



## Season 12: Episode 2 | Andrew Ollerton & Alanzo Paul | Are We Ready for Gen Z's Questions About the Bible?

Hello and welcome to Scripture Untangled, a podcast by the Canadian Bible Society. My name is Joanna la Fleur, I'm a friend of the Canadian Bible Society and I'm going to be your guide for today's episode. Today I'm going to be bringing you a conversation with Andrew Ollerton and Alanzo Paul, and this is in follow-up to *The Bible is Trending* Tour we did together in three cities in Canada in 2025.

Dr. Andrew Ollerton is a theologian, pastor, and one of today's most gifted Bible communicators. He has spent years helping ordinary people make sense of Scripture through the Bible Society's resources, including The Bible Course, which he developed as an accessible eight-session journey through the big story of the Bible. Andrew has led churches, teaches widely, and is known for making deep theological ideas simple, engaging, and life-giving.

He lives in the UK with his wife and kids and apparently, they also have two fish, a snake, and a dog.

Alanzo Paul also joins us and he's from the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics, where he speaks globally on questions of meaning and God, identity, suffering, the biggest longings of the human heart. He is born and raised in Calgary, but he spent the last part of his life over there in the UK.

He came to faith out of 10 years of drug addiction and then later worked in the corporate world and entrepreneurship before entering full-time ministry. He holds theology degrees from Oxford and a Master of Arts in Theological Studies from

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U of T, where he explored domestic metaphysics and research. So, a brilliant guy with lots to talk about as well.

Together today we're talking with Andrew and Alanzo about the power of Scripture, what's going on in culture, and why the Bible is experiencing a surprising resurgence in the hearts and minds of Gen Z and then Gen Alpha coming up after them. So we're going to revisit some of the big themes from the Why the Bible is showing up everywhere from podcasts and TikTok celebrities, young adults who are experiencing an openness that we may not have expected and how the church can respond to this generation's interest in God's Word. So, settle in, this is going to be a rich conversation, and I think it's also going to be a hopeful encouragement to you.

Let's get started.

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**Joanna:** Andrew, Alanzo, welcome back to Scripture Untangled

We're here on the podcast today talking about a bigger conversation we've had, which was *The Bible is Trending*. And we had this Canadian tour and some people listening might have been there, but most people maybe didn't have an opportunity. We were in a few cities in Canada in 2025 and maybe more to come in 2026.

But I'm wondering, since we did that tour and you continue on, this idea of *The Bible is Trending*. What has continued to resonate with you as you've continued in your work, walked around, gone around the world? Maybe you've seen more news articles, media coverage. What is something that is sort of standing out to you today?

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**Andrew:** I think for me, just to jump in first if that's okay, I think when we pitched the event, *The Bible is Trending*, we were slightly doing it kind of almost with a little bit of a sense of, you know, we think this is happening, but there wasn't any hard data.

It was just kind of a sense that the Bible was back in the conversation. It was a bit more anecdotal. Since we did those events, actually, the organization I work for, Bible Society in the UK, has published "The Quiet Revival," Research that's gone viral and global.

So you probably guys have heard about it in Canada, I think as well, because, you know, really suddenly there was statistical evidence to show, no, no, the Christian faith really is having a bit of a resurgence and the Bible in particular is back in the public conversation. Alongside "The Quiet Revival," there's been statistics in North America and the UK about Bible sales surging. So, I think, in a way, we were kind of, I look back and think we were slightly ahead of the curve, really, in just calling it out.

And others were as well. It wasn't just us in saying, no, look, the Bible really is back in conversation. I have to say for myself, though, I'm not really sort of wired with statistics.

I've got to say that's not what gets my heart racing. It's more stories. It's real people.

And I have been meeting more and more young men, especially, but not exclusively, young men, especially who just are deep diving into the Bible. Some of them have never been to church. Others are turning up to church, knowing almost more than most people in the church about the Bible, because they've been all over it on YouTube, online.

And I've got to say, I'm sort of feeling by the end of 2025, way more confident than we were at the start of 25. The Bible really is trending. I'm not saying everyone's out there buying Bibles right now.

But quite a few people are deep diving into the old book.

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**Joanna:** And so, Andrew, maybe as a follow up, do you have any sense of why? Maybe you're not looking at the data, but maybe in those anecdotal stories, what is a theme that's emerging? Why are people interested?

**Andrew:** Got to give a multifaceted explanation. I think it's not one thing.

You listen to different stories and its different things. For some, it's an intellectual interest. I think there have been cases made, especially by the likes of the British historian Tom Holland and others, saying that actually the Western culture, which feels like it's facing a bit of a meaning crisis at the moment, that the Western culture we inhabit is actually more founded on Judeo-Christian values than we realized.

And some people are buying Bibles really because they've been drawn into that conversation. Is that really the case? Is it actually the case that the values we hold dear, and think are obvious are actually more from the Bible than biology, for example? When it comes to human rights, there's nothing biologically that you can demonstrate that we're all equal. But that value seems to come more from Genesis than anywhere else.

So, I think for some, it's an intellectual pursuit. For others, I think it's a little bit more personal. In other words, there's a lot of geopolitical instability.

There's a sense that the secular narrative is bankrupt. It doesn't give people a sense of meaning or purpose in their lives. And that can push people to some dark places, mental health crisis and all sorts of things that leave people almost reaching out for something solid, something that doesn't give way, something transcendent, I think, something that goes bigger than the values and bigger than the stories that we can make up when we're trying to form our own identities by making up our own stories.

