rule of Life that was created right at the beginning and that just became some eternal foundational document or principle. But it wasn't quite like that, and I really appreciate the fact that it wasn't quite like that. So the original Order of the Mustard Seed was basically started by a group in high school. They were 16 to 18 years old, that kind of age. They'd been through a mixture of taking a bit of stick for their faith and a bit of bullying in a school environment, but also being part of a small scale, high school revival of prayer and faith. And they really wanted to consolidate that as they moved on into their lives.

So when they made this first commitment, and if you actually read and translate some of what they promised, a lot of it was relevant to the aspirations and temptations of young men starting out in life. So there was stuff in there about personal purity, there was stuff in there about ambition. There was stuff in there about zeal and what they hoped to accomplish for God and what they hoped God would accomplish in them. That was how it was written.

If you then fast forward about 20 odd years to 1740, which is the famous published edition of the rules of the Order of the Mustard Seed, which actually, I explore and present quite a lot of in the book. By then, you're talking about people who are at the top of their careers. They're in positions of leadership in a fast growing global Christian movement. Some of them also have influential positions in their professions or in what they do. The nature of what it means to be true to Christ, to be kind to people, to take the gospel to the nations, feels very different at that stage of life to what it did when you were 16–18 years old.

And whilst the same basic principles shine through, that sense of the kind of stuff they're grappling with in the 1740 edition of the rules is what do you do about people who are living zealously for Christ, but in reality are strongly opposing or persecuting what you're trying to do? What do you do about different branches of Christianity which have become very politicised and are at each other's throats and yet we want to help them work together? What do you do about things which once had the power of God in them, but quite clearly have fallen from that grace in a lot of ways and are now shadow of their former selves? Do you condemn them for the path of decline they've gone on, or do you try and help them to recover all those kind of questions that they're looking at and grappling with?

And I love the fact that those same basic principles could be translated into practical expression at different stages of life. For you had, quite literally, a king and a bookshop owner who were both members of the Order of the Mustard Seed. We know that for sure. We've got that evidence and those documents and, you know, these are people who in many would be regarded at not quite opposite ends of the social scale, but pretty close when it came down to it. And yet the rules of the OMS meant that they could both try and work out for themselves. What does it mean to live out those basic Kingdom principles in the life and the place that God has placed me and genuinely see the Kingdom of God at work? And, I would say that James Hutton, who was the bookseller, was

probably as influential in the start of the Great Awakening, the evangelical revival in Britain in the late 1700s as King Christian VI was in the restoration of faith in Denmark in the 1700s.

The way in which they could be an influence was very different. Hutton was a discipler and a radical disrupter and a radical thinker. Christian VI was all about, how do we build this into the structures of society over which I have a great deal of influence in my position? And yet they were both grappling with what does it mean to do mission? What does it mean for me to live true to Christ with integrity in the position I'm in? And the fact you've got these principles that are so close to the principles of the Kingdom of God and yet can be translated into something that genuinely works for people of very different ages with very different personalities, in very different stages of life, very different life circumstances they've got themselves into.

And yet they're willing to call themselves brothers and sisters and, you know, serve together as one Order and very deliberately say the world may see us very differently but we see ourselves completely on a level. We are servants of Christ and there's only two steps in this hierarchy, there's Jesus and there's us. It's just fantastic they'd managed to get to that place and especially that they'd managed to get to it in a society which was structured and hierarchical and class ridden in a way that we still recognise the problems of that today. But what we see is genuinely nothing compared to what it was back then.

Jill Weber

That's amazing. And I think we see that now in the current iteration of the Order of the Mustard Seed. We've got politicians, we've got stay at home moms, we've got vicars, we've got people in every strata, in terms of different calls, the places of God's planting where God has planted them and are just trying to work it out.

And I think the other thing I want to pull out, what you said too, is when people are writing their personalised customary, they do that over the course of their preparation to join the Order of the Mustard Seed. What is this? How does this Rule of Life apply to me here now that it really is a living document, isn't it, Phil? Like that's going to change. I don't know about you but I rewrote my personalised customary when COVID hit because I thought, wow, you know what? My Rule of Life in the age of global pandemic and lockdown is going to be a little bit different than it was before.

So I love in the history we see that there was this living document. As life changes, then our way of life in terms of how we wrap our lives around our gospel intention changes as well. I'm just amazed at your grasp of the history. Obviously you had to do a lot of research for your book, but your love for history just shines through. Why does the history matter? Why does the history of the original OMS matter to us today?

Phil Anderson

Yeah, and it's a fair question. 'Cause you could say, well, okay, it might have inspired us to kick this thing off in the first place, but now we just get on with it. We've got to live this in our own time. I think the history genuinely does matter and it matters for several reasons.

I think there's a really practical reason that there are practical things we can learn from what they did in their time. There's a whole reason around inspiration. That something has to excite you emotionally. There has to be a reason to get started on this journey. And for me, it was looking at what they'd done in their era, sensing how the fingerprints of God were just all over that. And this longing to say, you know, I love that verse in Habakkuk. It says, "Lord, we have heard of your fame. We stand in awe of your wonderful deeds. O God, renew them in our day, in your wrath. Remember mercy in our time, make them known." And, you know, I've always loved that verse. And it really came to life to me when I looked at the history of the OMS and said, "you know, Lord, your fame is all over this. Renew it in our day."

And then I think if you're going to be spiritually connected to something, there is a spiritual principle here that goes even deeper than the intellectual. What we can learn from this, or the emotional, how can we be inspired by this into the spiritual life if you are connecting yourself to something spiritually? I think it's like reopening a well of grace, almost. And you've got to understand what the water you're drawing up is, because, there are things you could look back in history that you might not necessarily want to connect yourself to. There are things you're never going to find anything perfect. There will always be flaws. And actually how men and women in their own generation repented of that and dealt with some of those things, that's an important thing to be connected to.

But I think, and sometimes people who criticise the OMS and there are people who do that, one of the things they look back is they look back at some of the mistakes that were made and said, is this the kind of spiritual legacy you want to be connected to? And I look back at the same mistakes and say, well, at least I can see those mistakes, because if there was some kind of veil being drawn over them and these people were pretending to be perfect, that would raise alarm bells with me straight away.

But more importantly, I see the journey of pain, of repentance, of restoration that they had to go on in their generation. I think actually there's things I can learn from that as well. And the aspect of how do you deal with sin, how do you deal with falling short of what God wants for our lives is not to cover over it and try and pretend that it never happened. It's actually to be joined to that journey of repentance and forgiveness and restoration which is completely fundamental to the gospel. After all.

So, yeah, there's loads of practical things we can learn from the history. You know, I mean, 100 years of prayer. I mean, a number of us involved in the OMS are involved in the 24/7 prayer movement. We're probably, you know, 20 years in. Well, okay, we've done a fifth of what they did. So maybe when we do the remaining four fifths, we might get close to learning.

Jill Weber

We can get excited about it then. Yeah.

Phil Anderson

You know, this was in reality the first modern mission movement at scale in modern church history. So there's loads we can learn about mission. They were real pioneers of community. They planted these incredible missional communities that were radically countercultural in their day all over the world. They were really dealing with intercultural issues in a way that we're only just getting back to right now. And, you know, they had some challenges and they had some answers and they had some things that still seem relevant even today. Yeah, there's loads we can learn practically. I am incredibly inspired by the story. And at the risk of being a book plug, you know, just read the stories for yourself.

Jill Weber

Read the story. Everybody read it.