And there's such pressure there, cross-pressure. The buffered self, as Charles Taylor would refer to it, is a pressured way to live. And I think for some people, they're just saying, well, actually, what if there's something ancient, something transcendent that

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gives meaning and purpose in a way that the modern moment can't? And again, I think of stories.

I think of one young man. I was just literally messaging him today. He's just an amazing young guy, but he nearly ended his life.

He was sat on the edge of a quarry about to jump off because he felt there was absolutely no purpose to his life. He's given me permission to share the story, by the way. And he basically just heard a voice telling him, this is not how your story ends.

He had no church background at all. And so instead of jumping off the quarry, he went down, walked down, fortunately, and went and bought a Bible. And I think of him, he just started in Genesis, just started reading the Bible.

And I met him only a couple of weeks later. And he's now become a Christian. He's now deep diving into the Bible every night.

And I think of him, I just think, you know, this isn't just an intellectual curiosity for some people, it's life or death, really. So, it's a long-winded answer to your question. I think there's many different facets and reasons, some intellectual, some more personal, but it's definitely happening.

**Joanna:** Well, Alanzo, we want to hear from you in a second, too. It reminds me of this intellectual academic atheist we just heard, who she was saying, or sorry, who has become a Christian. And she was saying the problem with atheism or secularism is you, like the answer you're providing is there is nothing.

And so, you offer nothing to people. But Christianity and, I mean, certainly the Bible is a text that offers an intriguing story that at least people are looking into. I mean, Alanzo, along those lines, your research looking at the decline of atheism, because it seems like atheism is leaving people wanting, but we're seeing this surge in spiritual exploration.

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You're seeing this in, again, whether anecdotal or the data, we're thinking about, you talk about shamanism, you talk about witch talk on, you know, this is stuff on TikTok and social media, occultic practices are on the rise. And then, but you also talk about this joy economy, people are seeking joy, they're trying to find what makes them happy. But, you know, what is this saying to us about the place of the Bible in this conversation? People are saying atheism, not so much, but broadly spiritual in a thousand different directions, and Christianity is only one of those choices.

**Alanzo:** Yeah, I think it's something similar to what Andrew was just saying. With the rise of the *Four Horsemen of New Atheism* back in 2001, just after 9-11, you had Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris and the late Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, and it was a very strident, aggressive form of atheism, hence the name new atheism, that came along and really tried to pummel Christianity and spirituality in general out of the public conversation and out of our existential experience with the world, including individuals like Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who you may have been referring to at the beginning of your question, Joanna. And she's now come around full circle to Christianity from her new atheism, which is very interesting.

And so, there's a lot going on there in your question, and what we're seeing out here. Like Andrew, I'm having young guys come up to me. For example, I was at the gym, I'm a gym bro, and I love going to the gym, and I view it as one of my mission fields.

And I had a young guy come up to me, I'll keep his name anonymous, and he said to me, oh, Alanzo, I think I need to go to church. And I'm like, well, why is that? I agree, you do need to come to church. I'll see you there on Sunday.

And he says, no, no, no, because I keep having dreams about Jesus. And I'm like, well, you know, I've been praying for you for about a year and a half, so that doesn't strike me as that odd. And he's like, that's why I'm having dreams about Jesus.

And so, he came with me to church a couple of weeks after that conversation. And it was the first time he had been in church in well over a decade. And for him, what

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resonated, what's beginning to be so appealing about the Christian worldview is this unshakable sense of brokenness, needing to be made right, to be forgiven, and to be made whole.

And I think that comes back to one of the ideas I was sharing on the tour that I borrowed from John Cunningham, a philosopher here in the UK, about this existential incompleteness. We recognize that, yes, the New Atheist Movement in our secular West was the predominant view amongst the educated and really did a number on a lot of people's spirituality. But there's this unshakable-ness of, I do feel incomplete in some serious way.

And I'm feeling impoverished by this naturalistic, scientific atheism. And so, I'm seeing this, as I was sharing on the tour, I'm seeing this rise of curiosity, very much like Andrew, especially amongst young people. I'm the director of "ReBoot," which is a youth apologetics initiative through ACA, the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics, whom I work for.

And they're just hungry to have their questions responded to, to get a free Bible, to get an idea of what the big story is of the Bible, because they're curious, and they're hungry for more, and they want more. And it's a very exciting time. Joanna, just anecdotally, one last time, I'm seeing young people respond to a gospel invitation every single youth event that I go to.

I was just in Winchester on the weekend, and out of 110 young people that were there, we've seen at least 30 of them respond to a call to repentance, faith in Christ, and a commitment to discipleship, after we gave two apologetics talks and fielded a long time of their questions. And we're seeing that everywhere we go. I was just in Ilford a couple weekends before that.

We were doing another big "ReBoot" event, over 300 kids there, and dozens, dozens of kids responding after a full day of apologetics to, I want to take this step of faith. I'm seeing that it's intellectually credible. I'm seeing that there's something here

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existentially that can complete me, that can redress the existential incompleteness that I'm sharing. And now I want to take that final step of, okay, I'm going to enter into the worldview and explore it for myself.

**Joanna:** Well, and Alonso, the follow-up I have there is, not that you're surveying everyone, but broadly speaking, who is coming to that kind of event? What I mean by that is, are these youth group kids who needed an intellectual foundation for the faith they've been raised in? Are these high schoolers who are bringing their friends? What kind of, maybe it's everything, maybe you're finding it's every kind of person, but is it that it's the kids raised in church who needed a solid foundation? Or are these people from atheistic or other religious backgrounds?

**Alanzo:** Both, both. You're going to have, from the Christian side, you're going to have people there that just because they're present in a youth group does not mean that they are Christian.

That does not mean that they have a robust relationship with the living God. They are there because their parents want them there, or for any sort of reason. Maybe there's some girl there, they want to be there, or because their friends are there, or their mates, we'd say over here, are there, and so they want to be there.

So, there's all sorts of reasons for why they would be present. So, when we do our events, we don't assume that they have read the Bible, and we don't assume that they are, in fact, Christian. But I will tell you that it's really interesting to me the diversity of the young people that come to our events. So, we have some of the Christians there that really do want to get some of their big, tricky, thorny questions responded to. Then we have some that are just sort of, they're just there because their parents want them there. And then we have some that are either invited to come, or they're very curious and they heard about it through a friend or some other resource, maybe an adult in their life, and they come.

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Like, for example, we had an openly trans individual come, really nice chap who came and had some really meaningful conversations with us, so myself and my team, during our breakouts on sexuality, as well as afterwards, we were talking about politics together. And in fact, this individual responded, was one of the individuals that responded to the gospel invitation. So, we're getting all sorts of individuals come up.

It isn't just what you would think of like a classic youth apologetics or a youth event.

**Joanna:** I guess, you know, essentially, maybe the question behind the question is, are we preaching to the choir? But what you're saying is, sure, there's a choir there, but there's many more types of people. Andrew, something that you did about this in the tour is, when we talk about the all kinds of people, was Ethiopian eunuch.

You used this when we were in The Bible is Trending Tour in Canada. You talked about Acts 8, the Ethiopian eunuch who's reading the Scriptures in his chariot and is sent someone to help explain these things to him. Anyways, tell us a little bit about this as sort of a character, but also how you're seeing that kind of play out as an illustration for today.

**Andrew:** Yeah, that's in Acts 8. Thanks, Joanna. It's a good reminder because I think that story for me is a little, it's not just a story. There's something archetypal about the way that these characters, the Philip, Christian and the Ethiopian, Curious character, they represent two different audiences.

And the Ethiopian is interesting. I mean, he's mysterious for one thing. We don't know his backstory.

Presumably a black African man. He's a VIP, incredibly elite in the ancient world. He's riding in a private chariot. The guy can read, which is top 1%. He owns his own scrolls. And yet he's also been sexually altered as a eunuch.

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He's probably carried some stigma attached to that as well. So, he's an intriguing character. We don't know his backstory.

But what we do know is that he is reading a portion of Israel's Scriptures. Why he's reading that, again, we don't know. But he seems to be on some kind of metaphorical spiritual journey, as well as a literal journey.

He's literally traveling home. Having been to the temple, he's still confused about what this whole message is about. And I think I like the story because I feel like that's where a lot of people in our culture are at.

Firstly, they're incredibly open. And it's an authentic, genuine openness. This guy, the Ethiopian eunuch, he would like the Bible to be true.

He's not reading it to disprove it like some new atheist skeptics would have in the past. The only reason they'd ever read the Bible is so they could show how ridiculous it is. Quite the opposite.

He's reading it because he wants it to make sense. And this is what I feel is so refreshing, and at times almost disarming with the people that I'm meeting and having conversations with. It's such an honest search.

I think of this one young guy who lives down the road from me, and I've just got into connection with him recently. He's just asking the most honest but deep questions about the Bible because he wants it to be true. But he's not just going to believe it, you know, taking it on trust.

He needs to feel like it makes sense. And so, the intriguing thing about the Ethiopian eunuch is that he wants it to make sense. He's incredibly educated, obviously a tremendously sharp guy.

But he can't get there on his own. He can't actually understand the Scriptures without some help. And that's where the other person, Philip, comes in.

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And I feel like this is one of the challenges that the church is facing at the moment. I feel like one of the things we were saying in *The Bible is Trending* events is there are more and more curious seekers coming down the road in our cultural moments. There are more and more people looking into the Bible, and their search is an honest one.

The challenge is there aren't that many Philips and Philippas who are ready to sit next to the honest seeker and not preach sermons at them, but in conversational manner, help them on their journey, help make sense of the Bible. So often, I think what's actually happening, certainly in the UK context, is that the church's lack of Bible engagement is being exposed by the fact that people from outside the church are coming in asking questions because they're searching in a deep way. And the church isn't ready to give answers, isn't ready to respond.

So, it's all part of why I think we do need the work that Alanzo is doing with "Reboot," resources like *The Bible Course* that I've been involved in creating. We've got to raise the standard of Bible engagement, the kind of competence with the Bible in the church, because these young guys, young girls, they're not wanting shallow, trite, easy answers. They're deep.

They're often beginning in the Old Testament. All of the people I've mentioned, without exception, the three or so stories I've referred to, every one of them began the Bible where you'd expect to begin a book, which is at the beginning, right? It's Genesis. So, they're deep into the Old Testament.

And it's time for the church to really be ready to sit alongside like Philipp does. And I love the fact in that story that Philipp says, effectively, just on the fly, he looks at what the guy's reading, as it happens to be in Isaiah the prophet. And he says, well, let's start there.