Phil Anderson

Say at the end of that, that you're not encouraged and challenged and inspired and motivated by this stuff because it is amazing. And just recognise that, you know, there's that story of Elijah and Elisha, isn't there, and Elijah is coming to the end of his life. And Elisha's request of Elijah and prayer to God almost is, you know, "give me a double portion of what you had. I want more than just to learn from you, and I want more than just to be inspired by you. I want some of the same spirit that rested on you to rest on me." And actually, I dare for that to be my prayer too, that some of the same spirit of God that was resting on these people would rest on me.

Jill Weber

Amen. Amen. So let's, let's just finish up our conversation today talking about the journey of the 24/7 movement. When we talk about 24/7 and we talk about the Order of the Mustard Seed, we actually say the Order of the Mustard Seed is just part and parcel of the 24/7 movement. I mean, we've got the same threads of DNA all the way through us. But I'd love to hear how for you, as part of the 24/7 movement and a bunch of friends, there was this fateful day, 2005, February 11. Talk to us about that day and why you and a bunch of others in the 24/7 movement found yourself in that particular moment in our history.

Phil Anderson

Yeah, I think I probably first bumped into Pete Greig in about 2002. Our journey into 24/7 started really early. There was a guy called Tim Harold who was part of the church. We were both part of the same church then and he went to an event called Cultural Shift in 1999 which was where Pete Greig and the guys from Revelation church in Chichester first stood up and said we did this thing, we prayed round the clock, day and night, 24/7 for a week and a month and it was amazing.

And God turned up and the power of God was all over it. And we've been changed and our church has been changed and you know, we think "God's in this" and maybe more people need to know about it. So we started thinking about that straight away. And in 2001 we did our first week of continuous prayer as a church. And because that's now starting to become part of the DNA of contemporary church, it's like, you did a 24/7 prayer. Nobody ever done anything like that. We

used to do a thing called a half night of prayer which was 4 hours and we thought that was really radical. So that was a big thing.

And then about 2002 Pete came to visit. I got to meet him and he was talking about how he was really keen to dig into some of where this had come from. Because I think they'd felt the challenge to continuous prayer pretty much based on this quite superficial understanding that there was this group called the Moravians and they were in Herrnhut in Germany and they prayed for 100 years without stopping. And that's amazing. So let's try and pray for a whole week without stopping then or a month without stopping.

But Pete was starting to feel and sense that there is probably a bit more to this Moravian connection than just 100 years of prayer. And specifically felt challenged about the Order of the Mustard Seed, this covenant society, almost that Zinzendorf and some of his friends who went on to be the founders of that movement and the founders of the hundred years of prayer had made in their teenage years that very much led them towards that.

And I got roped into doing a little bit of research for a book that Pete wrote called *The Vision and the Vow*, which really is the challenge that as often happens in God you end up throwing the challenge out to others and God calls you to be an answer to your own challenge. That book was where the challenge got set out. We need to rediscover the power of covenant or vow of commitment in the contemporary church. Just think we live in an age that is commitment phobic in almost every way. People won't commit to anything from a relationship to a mobile phone contract and you know, steps of commitment is some of the most radically countercultural things you can do right now.

So Pete was feeling this challenge to write a book about commitment in the context of Christian faith and discipleship. What does it mean to live a life of formally committed discipleship? You know, in a covenant thing that is an expression, an interpretation of the new covenant which is just the gospel but really expressed in that very specific way with specific promises reflecting that and elaborating that in your own life. So we explored that for a couple of years.

Pete wrote the book called *The Vision and the Vow* and we were just getting to the point of saying we need to do something about this, we need to respond in ourselves to this. We'd also discovered in our research and this was where the history bit really kicked in, that in finding enough material to help people write one chapter of *The Vision and the Vow* on the history I'd found ten times more. And the question was also being asked okay, where can people go to find out about the Moravians, about Zinzendorf, about this history that we claim inspires us? And you know, the last decent biography of Zinzendorf was quite academic, coming from a Moravian perspective and written in 1956. It's a really good book. I still recommend it to people. It's just called Count Zinzendorf by John Weinlich. But nonetheless it's not an easy book to give to a teenager and say get inspired by that. We wanted something that would do exactly that.

And so writing the *Lord of the Ring* was what came out of that challenge. Can we make all of this history, all of these wonderful stories accessible to a new generation? And that was what we did. But there was, even after doing that and the two were happening roughly at the same time, there

was still, we really feel called we've got to respond to this. If this thing about vow and covenant and that being a foundation for our discipleship and our own personal walk of faith is serious, we've got to do something about it. And we looked at lots of ways of doing it.

There's this suggestion going around, well let's fill a sports stadium and let's get 10,000 young people to take the Mustard Seed vow and that sort of thing. And that's not a crazy idea. It wouldn't surprise me if a day came when that happened. Please God, let that be the case. But as we started thinking in those terms, it was more, you've got to engage with this in its own terms and in God's time and pace. And it is specifically about a mustard seed, about a little seed being sown into the ground and apparently disappearing and yet bursting forth and forming the gospels, translated as a great tree, which is slightly over noble for how mustard actually grows. It's more like a rampant thicket.

But I don't mind the Kingdom of God being like a rampant thicket in the earth if it still gets to spread and that sort of thing. And so I think we felt we didn't really have any right to stand up and tell others about this until we tried to live it out in our own lives. So initially, it was only about 30 odd people, I think, who got together in a church called Holy Trinity, Clapham in London in 2005, on February 11. And it was carefully chosen. That was the church where the prayer group and the encouragement group who really got behind William Wilberforce, who was the British politician who led the charge for the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in the very early 1800s.

Jill Weber

So that was the Clapham Sect, right?

Phil Anderson

They were called the Clapham Sect, but they weren't a sect in the modern sense that we use the term. It was basically a prayer and encouragement group who really got spiritually behind what was being done politically and as influencers in the culture. And so we saw in them a group who had covenanted together in order to achieve a real Kingdom aim and thought that was an example of the kind of group that we might aspire to be.

So going there and saying, yeah, although we're primarily talking about the OMS and Zinzendorf here in our own nation and in our own history, here's another group who are inspirational in the same way, so let's go for that. And probably having chosen to take that vow together, which was just an incredibly exciting and incredibly scary moment, you know, it's like getting married. You already know you love that person, you already know you intend to spend the rest of your life with them, and you already know that you've probably got friends around you who are basically doing all that stuff without ever making that formal step of commitment.

So you know that making that vow in itself is not necessary to live that life, or superficially doesn't appear to be necessary to make that life. If that's the case, then why does standing up and making those marriage vows feel like such a life changing moment, such an incredibly big deal when you've got people around you who are supposedly living the same life, without making that step.

And yet there is something about that process of covenant, which is just the highest level of commitment. It's the nature in which God chooses to reveal his commitment, his love, his promises towards us as human beings, as men and women. And when we step into that, that covenant relationship, the one that God himself has modelled to us in Christ, there is something about the promises I'm making are only the same promises I made when I became a Christian.

So why does this feel such an enormous deal? But reality is, it felt like an enormous deal. And it was life changing and it has changed and shaped my life ever since. And that's just been the reality of it. And if you go right back to that question I asked my dad as a teenager, "Okay, I've become a Christian. How do I make this real in my life?" This has been one of the single biggest steps I've made to making my Christian faith real in my life. I've worn this ring every day ever since. I've probably looked at it every day ever since. And it has shaped my walk of discipleship in so many ways. And it was probably after ten years of doing that, kind of inside a submarine, doing it in quite a not hugely public way.