Let's talk about that. Philipp could just kind of begin where he was at. And I think that's the challenge for the church.

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**Alanzo:** Yeah, I wonder how much of this is a recognition of the temporality or transience of life. So, I was just to continue with this theme of story and narrative is I came across a story where there was a young lady who was going through an existential crisis. And she has a dream one day.

And in the dream, she hears this voice. And this voice says, um, you need to you need to find me. My name is Father of Jesus.

This girl had no Christian background. Her parents weren't a Christian.

It's just in the midst of this crisis. And has this dream out of nowhere goes and finds some Christians because of the name of Jesus and says, what is going on here? I need to figure out what this means. And it's so interesting that this is the sort of the way that God reveals himself to her.

You would think that right, like the father referring to himself as "Oh, I'm Father, Father of Jesus." And it's just very beautiful to me. And I think that there's a lot of especially young people, but maybe even young adults that have placed their hope in some sort of goal, some sort of aim in life, some sort of accomplishment, and they get to the end of it.

And they feel like this just has not delivered what I hoped it would. And it is like the author of Ecclesiastes would say, you know, it's just a vapor is just here one second and gone the next. One of my favorite Oxford poets is a chap named John Donne.

I don't know if you guys are ever familiar with John Donne. He wrote the sonnet. *No man is an island*.

If that's familiar to you. And he once wrote that, "love built on beauty, soon as beauty dies." And it's talking about the transience of beauty, the temporality of beauty in that.

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But what's so interesting is when we get to have this time with young people or young adults, and we get to share the gospel, that there is a beauty that love can be built on that a life can be built on that isn't temporal like that isn't transient like that.

And I think that that is quite appealing to a lot of people in this cultural moment.

**Joanna:** Well, it reminds me of this quote I have here from our talks, this Jordan Peterson borrowing from him, you say the Bible is way more true than true, or there's a beauty, it's more beautiful than beautiful, more true than true.

To pull from what you're saying as well, Alanzo. So how do we get to that depth? I think there's, there's the average person who I agree that part of the problem is we need more people who are the Phillips ready to respond to the Ethiopian that we maybe don't feel equipped for that. So how do we communicate? You know, without going into we want to have like honest and deep answers, but we don't want to overwhelm people.

How do we approach this, I guess, this truer than true?

**Andrew:** I mean, I think one thing that we're picking up on generally is that there is a vibe shift in the culture that we need to almost recognize. In other words, I think the depth that you go into will be determined by the person or context that you're engaging with. But what I think is, is important before you get to the depth question, is the tone question, you know, the tone is so important.

We are not talking, we're not sparring with Richard Dawkins anymore, primarily, we're sitting next to someone who is just honestly wanting to make sense of the Bible, wanting to make sense of truth. And it's a different kind of tone. And I think people from certainly from my generation, you know, where when I was a teenager, the Bible was a sort was a point of hostility, a point of conflict, a point of ridicule.

It's almost partly we just got to realize things have shifted. And we're not fighting yesterday's battles anymore. So, some of it's about tone.

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And I think the tone needs to be that of taking on face value that the fact that people's questions and issues are genuine, but recognizing as well that actually, just because someone is into the Bible, just because they like the Ethiopian unit, just because they're getting into it doesn't mean it's a home run doesn't mean it's plain sailing. Especially if you start at the beginning of the Bible, you know, you're going to bump into some challenging things. And one of the interesting things about "The Quiet Revival," research is that it didn't just highlight the positives.

And I feel almost like our conversation, the one of the risks with it so far as it says, it could sound as if it's just a home run, everyone's, you know, well, actually, that's not the case. In "The Quiet Revival," research, it showed that when people get into the Bible, I think it was 35% of young people inside the church. So, these are Christian, or at least churchgoing young people. 35% said that when they read certain parts of the Bible, it undermines their faith. And I found that really intriguing and alarming. I think it's saying effectively that sometimes our faith is quite shallow as Christians.

It's faith in a particularly highly curated version of the Christian faith, a highly curated version of Jesus. And when we actually read the Bible, get into the actual text of the Bible, especially often the Old Testament, we struggle, we struggle to reconcile what we're reading there with who we thought we would put faith in, you know, and the simplicity of that. So, I think the tone is important as much as the depth.

But I also think, you know, the depth will be in part determined by the person we're speaking to. I actually think it's important to recognize that, just because people are new to the Christian faith, in no way means that they want Bible light. What I'm seeing is the opposite, that actually a lot of young people are going deep into quite sophisticated apologetic debates and arguments online. And often by the time they reach church, they're already quite engaged, quite knowledgeable, actually.

So, you know, how where we start needs to be really sensitive to the person. There's a young guy going to a church just down the road from where we live. And he's only

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16. And I think he turned up at church with a friend and they just assumed... it's an older congregation.

They just assumed this must be some kind of joke, you know, like, why would a 16-year-old come to this church? It just didn't make any sense to them. Turns out, he'd been already all over exploring the Christian faith online. And they tried to give him a sort of really simple, like little booklet about Jesus.

And his reply was, you know, that's really kind of you. But I'm currently reading Augustine's Confessions, you know, is there any? Have you got anything a bit more? And this, this guy had never been to church before.

**Joanna:** But he wants a full steak dinner and you're offering him.

**Andrew:** Exactly.

**Joanna:** You know, chicken nuggets from McDonald's.

**Andrew:** Yeah, exactly. The Times newspaper in the UK ran an article and it was entitled full fat faith. And it was really just making the point that young people are often wanting something meaty and challenging.