We would get together every year and renew our vows together, about half a dozen of us. We'd talk about how we were living out on our lives. We'd connect with other people who are trying to do the same thing. And it took a decade of that for us to really feel that we were ready almost to offer this to others as a walk of discipleship and to offer them the tools and the means to make that formal commitment for themselves.

And obviously you, Jill, have been somebody who just has been completely instrumental in bringing the OMS as something that has a structure, has an organisation, has someone who takes that role of servant leadership, which is exactly what you do, and makes that available to people to be something they can be part of for themselves.

So it's been a real privilege to be part of that journey from 2005 to where we are now in the OMS. It's felt like a very personal journey with a small community of friends alongside me. And now, praise God, it's becoming a much more community journey with a much bigger community of people who are all on that same walk alongside me, which is just fantastic to see.

Jill Weber

Yeah, it is amazing. It's so encouraging to see how it just continues to grow and grow. And even now with the Lectio 365 app. Three of the four contributors are members of the Order and the app is structured around our three vows and our six practices. Right now we've got 86,000 regular users.

Phil Anderson

86,000? That's crazy.

Jill Weber

It's totally crazy. You know, so we've got this opportunity, right, to give the gift that we've been given, a way to practice the way of Jesus that's life giving for us and for others. And so just. I just want to come back again to your book. I just. I'm so grateful, Phil. Your book has been such a gift

to 24/7 movement, gift to the OMS, gift to me personally, gift to all of us. And so I'm just really grateful we've got it out there again and for this whole new generation of people looking in and wanting to see how this way of life is available and possible for them. So thanks for that. I'm wondering if you could pray for us as we finish up our time together.

Phil Anderson

Yeah, sure. That would be fantastic.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that everything we've talked about today is your work. It's not something we've had to work up for ourselves. And we get the privilege to walk alongside you, to be disciplined by Jesus, to learn from you, to take on your yoke, which is light and easy. I thank you for the incredible example of the original OMS, the people who were involved in all that you were doing in the 18th century.

I thank you for the inspiration that has been to me as I've tried to walk my own life of faith and discipleship. I thank you for the practical things that we can learn from that. I thank you for the fruit that came forth in their generation that is still relevant today and that we're still feeling the benefits of.

And I thank you for that hope that we can be connected to that in more than just learning about it, but actually becoming part of the same ongoing move of your Spirit that they were part of and that we can be part of, too.

I just pray for everybody who's listening today, Father, that you would inspire us together to follow you in this way, that you would disciple us and lead us to work out what it means to be true to you, to be kind to all those around us, and to see your gospel message spread in our generation, and that you would just fill us with grace to be blessed and to be a blessing in every way in our lives and in every place where those lives touch those around us.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

SEASON 3 EPISODE 12:

JILL WEBER, JOE STEINKE, PETE GREIG

Published: 14th Jan 2021

Jill Weber

Hey there.

Joe Steinke

Joe Steinke here with another 24/7 core training for you. We have just the privilege of inviting two of my favourite people to give voice to a teaching on this idea of *apostomonasticism*, which we'll describe in a second, but which is a funny word, a funny term, but has some really great characteristics that have been a historical strain within the church, but also something that we as a movement has stumbled into as expressing. And the two voices that are really carrying this conversation today are going to be Pete Greig. Hey, Pete.

Pete Greig

Hey, great to be with you all.

Joe Steinke

Pete's on the Isle of Wight in a wonderful new space. So such a pleasure to have you, Pete, with us. And then Jill Weber is with us. And where are you, Jill? Right now?

Jill Weber

I'm sitting in Waverley Abbey House on the Waverley Abbey Estate, not too far from Guildford in the UK.

Joe Steinke

All right. And I am sitting in the handsome little cottage that my wife and I occupy in a little town, a little lake town in southern Wisconsin. But yeah, let's get into this. So, Pete, you know, speaking of Wisconsin, there was, I forget how many years ago, at least twelve, where we hosted - I think it was one of the first convening of the communities network within the US that was just a seedling of relationships. And yes, you did it.

Pete Greig

Was it January? I still haven't warmed up. I'm still cold from that.

Joe Steinke

It was February in Wisconsin in the middle of winter and it was sub-zero Fahrenheit temperatures

here. And you guys had, you guys didn't even have the right coats or anything. We had to borrow you winter coats. You couldn't move from one venue to the other without your nose freezing. It was so cold.

Pete Greig

3000 years. My forefathers evolved to deal with rain and literally nothing else. I'm good at rain, but your climate did things to me that are still probably, like, damaging my neural pathways. It was an amazing gathering. Seriously. I loved it. I loved it. I loved it. It was brilliant. Genuinely.

Joe Steinke

But you were touring several communities in the States. But that was kind of a focal point of landing this encouragement to the seedling communities that were popping up in the US. And you carried this message and came with this new term, *apostomonasticism*. And you just kind of talked about that as an idea with us. I'd love you to just go off on that for a bit. What is it that characterises this idea of apostomonasticism?

Pete Greig

Hey, Joe. Thanks. This is like being with two of my favourite people, talking about some of my favourite stuff. And all I know is I so wish that all of us, not just the three of us, but all those of you guys listening, we would be sitting around a fire curated by Bishop Steinke, talking these things and praying these things out. I know it sounds really pretentious. Apostomonasticism is a term I came up with. I had invented it, not because I wanted to create opaque language, but because I couldn't find language for what I was trying to feel my way towards in terms of the intersection of spirituality, community and mission.

And the strange thing was that as I look back into history, I felt very familiar with the motifs of Christian community that have shaped the landscape, certainly of Europe to this day. The sort of monastic, prayerful, aromatic instincts. But that I couldn't quite find that in contemporary Western society. And I still remember when we first lived in the US, 2004 through 2005, I went down to California, actually. I was speaking. It was when everyone's talking about emergent. Everything, everything was emerging. And, you know, I went to speak at the most emerging of emerging events. You can believe how, like, hip this thing was.

And I talked about monasticism and they were just like, "what are you even talking about?" I remember people taking me aside saying, that's just some European thing, but that's not a deal here and now. It's really interesting because in the US it's gone the other way. And anything to do with monasticism, everyone's really interested in, but almost in an unhealthy way. I think it's like if something's in Latin, they think it's true, if it's old, they think it's authentic. And actually a lot of the old stuff is terrible and there's a lot of nonsense written in Latin. So it's been interesting to see that journey.

So let me explain why I came up with that language. I had spent a number of years at that point planting churches. And when I say that, I mean congregational expressions of church – some kind of a big meeting or a medium sized meeting on a Sunday, small groups during the week,

programmes, strong community. Not, a sort of disembodied, programmatic thing, just a strong sense of community and mission. But that was that.

And I was beginning to discover monasticism and try and work out how does this fit together. One of the challenges, the very etymology of the word monasticism comes from *monos*, the Latin for one solitary single only. And technically, really, I'm more interested in friaries than monasteries. Monasteries are where you withdrew away from the world to be alone with God and maybe do a little bit of farming, but the friaries were these kind of apostolic missional centres that were deeply prayerful – Franciscans are the obvious example there.

So one of the defining moments for me, Joe, was we all read a book by a guy called Patrick Johnson called *The Church is Bigger Than You Think*, in which he traced three great traditions of church going back 2000 years, and he said, yes, one of them is what you might call the congregational church – you congregate, so it's all about meetings out of the world, so it's often about membership and defining who's in and who's out, and he said that's the model of church that has risen to ascendancy, particularly since the Enlightenment, because it's just really convenient if you're doing a nine to five job, an expression of church where you can rock up on Sunday and maybe midweek and say, "I've done church" just fits really well with the Industrial Revolution and everything that came after, and so the parish church, the congregational expression.