And so, look, the depth will depend on the person. But the tone is really important, I think. We're not debating with Richard Dawkins here.

We're talking to people who are sincere.

**Alanzo:** Yeah. And just to corroborate what Andrew is saying, too, I think there was a really important point on tone.

So, one of the, one of the cultures that we try to embody at Reboot and at Okka is one of kindness and credibility. So, we're, the tone, we're trying to mirror the biblical mandate for apologetics, First Peter 3:15, that it is gentle and that it is respectful, giving the reason for the hope that we have. But also grounded in credibility. So that's what we specialize in.

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But I think the way that you cash out that idea for just somebody that's enthusiastic about reaching people with the gospel is, I cannot tell you how effective it is sharing your story, your experience with God. What difference Jesus Christ has made in your life from who you were before and who you are now. And then, like Andrew was saying, going through the Bible with them and not that Bible light. I cannot, I'm just, when you were saying that, Andrew, I was like, yes and amen, because the young people that I come to, they're like, if you think I'm going to hell, just tell me, you know, don't gloss over things, don't avoid things, like let's get into the thick of things.

They want to have conversations about, I don't know, determinism and God's divine foreknowledge. How are those things, you know, Biblical prophecy and free will, how do we harmonize these things? Or they want to know about the different views of hell, the different views of the Christian sexual ethic. They want to know what's going on with the conquest in Canaan.

They want to know what's going on in some of those difficult passages in Genesis, let's say, like old earth, young earth, Genesis 34, all of those sorts of things, some of the horrific stories and judges. So, what Andrew was saying, I think, is reflecting reality. This is what young people want.

And we wouldn't do them a good service if we just kept it sort of that seeker-friendly, superficial type of Christianity.

**Joanna:** Yeah, that's good.

**Andrew:** I think as well, just to jump in as well, I totally agree Alanzo.

And I think I really like what you said, it's kind of tone. And then it's also just transparency, if we can use those two words, there's a tone there. I think the transparency point is really important that you raise as well, which is young people are not impressed by us fudging it and sort of sidestepping difficult things, because we're afraid of what the response or the reception might be.

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They respect transparency, like obviously, we need the tone to be compassionate and sensitive. But with a compassionate, sensitive tone, they're not going to respect us if we just avoid difficult things, because we don't want to upset anyone. It's like, I think that's a kind of past state of affairs.

The world's moved on, people are speaking incredibly directly about what their convictions are online. And as Christians, I think we have a duty to be very compassionate. I like what you said there, Alanzo, there is a kindness and a compassion we need to have, pastoral sensitivity, but be straightforward as well.

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**The Bible Course:** Taking a minute here out of the conversation to tell you about The Bible Course. That is from Andrew Ollerton, because whether you're a seasoned Bible reader, or you're just starting on the journey, The Bible Course offers a superb overview of the world's best-selling book. This eight-session course will help you grow in your understanding of the Bible.

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**Joanna:** Clarity is kindness. If we're running around avoiding the difficulty, it's not actually being kind. We'll come across it later.

And that's where people often, the classic of, you know, I had this simplistic idea, and then when life was more complicated, the whole theology, my whole faith fell apart, because I didn't have something more robust, more complex.

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**Andrew:** Yeah, exactly. And I think it's patronizing as well, isn't it, to almost try and think that we should, in some very paternal way, protect young people, especially from difficult topics or questions in the Bible, by just sort of hiding those areas.

They're asking, and they live in real world. And actually, I find like young people today, I wonder whether because of the way the online space has just opened up, they seem to almost have very, they seem to grow up fast today, you know, and they're ready for some pretty sophisticated ethical discussions age 15. And I think sometimes the challenge we've got is out in the world and in school and education, that's what they're drawn into.

You know, that's what's expected of them in religious studies classes, or in philosophy, or in science, or Shakespeare, whatever it is they're reading. They're expected to bring analytical skills and assess critical theory. And then in the church, we just lose pace with that.

We're still treating the Bible like its children's stories for, you know, for primary age. And I think we've got to allow young people, you know, I've just recently published a book going through the seven most challenging topics in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. And the older youth group in the church that we go to has just been going through it.

And their numbers have doubled, because they've tackled head on, just the difficult things. And they've invited their friends, they're not embarrassed by this, they're like, they're relieved. Finally, we're actually wrestling with the things that matter.

And we're asking the hard questions. And sex is one of those topics. And far from avoiding that, you know, they want to know, what do you think? What is what is the Bible say? And so obviously, we have to be gracious.

And it's incredibly important where you are, I think, representing the Bible, to acknowledge where Christians differ, you know, we have to recognize, we're not all univocal, we're not all saying exactly the same thing. So of course, we have to

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recognize some Christians think this, and others interpret the Bible this way. So being nuanced is important.

But along with that nuance, we just need some clarity, some straightforward transparency. And I think young people respect that.

**Joanna:** Yeah, well, I mean, just on Monday nights, I have an inductive Bible study with young adults in my home, they're all packed into my small apartment.

And we had about 14 people and we were studying the Christmas story is an , inductive Bible study, we don't need to get into it. But we're going through the text in a deep way. And somebody is asking questions about well, did Mary have free will? Did she choose like, what if she had said no to this angel that said you're going to be with child? Or did she and then we go into issues of consent, which is an issue of our times.

Did she have consent to become pregnant? You know, like, was this her choice? Was this forced upon her, you know, all these kinds of things. And then people and then, but a question of free will, what if she had said no, you know, and then part of the group kind of, I don't know if we can go there, the other part of the group leapt in and wanted to get into the meat of what does that mean? What is the relationship between our choice, our yes, and God's divine plans for the world?

These are huge questions on a Monday night in my kitchen living room. But I mean, we also had on the tour, we had a panel of young adults that joined us in these cities.

And is there something that struck you? I mean, I know, it was a number of months ago, is there something that struck you from what they said? Maybe it was just thematic that they said the same thing we're hearing everywhere. But I'm thinking about when we said, would you rather meet in person or online? Would you rather have a digital Bible or a physical Bible? Do you want to do maybe Alanzo? Do you want to speak to that a little bit?

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**Alanzo:** Yeah, I think what struck me when I was listening to that panel in person was their zeal, their passion for Christianity, their passion for the Scriptures, the passion for meeting up. And I am one of those individuals that thinks that with the rising generation, we might see more and more meeting up in person, and a bit more of a rise of digital minimalism, a sort of bucking of the trends of I'm just constantly going to be on my phone.

Like I had said, in my lecture with you guys that the average young person's on their phone for about seven to 10 hours per day. And I am starting to see more and more dumb phones. So, this would be like a flip phone, anything that's like not an iPhone or a Samsung type smartphone, and young people wanting to meet up in person, and wanting to in person around some sort of common or shared interest.

So, it could be something like gaming, it could be something like Bible study, it could be something like sport. And we're starting to see more and more of those as well. So, I think that all of that is a real positive, because if anyone's read the Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation* book, gosh, social media and our smartphones are just destroying our brains.

So that's positive. That's encouraging. And just circling back to that panel.

Yeah, it was their zeal for the Scriptures, their zeal for their faith and their zeal for meeting up in person that really stood out to me. I think we're going to see more of that.

**Joanna:** Maybe then as a follow up, Alanzo, yes.

And what about people who don't care? I mean, there are some who are apathetic, how or maybe even hostile to faith. And there's lots of reasons they might have that experience. How do we reach them? Can we reach them? Is it just they're not at the right time? Like, leave them be maybe later? You know, how do you think about that type of a person? Because we're talking a lot about, we are seeing this trend.

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But I think people listening are saying, that's great, but that's not my kid. That's not my nephew. That's not the students in my class. That's not my grandchild.

**Alanzo:** Yeah. So, with respect to apathy, just one sort of preliminary remark.

A few responses ago, Andrew had talked about not sounding too overly optimistic, but, rather advocating for a more measured view of things. I think that that's right.

So, Alex O'Connor, aka The Cosmic Skeptic, recently came out with a video, and it was entitled, "Am I Becoming a Christian?" And really, it was a response to Christians chopping up his content, posting it and saying that he's like, one prayer away from bowing the knee to the Lord, you know, and he's just like, no.

It's basically because he thinks that it's more plausible. So, this was during his interview with Bear Grylls, that's Andrew's friend, that he said, oh, yeah, I think that Christianity is more plausible than when I was a younger man. And people chopped that up and said, "Oh, yeah, he's like, basically a Christian now."

And so, I think he drew our attention to something that's really important, that we can't be overly optimistic and even distorting some of the stories and anecdotes and stats that are coming out. But we have to do this in a very measured sort of way, especially with young people that are going to go and do their own research and follow up and corroborate these things. So that's just a sort of preamble to what I was going to say about apathy.

There are some individuals that I have genuinely tried to have a conversation with over dinner or something like that, or just meeting at some venue, and try as I might with all of my apologetic ninja moves. They just do not want to engage. And from my experience, I think that's less of they're just so convinced by the arguments, like the propositions, that God does not exist and all of the arguments.

It is less about that and more about they've had some really horrific experience that is painful for them. And they just don't consent to someone like me who doesn't know

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them to engage with them out on that level. And when I'm in those contexts, I will back off.

If I'm starting to sense that, if I'm getting a vibe of that, like they've had a really negative experience, this is not for me to continue to press, then I will back off and commit them to prayer. So, I will pray for them. We have to remember when it comes to individuals that do not want to engage for one reason or another, that God still infinitely loves them more than you or I will ever love them.

And so, I think we commit those individuals to prayer. And we have to recognize that for let's say it's not a stranger, like the one that I was referencing, where I just met them for the first time, and I was trying to have that conversation. But let's say it's like a loved one that we know, like a family member or like, you know, a friend from our life.

I think we have to recognize that this is a lifelong journey alongside them. That just because they're apathetic in this season, and disinterested in this season, doesn't mean that they will always be that way. Things could be going really well in their life, and they just don't feel like they need anything from God.

And they don't feel like they have big questions. They don't feel this or that. And so that's okay.

We recognize where they're at, but we stick with them relationally for the long haul, because no one goes through life hitting all of their marks, getting all of their goals, getting all of their aims, and never experiencing suffering and confusion and chaos. We all will have seasons. And so, I think if you continue to build on that relationship, and then those seasons do arise, then you can start making some progress with that apathetic or disinterested individual.

**Joanna:** Well, and then Alanzo, you just talked about the, you know, this difficult stuff, when we talk about suffering in our lives, when we talk about things falling apart. Andrew, I want to go back to this book you're saying, the youth group doubled in

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your church as they're going through this book that you've read. And I know that here at the Canadian Bible Society, we're working with you to release like a film version of this series.