Now, when you say "church" to people, they think that that's what they think, when if I said we've been planting churches, you think we're doing that, but it doesn't say you don't have to do much Bible study to realise the church must be bigger than that, I mean, just look at the book of Acts – they didn't have buildings, they seemed to gather every day of the week, not just on Sundays, breaking of bread was in homes and so on – the church is bigger than you think.

The other two expressions that Patrick Johnson described delineates, are these: the congregational, but then he says, you've always, through 2000 years of church history, had what he calls the monastic and the apostolic, so the apostolic expression is missional, the greek *apostas* means ones who are sent, I know that when you say apostolic to certain traditions.

Some traditions say, well, that was the twelve Apostles and we've had the Apostles, they're gone. And then others. If you're more Pentecostal, you probably say apostles are these kind of men. It is mostly men in shiny suits at the top of these big pyramids. Try not to fall off the pyramids. But quite often they do end up falling off the pyramids. If they stay on the pyramid, they hurt themselves.

But that's not the biblical understanding of the apostolic. Biblically, the apostolic, in Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12, the church is built on apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and then one of the lists has ops or admin alongside that. And so the apostolic impulse is that let's go, let's move, let's obey the Great Commission, let's make disciples of the nations, let's fight injustice, let's preach the gospel, let's get busy.

And so examples of the apostolic impulse could be the Franciscans who changed the face of history. And another example of the apostolic expression of church could be YWAM, which is controversial, but I don't apologise for it. Every YWAM base I've ever been to, what I found is that

they're in complete denial about being church, even though they're living together in community, they're studying the Bible, they're praying for each other, they're discipling one another, they're going out to make disciples of the nations, and half of them having communion as well. But apparently they're not church. That's because they've embraced an ecclesiology that says the only legitimate expression of church is the congregational one. Therefore, poor, lovely, sweet little YWAM DTs's are sent off to attend a church on Sunday, which they feel no connection with whatsoever, because their real discipleship life is happening, you know, throughout the rest of the week in the YWAM base.

And so Patrick Johnson says it's nonsense. We've got to understand that that apostolic movement that's in the church is an legitimate expression of church. And I'm going to be a little controversial here, but I want to just slightly suggest that maybe the reason that they are in denial on that issue, is also that their economic model, their funding model, is dependent on them not being the church and getting money out of the people who consider themselves that they are the church. The church was always meant to be the missionary movement. You weren't ever meant to have to invent missionary societies. The church is the missionary society. It's not the church that has a mission, it's the mission of God that has a church. Right? So that's the apostolic.

And as a church planter, as someone with a heart for the lost, a desire to fight injustice, I'm really interested not just in helping people congregate out of their jobs on a Sunday to get a bit of Bible teaching, but helping us to get into the world and change it.

And then you've got the third expression of church that Patrick Johnson outlines, which is the monastic. And, you know, we can trace that right back to the Desert Fathers and probably earlier, probably to the Essenes and John the Baptist, but that's another story. And what was Jesus' relationship with the Essenes and the Qumran community? That is another very interesting conversation, but for another time.

And so that was, you know, if we take the Desert Mothers and Fathers, they were the ones who, when Constantine was converted, allegedly, I'm not convinced that it was a true conversion because his vision that converted him, he saw the Lamb of God, Jesus, carrying this flag and saying, in my name, go forth and conquer. And it just doesn't seem to me very much like the Jesus I know of the Beatitudes. It seems very convenient for an emperor. And also he kept his pagan priest on right till the end. So who knows?

The Episcopal traditions hate it when I say this, but I think we have to seriously question the sincerity of the conversion of Constantine. I think it's far more likely that he finally realised, if he can't beat them, join them. So he starts to pull together the church to work out the creeds and all the rest of it, because suddenly he says, I'm going to chuck the keys to every pagan shrine. To Christians, they can become churches, every pagan festival can become a Christian festival, which is why Christmas happens on the pagan festival and all the rest of it.

And so he Christianizes paganism and suddenly the church, who are these previously persecuted, now scarily popular and powerful and rich followers of the Nazarene, the penniless Nazarene, the

friend of the poor, has a dilemma. And some people say, this is wonderful. It's complicated, but it's wonderful. We need to stay in Constantinople and try and work out what does the Kingdom of God look like? What does church look like. Now we've got buildings, now we're popular and so on. Now we're in and out of the emperor's palace. And then others said, this is nonsense. This is not the way of Jesus – power corrupts. Let's get out of here.

And so they moved into either the Egyptian or the Syrian deserts, and they just sought to live ascetic, holy lives away from the great throbbing metropolis and to pray a lot, did a lot of spiritual warfare. And, you know, we know initially about them from the writings of Athanasius, and you have people like Alexander of the Desert, and they became enormously influential. People would travel out from the great cities to seek counsel from these godly prayerful men and women.

And then inevitably, economies and communities grew up around the great praying people, exactly like Mike Bickle. You know, he's a modern day Desert Father who's gone out into a complete No Man's Land. I know because I used to live in Kansas City, and he doesn't live in Kansas City, he lives in the dog end of it on a strip mall somewhere, and I in a sort of soulless building, and begins to just cry out to God, because he is a godly man who loves the Lord and says, "we just got to prepare for the Bride, the Bride, for the return of the Bridegroom." We've got to get ready for that.

So his solution is, don't engage in the politics of the city. Don't too much, you know, don't try and solve all that. Let's just be holy. This is a 2000 year old impulse that Mike Bickle, is channelling, and then what you find is everyone's very attracted to that. So one thing happens and people do internships, and before you know it, you've got a community and an economy that's growing up around the godly leader. That's how monasticism already began with Pachomius and all the rest of it, long before Benedict codified a way of life that became predominant.

And so we can trace that monastic impulse right the way through, which is less worried about apostolic mission and certainly couldn't care less about congregating people, and is let us club together and push into holiness and to pray. So here you have these three traditions, congregational, apostolic and monastic. And as I looked at them, I thought, well, I've spent, you know, whatever it was then 10–15 years of my life planting congregational churches. I know how to do it. If we keep doing this for the rest of my life, will we have got the job done?

And I realised, no, there's something else. We need the apostolic breakthrough thing and we need the monastic impulse. We need something that's qualitative, not just quantitative, something that's not just about lots and lots of big churches with lots of people doing Alpha Courses, something that is about encountering the presence of God that I find in that monastic tradition.

Add to that the fact that when you live in the UK, and Jill knows this, because where she literally is sitting right now, where she lives, we are haunted by the ghosts of monasticism, because before the Romans came to the British Isles to plant the kinds of churches that have become parish churches and congregational. We had monasteries, the Celts called them the *mainistir*, and these were centres of prayer and worship, of education. They were the schools. The first schools were the praying people, they were medical centres, they were centres of social justice, care for the poor,

places of hospitality, places of staff and creativity. If you've ever been to Dublin and seen the Book of Kells, I mean, just stunning creativity.

And I don't really know what they did on Sundays. I suspect they met, but that wasn't the thing. They were colonies of heaven, they were centres of *shalom*, they were forerunners, they were, if you like, anti-rights theology, that the world is being renewed, worked out in an actual community and worked out in farming, worked out in book binding, worked out in eating together.