And this is about, talk to us a little bit about this big questions that we are wrestling through in the Bible, these hard questions that maybe we as the, if we're the listeners here are the fill up to the Ethiopian eunuch, we need some equipping too. We may not know how to respond to some of these big questions. People get in the Bible and they're like, wait a second, there's like, it feels like there's like some genocide and some weird laws.

And I don't know about these sexual ethics. And, and so you wrote about this, tell us a little bit about that in context of this curiosity in the Bible we're seeing.

**Andrew:** Yeah, well, I'm grateful to the providential sense that God had a plan when I was writing this book, because when I started writing, I didn't realize that this quiet revival would be happening.

And you know, the new openness, but I think it's landed at a good moment along with *The Bible Course*, because I think both these resources, they hit on different things. *The Bible Course* focuses a bit more on the navigation challenge, how do I make sense of how all of the books and characters and stories in the Bible fit together. So that's more navigating the Bible.

But once you're competent to navigate the Bible, or once you found your way around a little bit, the next challenge you're probably going to encounter is why some of these things in the Bible in the first place? Why are there laws about or instructions about holding slaves in the Bible? I thought the Bible was sort of anti-slavery and freedom for emancipation. Why does God condone warfare in the conquest of Canaan? So, these are the kinds of things that I think trouble people. And often as well, they're the things that skeptics highlight, they often will take a verse out of context, isolate it and say, look, isn't this terrible, you can't possibly trust the Bible.

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So, what I wanted to do was write a book that went through the Bible, Genesis to Revelation, but tackle some of these topics, what I felt were the seven most challenging topics for our culture. I'm not pretending these would be the seven topics if you lived in medieval England, I don't think these would be the seven you would have picked out. They're for our moment.

So, I look at the creation stories in Genesis, and how do we reconcile those with modern science. And then I look at the laws of Moses, especially laws about holding slaves, and how do we understand that, then the conquest of Canaan, and the warfare stories, then the suffering in the time of the exile, when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, how do we understand bad things happening when God is a God of love. And then in the New Testament, I look at the miracles and exorcisms of Jesus, can we really believe all the supernatural stuff? I look at Paul's teaching on sex in the letters.

And then finally, the visions of judgment and heaven and hell in Revelation. So it really is sort of all of the things that I guess it's kind of like, to your point, it's all the things that could have stopped a potential Philip, sitting alongside a curious seeker and getting into the conversation in the first place, because the reason Philip would shy away is, oh, well, what if I don't know what to say? What if they ask a question and I've got no response?

**Joanna:** They're going to ask about LGBTQ...

**Andrew:** Exactly.

**Joanna:** They're going to ask about slavery in the Old Testament, and I'm going to feel stupid.

**Andrew:** Exactly. And so, for that fear, because of that fear of the potential what-ifs, we don't even get into the conversation, we're not even on the front foot. And I just feel right now we don't need to be defensive. The Bible remains the world's best-selling book.

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It's trending again in our world. People are reaching out to it to find meaning and hope. It's got many critics, but no rivals, right? I think that's so true of the Bible, isn't it? The Bible's got many critics, lots of people can criticize it.

No one can rival it. There is not another book in the world like the Bible. So, we don't need to be defensive.

And we don't need to be fearful that there's stuff in the Bible that we can't possibly make sense of and that someone's going to expose it and our faith is going to be undermined. We can get all the difficult stuff out on the table, which is what I try and do in this book, and just make sense of it in its context. And I'm not saying that resolves all of the difficulties, but it does make sense of even the toughest parts of the Bible.

And my hope is it just gives more Philips and Philippas confidence to say, well, I've got a bit more confidence in why I trust the Bible now. And so, I'm a bit more comfortable to sit next to someone who's searching and seeking and say, let me help.

**Joanna:** Well, and I'm hearing you, maybe the undertone that I'm hearing, maybe I'd love either of you to respond to this.

It's not about being afraid, but it's also not about being lazy. I hear that your undertone is there is a responsibility for the church, but also individuals, if your church isn't providing it, to know the Bible better, to get to have your own faith, be more depthful. I mean, not everyone... I'm at the master's level of theology. You both are at the PhD level. Most people are never going to do that.

But what would be some ways that we can be less complete, maybe lazy isn't the right word, but be more curious to increase our own depth if we're not academic?

**Andrew:** I'll let Alanzo answer the question. I just want to underscore what you've said, which is I totally agree. Why have we lost our confidence in the Bible? Partly just because we've become distracted.

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I think we've almost replaced it sometimes with all sorts of other, seemingly more impressive or entertaining things. The Bible can often feature very light touch in church services. It can feature light touch in small group gatherings.

And what I'm actually seeing with young people today is they're talking about Bible studies. That kind of went out of fashion. We replaced Bible studies with cell groups or life groups.

And young people are almost like, no, a couple of times recently, I've come in, found my kids on their phones. And I'm like, I thought we told you no more screen time today. And they came out with the sort of ultimate riposte, which is, well, I'm actually on a Bible study with my friends.

Do you really want me to get off my phone? Which is a kind of catch 22, really. But my point is, I just think it's time, totally underscoring what you're saying, Joanna, we've got to get back into the Bible with fresh eyes and fresh curiosity. And Alanzo can tell us how we do that.

**Alanzo:** Yeah, well, I just couldn't agree more with you, you both. I think that there needs to be a taking to the Lord about the seriousness of Scripture and how we need to increase the seriousness of which we take Scripture in our own lives.

This is from my perspective, Christianity 101, is that you become well acquainted with God's Holy Word.

And it baffles me, um, the sort of apathy towards the Bible with the average Christian. And honestly, I think we need to take that before God, many of us. And what's so bemusing as well about this situation is that there are so many wonderful resources out there, you couldn't ask to live in a better time to better understand the Bible.

You have *The Bible Course* with Andrew, and you have *The Bible Project* with Tim Mackey and those guys. And you have every sort of denominations, sermons on podcast, and you have explainer videos on YouTube, and you have Wes Huff on all

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platforms and all of these sorts of things. So, the fact that, you know, people aren't getting into the Bible is, well, some people aren't getting into the Bible, maybe some of the older generation isn't getting into the Bible or something like that, is bemusing to me.

What, what can you do? What can you do? Okay, number one, I think you go with your young person or with the people that are interested in taking the Bible seriously with you in your life, you start with a single book, and you start reading it together. And then you start drawing on some of these wonderful resources, like Andrew's new book, or *The Bible Project*, or listening to a great sermon with Tim Keller, or one of these, or even John Mark Comer and various spiritual practices. And you draw on these wonderful gifts of resources to the church right now.

And you start doing your deep dive into the Bible.

**Joanna:** Yeah, just actually read it, and do it in community and seek out resources. I appreciate that you named some of them, because of course, not all resources are equal.

And that can be overwhelming, too. But you've named some of *The Bible Course*, certainly stuff from the Bible Society, but also what you said, *The Bible Project*, amazing YouTube videos. If you're going to read the book of Ephesians, maybe go find *The Bible Project* video on Ephesians and get the context as you dive in.

And I find over and over as I study, as I've said, in my home every week with a group of young adults, that the beauty of studying together is you see things that everyone sees something the others might not have met, that might not have noticed. So, we're together bringing the beauty out of it. We're bringing the power and the truth out of it that truer than true, more beautiful than beautiful.

**Alanzo:** Yeah, can I just say something to that, Joanna? So, every Wednesday, I'm a part of a Bible study, we read a passage together, we just slowly crawl through one book at a time. And there's, I don't know, 20 of us or so, 15 of us or so. And it's

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exactly what you just said, Joanna, you are pleasantly surprised that people see things in the text that are just hidden in plain sight that you would have never guessed or never seen if you were just reading it in isolation.

And that just makes you love the Lord and love the Scriptures even more. I get so excited when I'm like, gosh, how did I miss that? It makes me want to actually go home and read my Bible by myself even more, so that I can bring something to the table next Bible study and help somebody else have that same experience that I just had. So yes, you're absolutely right.

There's got to be private time one-on-one with the Lord. Quality quantity time is what I usually say. If you are trying to read your Bible for five minutes a day or a verse of the day, and that's the totality of your Biblical diet, you will stunt your growth.

You can't do that. Quality quantity time, 30 minutes, an hour each morning or in the evening, or you break it up throughout the day. Maybe you do 10 minutes here, 10 minutes there, 10 minutes here, and just get it on the inside of you.

But you cannot miss out on that corporate setting where there's a group of you together, diving into it together and pulling things out that you would just never, ever see by yourself.

**Andrew:** I think as well, just one other thing to underscore, totally agree with that. And I think if in any way our conversation has come over as a little bit highbrow or educated, just one qualifier, which is actually the Bible.

The Bible doesn't open itself to IQ or to educational qualifications. I just think it's so important to stress this, isn't it? That people who are fresh to it, who have no knowledge of it, who are not readers or educated, they can have the best insights. This one guy I was just talking about earlier, who's recently new to faith, he pointed out to me, he said, I was reading the nativity stories.

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And he said, it's like, I was amazed that the shepherds were the first people that the angels came and told the story to. And then he paused and he said, it's a bit like sort of Mary Magdalene being the first witness to the resurrection, isn't it? And it's like, you know, he's just making these connections between the nativity story, you know, the uneducated, ordinary shepherds, and then the resurrection, the Mary Magdalene, first eyewitness to it and first evangelist for the resurrection, first evangelist for the incarnation. Neither of them are the elite, educated types.

So just, you know, it's the Bible is Jesus celebrates in Matthew's Gospel. *"I praise you, Father in heaven, that you have revealed these things to the simple, to the children and kept them from the wise."* And I think that's always something to remember.

God loves to show you the simplest person profound things from His Word. And it's beautiful.

**Joanna:** We have covered a lot of ground here.

But where we're landing the plane is our responsibility and our invitation to get into Scripture ourselves, to do it in a group, and to simply invite others along the way that there are young people around us. We may be a young person herself. So, we have friends.

But there are people who want to do this with us in our churches and our homes. If we would open together and there are resources available, we're going to link some of that. Of course, we always do that in the show notes.

People can find some of these things we're talking about. But Andrew Alanzo, I hope we can be in person again sometime soon. We'd love to have you both back in Canada.

Maybe even at the same time, we'd love to have you. Thanks for your work. And of course, if people want to find you, we're going to link it in the show notes if people want more of you have so much content, both of you about these issues and more.

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So, thanks for your work. And yeah, just make may God make it very fruitful. May God bless your work as you spend time doing this all over the world.

Thanks so much, guys.