And so I realised that our own tradition in the UK and really around Europe wasn't pure monasticism in the sense of withdrawing from Constantinople to be holy. It was deeply apostolic as well, because they were preaching the gospel to kings and queens. There's a lovely story about Aidan. He'd been off seeing the king of Northumbria, who's very impressed with him and so impressed that he gave him an incredible horse. And good old Aidan rode the horse out of the palace. And the very first beggar he met, he jumped off and gave the beggar the horse. And the king was furious. And Aidan said, but I thought you'd given it to me. So I thought I'd give it to this poor man here. So they were deeply, apostolically, sort of engaged.

But you read the writings of some of those great Celtic saints. They longed for their cell, they longed for their cave, they longed for the place they could withdraw to pray and commune with God. And then the more they prayed, the more they found themselves propelled out, infectious with the gospel, to preach the message of Jesus and fight injustice. And so it's tidal, it's like a lunar cycle, it's like breathing. There is the inhaling of the Spirit in the place of prayer. And then there is the exhaling in mission and justice.

And I don't know about you, I find it hard to inhale without then exhaling. I find it hard to keep exhaling without wanting to inhale. There's something in me that wants to deeply withdraw to my books and my place of prayer, my place of reflection. But then if I spend all my time there, there's something in me that says, we've got to go and fight human trafficking, we've got to go and preach the gospel, we got to go and plant churches, we've got to go and throw some parties.

And so I found, oh, what do I do with the fact that in myself I have this apostolic impulse, but also this monastic invitation? I see that in the history of our country and these extraordinary communities that have given rise to the very topography of our land. Anywhere in Ireland that has *Kil-* on the front of the name was originally a cell, hermit cell. It was a person of prayer who, you know, became a community, a city. Go to any town or city in Europe and you're going to find streets called Abbey this or Friar that, you're going to drink beer that's still brewed in honour of the monasteries and so on.

So I thought, wow, this was a type of spirituality that shaped culture, that defined the sociology and anthropology and even the architecture of society. And then as I finally – and I'll come into land here, Joe – I thought, let's think about 24/7 on one hand, I got into praying night and day because Sammy and I had planted our second church and we just became spiritually hungry and started a prayer room because we realised we were bad at prayer and we need to get good at it.

And I think our initial theology of prayer was basically, it's a big fat red switch, and if you do it hard enough and long enough, revival will come. And that got beaten out of us pretty quick, you know, and I mean it deeply. I got beaten out of me by my wife slipping into continual repeated epileptic fits and realising my prayers don't seem to work very well to stop her epilepsy. So how are they going to bring in revival? And realising, I think I need to go deeper.

I think I need to become a prayer rather than say prayer, I need to move prayer from a verb to a noun. I think I need to discover contemplative prayer. So I still believe in petition, intercession, spiritual warfare. I still passionately pray for revival and awakening, but I think it has to start with me, it has to start in me. And so somehow my own apostolic impulse was, was beginning to tango with this contemplative, very broken part of me, but reflective part of me, creative part of me.

And 24/7 here we are. We've been praying nonstop for 20 plus years. That's a deeply monastic thing. Every prayer room is a cell. You know, Jill is doing phenomenal work, establishing rhythms of prayer around the world. That's becoming normative. So there's a strong monastic impulse.

But we've also, this is very strong, especially in America, got a growing family of communities, of churches and of monasteries and houses of prayer that are profoundly apostolic. And so I just felt like, and I hate that this sounds quite pretentious, but we need some language for what we are doing that will combine the breathing in and the breathing out, the contemplative and the intercessory, the apostolic and the monastic. And so *aposto* is the mission piece and *monastic* is the prayer piece. And I increasingly believe that people who are good on activity, on mission and justice must learn to pray. We must learn to pray. If COVID-19 has taught us anything, we must learn to pray.

And for those of us who are more naturally mystical and introverted, perhaps, and prayerful, we must learn to engage, we must learn to take the revelations of the Father, the presence of the Father, and translate them into the culture of a world that is in deep, deep crisis. And I don't care whether any of you ever use the phrase "apostomonastic," I'd advise you not to use it, like, at Thanksgiving dinner or like, you know, at Starbucks, because they'll think you're an idiot. But I want you to hear the heart of it. We're called to be withdrawing and engaging. So that's it from me, Jill, over to you. Is that okay? Is that too long?

Joe Steinke

No, that's brilliant. Thank you, Pete, for that survey history and how we as a movement have stumbled our way into trying to hold those in a beautiful synergy together, that work together to fill out this body function of breathing in and prayer and exhaling and mission and participating in the generative nature of God, wanting to establish his Kingdom in the earth, and yet also the communion of the first commandment, to be in this belovedness of God in prayer and holding space for that just being without any other agenda. And somehow in the middle of that, we hold space for people to encounter that in. Somehow we've been graced as 24/7 Prayer to have that strain in it. So thank you for that.

Jill, I'd love you to speak to your insights personally as being a pioneer of a new monastic community in Hamilton, Ontario, and also recently been appointed as the Global Convener of the

Order of the Mustard Seed, which maybe you can explain a bit more of what that is to us, but how does your vocation, your history in your current reality, fit within this idea of apostomonasticism?

Jill Weber

Well, I love to answer that and I'll have to do it in just a minute because Kirk's locked out of the house and is frantically messaging!

Pete Greig

Whilst Jill attends to that, listen to this from Augustine in the *City of God*. He says this: "No man or woman has a right to lead such a life of contemplation as to forget, in his own case, the service due to his neighbour. Nor has any man a right to be so immersed in active life as to neglect the contemplation of God." So there you have it. In the *City of God*, St Augustine, we all have to combine the contemplative and the active, and that's not just individuals, that's us as communities. And I know some of you love the theory, so you're like getting off on this and others of you are like, what's he on about?

This stuff gets really practical, and I think that's some of what Jill is going to segue into in a moment. This is, this is super practical. At Emmaus right now, we have three prayer meetings a day. There's just a monastic rhythm of prayer. Jill is sitting where she's sitting because she is busy reopening a 1400 year old site as a place of prayer. And so this stuff gets real practical and there are budget sheets and programmes and training and all the rest of it. And Joe epitomises this as he cares for communities and churches and leaders like you guys, but then sits out on his porch, is quiet before the Lord and swims in the lake. You know, this is, this is a very ancient rhythm. So, Jo, I bet you've got some stuff to say while we're waiting for Jill.

Joe Steinke

Yes. I find it personally very, very accommodating in being part of a movement that can celebrate these things and hold them together as a rhythm of life and know that there's breadth, there's breath in things to expand into. And we have the luxury of being informed from all the great traditions of the Church, but then also creating a space together that can be informing one another. And so this is why the congregational church has the prayer space and why the monastic community has its open table to the community. It's resourcing the church of the city, how to pray, but also engage in mission. And so I think the thing I love about it is that there's also room for coherent unity together as a people with a variety and diversity of expression, and that we need what each of them bring to us in their unique design and their unique character. And so as Jill comes back to us from the rescue of Kirk, that sentence is kind of fun because the name Kirk means, you know, isn't it church?

Jill Weber

Well, actually his name is Kirkland, which means land of churches.

Joe Steinke

Land of churches, even better. Well, here we have Jill back to talk to us about the rescue of the land

of churches through monastic.

Jill Weber

Closing the door of the monastic.

Pete Greig

She just let the church into the monastery.

Jill Weber

So this was prophetic. I'll tell him. It will make him feel much less frustrated.

Pete Greig

Everything's prophetic, Jill.

Jill Weber

Yeah, I think the way I want to start that conversation is just a little bit of my journey, because I was trained as a church planter. For six years I had been apprenticing in a local church and was all set to kind of move towards ordination and started out. And then I bumped into an expression of new monasticism, of a house of prayer. I made the mistake of going to a prayer meeting one night. We've mentioned Mike Bickle, but Kansas City, a team from the house of prayer in Kansas City, which I agree with Pete, this is a modern expression of what I call the monastic experiment.

And I was just confronted with these modes of praying. And I think what just kind of got me was they had adopted and contextualised in modern culture this ancient monastic tradition of praying the Scriptures. And I sort of bumped into that and was just arrested by it. I was writing on it the other day. I said, I came, I saw, and I was conquered. Everything inside of me began to resonate. And they talked about a mode of praying and a mode of being and a mode of partnership with God as he was at work on the earth through prayer. And I had been ready to partner with God through activity and church planning and getting out there so that was an onramp for me. It was a startling interruption in my life into the prayer movement. And I actually was so strong that in that moment I knew that I thought I had been training for six years to plant churches and I had instead been training to plant new monastic expressions or houses of prayer. And so that just took me on a whole journey and I need to be reminded of the question, what are we talking about?

Joe Steinke

Well, no, that's great. So that's brought you to the personal, where you find maybe an expression that fits you personally in a sense of calling to bring both your apostolic impulse but also this monastic expression. And so why don't you describe a little bit about you planted in Hamilton, Ontario, what characterised that community in its work and then how you've landed now in the UK and the roles that you're in, and then maybe end with, like, where you're sitting and what's going on, you know, with this moment.

Jill Weber

So, yeah, I think the invitation for us was to build and to become really a house of prayer. And

I had no idea how costly both the building and the becoming would be over the years. But we started what I do, I call new monasticism, the big experiment. It's like, what, from these ancient traditions, can we pull into the now for us and dust them off and find the treasures and begin to work them out in our own context? And that took us on a 17 year journey, and it was a journey, it was fascinating in the way that the Spirit would lead us, because I think what was so vital for us in the journey was this practice of discernment. We didn't want to just build, we didn't want to read a book and build it. We wanted to listen to where God was at work building and shaping not only ourselves, but the community surround us and respond.

And so for me, part of the monastic impulse is you create space for God, that space for encounter, and then you invite God to come and fill that space however he wants, which is extremely risky because he doesn't necessarily want the things that we want. And we were constantly surprised. And the direction that it took us, and it took us. We started out very comfy. Our first house of prayer was in a Christian television station in a suburban town. So we had 24/7 security and we thought, great, 24/7 security, we could do 24/7 prayer. That's where we started. And then we went on this long pilgrimage journey and we ended up in a basement of a social enterprise cafe in a red light district in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Canada, you know.

Many of us actually moved from suburbs in the edges of our city, right into the centre of our city, and began to explore what does it look like for us to be the loving presence of a people of prayer right in the heart of intractable poverty, you know, generation after generation of darkness and hopelessness and despair, you know, and it was intense. Like I could measure my street by how many police cars could line up nose to nose on the street. We had a brothel around the corner. I could sit in my back yard and watch drug deals happening in the backyard kiddie corner of my neighbourhood.

But what does it look like for us to relocate? There's, there's a wonderful piece of work been done where they, a group of new monastic practitioners in the States has outlined these twelve marks of new monasticism, but one of them is relocation to the abandoned places of empire, right? That's the apostolic impulse, to push to the edges and to see where God is at work there.

They also talk about sharing economic resources with fellow community members. We lived in intentional community together. It talks about hospitality to a stranger as another mark of new monasticism. So we opened our home and had community dinners with people who normally we would meet at a soup kitchen, but wanted instead to invite to a family table, which was a very different dynamic and a far costlier one altogether.

Another mark of new monasticism is this humble submission to Christ's body, the Church. And I think the invitation for us was not to think the church doesn't know how to do this, but we New Monastics, we figured it out, we know how to do this right. We didn't want to posture our hearts in our community that way. And God in his kindness, opened up sort of this relational opportunity with the church in our city that was working together in mission. They wanted to see, they wanted to serve together for the good of the city.

But they approached us and said, we're good at serving, we're not so good at praying together for the good of the city. Can you come and help us? And so we had the opportunity to just hand in glove love and work with, and serve and grace the church in our city with the gifts that we had been given.

I think another important part of our journey, and I think this speaks also to the larger 24/7 ethos, is that we didn't want to build a big sort of house of prayer organisation of our own. We made an early decision, do we want to build an organisation or do we want to shift the culture of our city? And I think this is part of the apostolic mandate, is to create, to cultivate, to architect culture. And we wanted to see culture shift and change, particularly amongst the 20 to 30 year olds in our city. So as an example for us, when we first started our experiments in intentional Christian community, which we started because we heard an audio course from the 24/7 website on it and we listened to the audio course and we're like, sure, let's give it a go.

So we did. We started moving into houses together. We'd only heard of one or two small sort of peripheral communities that had tried that. But after we'd done it for eight years, it was normal Christian living in the interior city with young sort of Kingdom-advancing kids. They were all getting houses and all moving in together and all exploring and experimenting. What can it look like for our home to become a base, a place of *shalom* for our neighbourhood? So we wanted to shift culture and so that's been part of the grace for us. So that was a wonderful 17 and a half years of exploration.

And in particular, I think one bit was fun for us with regards to the apostomonasticism is we saw lots of young justice activists at work in our city, working really hard with sex trafficking and working with homeless kids, and we had tonnes and tonnes of vulnerable children in our city and doing all this kind of work, but they had no idea how to do it with any kind of sense of rhythm and sustainability. They had the breathing out, they didn't have the breathing in.

And so we had the opportunity and to create some spiritual formation frameworks for them to take them through on a journey, to learn how to breathe in and how to actually to cultivate spiritual practices that would shape their lives, to give them what they needed for the long haul of that cutting edge work they were doing in their city and continues to be probably one of our favourite bits about what we do.

So that was back at home, our little New Monastic community. And so in the midst of that, we learned about, stumbled on the other great monastic experiment within 24/7 prayer, which is the Order of the Mustard Seed. And so, I mean, Pete could probably speak into this. Yeah. Do you want to talk a little bit about the origin, sort of 2005 Pete and how that bubbled up in you guys?

Pete Greig

And, Jill, you are really the expert on this, but I'll do the backstory very quickly and you fill it in. You know, it's a weird thing when life gets hijacked by a prayer movement. I mean, that was never in anyone's career plan. Right. And we spent the first one or two, three, four years thinking, this will stop any moment and we can get on with the rest of our lives and go back to being normal

people. And then in the five year mark someone said to us, you know, you need to get ready for the ten year mark. And we're thinking this like a decade, that's a chunk of our lives.

And so we had to begin to ask questions about not just how do we do lots and lots and lots of praying, but what does this look like sustainably in terms of community and personally in terms of spiritual formation and discipleship. And we found a key. We've been inspired by the Moravians, the hundred year prayer meeting at Herrnhut under the leadership of Count Ludwig Nikolaus von Zinzendorf. And of course they were the ultimate example of apostomonasticism. You know, prayed night and day, highly mystical, but were the first to take the gospel to many nations on earth. Paid an enormous price to do so.

And so as we looked at their story, we realised the key, like the absolute essence of why they were who they were was the fact that their leader, Zinzendorf, had entered into a serious vow when he was a university student. And then when he was at Wittenberg with some friends, they had decided to wear a ring that said in Greek exactly what this one does. I don't know if the camera will be able to pick this up, but anyway, it's on there. It says, "no one lives for themselves." And their vow was to be true to Christ, to be kind to people. I love the echo back to the early 18th Century there that they didn't just say, we want to love people, which can sound awfully religious, but we're going to be kind to everyone and then to take the gospel to the nations. There you've got the monastic impulse of true to Christ and then you've got the apostolic impulse of gospel and the nations, and the two are mediated through the value and culture of kindness – it's beautiful.

And I just kind of thought, that'll do me. At the time, my life felt very chaotic and I felt the personal need of some boundedness and I was sick and tired of Christian metaphor and hype and I was like, yeah, but how do we do this stuff? Like, what does it mean to be a disciple in this brave new world? And so it was terrifying, but we decided to revive the ancient Order of the Mustard Seed, which was the name Zinzendorf had eventually come up with for his Order.

And I should say the reason that we now realise, the reason that when Zinzendorf was approached by a bunch of refugees to live on his land, the reason he said, "sure, have a load of it, build a village on it," was he'd made a promise to be true to Christ and kind to people, right? And the reason why, after five years of Herrnhut, when they're all rowing and dividing, he called them together, aged at 27, and told him to sort it out and repent, was he'd made a vow to be true to Christ.

And then the reason why, after five years, almost to the day of non stop prayer, he sent out the first missionaries of the Reformation from Herrnhut – Luther didn't do it – it was Zinzendorf, was he had made a vow to take the gospel to the nations at a time where Christendom believed that basically, evangelism had been done. Everyone's Christian. So that vow had profoundly shaped his whole life and mission. And it was amazing. The king of Denmark and Archbishop of Canterbury, you know, Native American indigenous king Tomachichi, was a member of the Order. All sorts of people were members of the Order of the Mustard Seed.

So we decided to revive it. We went to Holy Trinity Church in Clapham, London, which is where the Clapham Sect, if you're familiar with William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect, they used

to worship. And so we gathered there and my knees were knocking. I don't know if I've ever been so scared in all my life, but I think it was February 2005. We entered lifelong vows of the Order of the Mustard Seed. We promised for the rest of our lives to be true to Christ, kind to people, take the gospel to the nations, not to live for ourselves, but to live for one another.

And that was the beginning of really reviving the Order of the Mustard Seed. Many people either wear the ring or they have a tattoo to mark it out. And then we are now officially recognised by the Church of England as a religious order alongside the Franciscans and everyone else. And we've been through a process with a number of bishops and abbots to do that. And part of that was saying we need to put some governance in place. And we asked Jill Weber to be our first Global Convener. And Jill, I'm delighted to say, agreed, and is just now, I think, about a year into her second term, she's only allowed to do two terms, so she only got three year terms. She's done. This is your fourth year, right, Jill? Is that right?

Jill Weber

I have three more. Three more years to go. I've just finished my third year.

Pete Greig

Three more years to go, and then she's not allowed to be like the Global Convener anymore, so it could be anyone. And someone recently said to me, a bishop recently said to me, I think the Order of the Mustard Seed is the fastest growing religious order in the world, which I thought was really encouraging until I realised that most religious orders are declining and the ones that are growing, they do everything slowly. So it's not as impressive as it sounds, but there's something amazing under Jill's leadership. So, Jill, just fill people in with that. That aspect of our Rule of Life, our way of life and the architecture that gives to the way that we build apostomonastic community.

Jill Weber

Yeah, thanks, Pete. I think the early work that the Order of the Mustard Seed folks did after 2005 was to start to look at, what are the practices that hold these, that enfold these promises that we have made and so identified six key practices. So prayer, of course, creativity, mercy and justice, mission, learning and hospitality, and begin to formulate together.

And in the first of our New Monastic communities that we had in 24/7 prayer, which was the Reading boiler room, they created a boiler room Rule of Life and just said, so if we're going to live into these three vows and these six practices, we'll do it individually, but then how do we actually do it together? How do we shape a common Rule of Life together? So that was an early experiment in that.

But since 2005, Pete and the whole first cohort, just as individuals, began to live into these vows and into these spiritual practices and just really quietly, they didn't make a big brouhaha, they didn't try and build it too much, but then it's just, we've just moved into a new season. It's been a step change, hasn't it, Pete? And just really formalising everything and getting proper constitutional documents, visitors, etcetera and so. And then beginning to just see it expand, I think a fun part of the work of the rule, the Order of the Mustard Seed, but also part of the other

24/7 family, is the establishment of Lectio 365.

I think that's an important part of who we are, because what we've done with this daily devotional app is we've taken our three vows and our six practices, and we're sharing it with the world. And in this little daily devotional, ten minutes a day, meditating on Scriptures together and letting the Word and those six practices shape our lives. And so we've got 60,000 regular users who are going on the journey with us right now and being invited into these lifestyles of prayer and mission and justice, coming together in a beautiful fusional way. And so that's been just an exciting part of 24/7's journey and also the Order of the Mustard Seed. So three of the four main contributors are members of the Order. So really, it's our prayer book, but we're just sharing it with the rest of the world.

Joe Steinke

And so, Jill, if I were to be interested in leaning in that direction, exploring what it might mean to individually pursue coming into the Order of the Mustard Seed, what would be my process?

Jill Weber

The process, it depends if you're coming out of a 24/7 context or not. So if you're part of, if you're coming, just maybe you've read or participated in Lectio 365 and you love it and you've looked in the About section, you're like, oh, there's a thing called 24/7 Prayer in the Order of the Mustard Seed. They would contact our office through our website, which is orderofthemustardseed.com, and then we would invite those people on a three month period of exploration where they would learn about 24/7 Prayer. We would get them to read Pete's books, *Red Moon Rising* and *Dirty Glory*, which is his exploration of those motifs in his own life and, and how that's kind of spilled over to create this whole movement by the grace of God. And so we'd introduce them to that narrative and that story and the ethos of the whole 24/7 movement.

And then because 24/7 is highly relational, in the Order of the Mustard Seed, they would need to meet a member of the Order and get to know them and build some relationship with them. It's at that point when we then say, okay, well, you kind of get a sense of who we are, a sense that perhaps you want to go this journey. And then they would begin a nine month period of preparation.

And so in that period of preparation, they would be put in learning spiritual formation cohorts, all online at this juncture with, with other people who set their heart on pilgrimage, who want to learn and grow. And during that, that season of preparation, there'd be biblical reflection. We've been encouraging them to have a spiritual director or soul friend, somebody they meet with one on one, to talk about God's invitations to them in the midst of that journey. We encourage them to go on mission or pilgrimage, and there's a lot of reading involved as well, so they can understand the history of the Order, the nature of vow taking, and sort of everything they need to know to get their hearts ready for that moment.

And then it culminates in a vow ceremony. This year, it's online. We're all gathering digitally from the four corners of the earth into the upper Zoom. And there's this kind of beautiful liturgical moment where those of us who have already taken vows, we actually take off our rings and we

say, “God, we’re so sorry for all the ways we’ve mucked up and broken our vows this year.” And then we put our rings back on. And then all the new candidates and the members alike step into that moment where we take our vows again before the Lord. And it’s a beautiful moment.

And in the context of their preparation, they write a personal customary. So they take those six practices in their own context and they imagine and envisage, what does this look like for me here and now? Because each of them is embedded in their own church, their own particular context, and we don’t want to create a new Order of the Mustard Seed church. We want to empower them as they’re embedded where God has planted them, so that it can flourish in that place. And so they write a personal customary, their own contextualised version of their Rule of Life, and then that carries them into the future. So that’s the journey. It’s a beautiful journey. It’s a transformational journey, really. This year we’ve got 80 people on that journey, probably 65 of which we’ll be taking vows in a week from now at our 24/7 Gathering. Yes.

Joe Steinke

That’s brilliant. Thanks for that explanation. And it gives us an insight into how the Order of the Mustard Seeds evolved and flourishing now, you know, as a strain within our movement. So, lastly, Jill, would you just give a context for where you sit right now and what sort of miracle we’re experiencing with that, with being in the setting that you’re in and maybe some of the forecast of vision for this idea of a mother house or whatever is being described around Waverley Abbey and its journey to get there in your current situation?

Jill Weber

Sure. Pete, do you want to speak into this as well?

Pete Greig

Yeah, you got it.

Jill Weber

He’s the one who lured me in. Pete invited me. I remember walking through the ruins – what we’ve got right outside my window are the ruins of Waverley Abbey. And so that is the ruins of a Cistercian monastery. The first Cistercian monastery in the UK, established in 1128. But not only that, before that, at the time of the Council of Whitby, King Cadwellyn, a local Celtic king, had given the land around 700 for a prayer community. So there’s been prayer on this site over a millennium. That’s ridiculous. Right?

And with the Celtic monastic impulse right at the very beginning in these Celtic monastic sites, it would have been prayer and education and the nurturance of community and this outward focus. And of course, as in the Cistercians, Waverley Abbey went on to plant another eleven abbeys across the UK. So historically, it was a mother house that pushed the gospel to the edges of this lovely island called the UK. And so there’s this heritage, there’s a well that’s been dug here, there’s seeds sown into the ground of lives given to prayer and mission and justice and God in his kindness, invited us by virtue, in the guise of an invitation from the organisation that owns this land.

So CWR, which is now just rebranded as Waverley Abbey, have been on this property since 1955. So it was Selwyn Hughes planted here. Do you want to talk about Selwyn for a minute, Pete? I think *Every Day with Jesus* is how he's known. He was just super passionate about helping people engage with the Scriptures to encounter Jesus every day. Is that. What else should we say about him?

Pete Greig

Oh, you're doing great, Jill. Yeah, I mean, I don't know, guys. I think we believe the Holy Spirit can fill places as well as people and that land can carry the presence of God. When we were first invited into this space that Jill's describing, which is of momentous spiritual, historical significance, I took one of our prophetic friends, Bill Cusack, down to the site and as we walked around it, he could literally hear the prayers coming out of the ground. And I don't doubt that. I don't get those kind of things, but I don't doubt he said to me, he felt like if he pressed record on his iPhone, he could record, he could hear the prayers.

But it seems to me that when you've had prayer on a site for 1400 years, like going right back closer to the Lord Jesus by far, than, you know, something gets embedded in the space. The Celts called it a "thin place", whether the veil between heaven and earth is particularly porous and so King Cadwellyn made it a place of prayer from the 7th Century through to the 12th Century.

Then the Cistercians, under Bernard of Clairvaux's leadership, built proper stone buildings there. So that's from the 1100s through to the 1500s, 400 years. Not just to praying, but working the land, caring for the sick, educating kids, all the stuff we talked about, spectacular, vast buildings.

I don't know, Joe, if you're able to let me give information to share – I can show people a picture. And then Henry VIII banned the monasteries, and so the thing dissolved, and then along comes this guy Selwyn. He's leading a phenomenal ministry called CWR, which stood at the time for Crusade for World Revival. And they made this their headquarters, this incredible house next to these ruins. Let me show you this picture. Here's some of the ruins there. That's just pretty much spitting distance from where Jill is sitting right now. It's one of the old buildings Hollywood uses this as a set.

You know, Jill's sitting in the adjacent house, which goes back to the 18th century and was built by former Chancellor of the Exchequer. So that's second most senior politician on the land. Florence Nightingale used to hang out in the house and so on. This is an incredible sight. And CWR has been doing daily devotionals for many years, over a million users at its peak, helping people to encounter God each day through Scripture. One of the leaders of Christian counselling training in Europe. My wife Sammy is training that right now.

And so they've invited us to partner with them in reopening the well of prayer. And so you'll be hearing the themes that we've been talking about throughout this time together. Coming through here, we have a place of prayer in physical space that is also seeking to engage missionally, educationally, pastorally, binding up broken hearts, counselling, and so on. So this is the apostomonastic impulse.

And I knew that when that conversation began, there was no one better in the world to head that up than Jill. And I was so thrilled when she agreed to relocate country, she and Kirk. And it's early days, it's very, very small, but we're beginning to reopen that space. We hope that one day it'll become a mother house for the whole 24/7 Prayer movement as we seek to plant apostomonastic communities around the world at a time where people are looking for new models of community. How to do relationship, how to do family, how to engage with the land, how to live in rhythm with the seasons, how to have a holistic faith that integrates creativity and commerce with prayer.

And, you know, the Lord said to me, if we do it here, other people will do it everywhere else because everyone is looking for models right now. How do you build types of church that aren't just congregational? Those are good and important and necessary, but are more digging into the monastic and the apostolic streams of the church. And so no pressure, Jill. That's what she's trying to develop there. But it's very early days in a very amazing location.

Jill Weber

Okay. You said it. Well, Pete, I don't know that I have anything to add. We're calling it the Seed Community right now. We just feel like we're just kind of sowing ourselves into the ground, cultivating this space and watching to see what grows. And I think the beautiful thing about seeds is they're small, they're not much to look at, but certainly with a mustard seed, they proliferate and they just spread and they just cover the earth? So that's the vision that we're carrying.

Pete Greig

Wow.

Joe Steinke

So thank you guys so much. This is like exactly the frame I wanted to put around this idea and its expression within our movement, historically rooted, rich tradition, and also this experimental unfolding of it within our generation. But that this is what's characterising a bit of the shape of our work and our future together. How are we going to build these communities that have this more holistic rhythm and social constructs of the Kingdom, you know, and it's just a beautiful thing and I think I'm hungry for it.

And I know another generation coming up. Boy, you start describing this space and I think there's something that could awaken to say, could our expression in our generation of the church, you know what I mean, really apply ourselves to that sort of apostolic, monastic, beautiful movement, but also learn how to sit within the ebb and flow of prayer and mission and the rhythms of life and getting back into the work of our hands and creativity and, just something that is an integrated life instead of an extricated life that is binary and dualistic and stuff.

And so I love it. I just love this stuff. Thank you so much, you guys. This is longer than any of our teachings, but this is pointing at something, right? I think we're pointing at a hopeful future and something that the Lord's given us to steward together and obviously giving the firstfruits to garden in the plot. So thanks so much, Pete. Great to have you and Jill. Lovely.

Jill Weber

Great.

Joe Steinke

Thanks.

Jill Weber

Thanks for the chance to talk about the things that we love to talk about. Thanks, Joe.

Pete Greig

Yeah.

Joe Steinke

Awesome. All right.

Pete Greig

Thanks, Joe.

Joe Steinke

Yeah. Have a great time in your group's discussion about these things, and I'm sure your imaginations are running wild. And hopefully some questions that we'll curate for you will help you dig in a bit with each other on this idea of apostomonasticism, and its marrying to our movement in our current moment together. All right. Bless you, guys.

Jill Weber

Peace.

Pete Greig

Bye.



Order of the
Mustard Seed