

# OpenTheo

## #15 A pastor losing his faith writes in. Tom responds to personal questions

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### Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

In a special pastoral Q&A edition Tom responds to various questions on difficult family situations, unforgiveness and a church pastor who doesn't know if he believes any more.

Plus, Tom whips out the guitar again for a Leonard Cohen classic.

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## Transcript

[MUSIC] Premiere podcast.

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[MUSIC] >> Hello, it's Justin Brierley, theology and apologetics editor for Premiere, sitting down as ever with New Testament scholar and prolific author Tom Wright.

This is the podcast where you get to ask the questions and the show is brought to you by Premiere in partnership with SBCK and NT Right Online. Really interesting addition of the podcast today, full of your pastoral questions. And if you stick around right to the end, you'll also get another edition of Tom Wright Unplugged.

Good news, we're running another book giveaway. Three signed copies of Tom's best

selling book, Paul, a biography. It could be yours, plus I'm also going to chuck in a copy of my own book Unbelievable.

Why after 10 years of talking with atheists, I'm still a Christian. But to enter that, to get both those books, Tom's book, my book, you just need to be signed up to our newsletter by the end of July. Then we'll select the three winners.

So simply get yourself subscribed now to be entered for that prize draw of Paul, a biography, and my book Unbelievable. Why after 10 years of talking with atheists, I'm still a Christian. So we'll do that at our website, askNT Right.com. Now if you enjoy this show, you might also enjoy the Unbelievable podcast and our London conference coming up on Saturday the 20th of July with 13 international thinkers, including Chris Candier, Chris D. Mayor, Bruxy, KV, Craig, Hazen, and many more.

It's on Speaking Truth in a Post Truth World. Do go and check it out at [premierChristianradio.com/unbelievableconference](http://premierChristianradio.com/unbelievableconference). And if you use the discount code, Speak Truth, all capital letters, before the 20th of June, you'll get a 10% discount on your tickets. I'll leave details for that in the podcast information.

That's Unbelievable, the conference on Saturday the 20th of July. Well, time now to turn to your questions. But as ever, if you'd like more episodes, updates, bonus video content, and of course, to enter that prize draw for signed books, do get registered at [askNT Right.com](http://askNT Right.com).

[MUSIC] Tom, welcome back for another sit down over coffee, tea, cakes, apples.

We have got some healthy things here as well, honestly. But I thought it would be good to have at least one episode of the podcast where we deal with people's personal pastoral questions. As well as being a teacher and a leader, you've been a pastor for a lot of your life.

I'm sure you've dealt with lots of difficult situations. Now, before we get into any of these, though, I think it's probably worth saying that you're not in any way advocating that a brief response on a podcast is anything like proper pastoral care. No, that's exactly right.

I mean, people email me with pastoral questions, and I now routinely say, point number one, I cannot be your pastor on email, and I cannot be somebody's pastor on a podcast. What I can do is offer a little crumb of possibility of advice, but this presupposes that they will then find somebody. And I say, please find a church near you, whether it's a wise person who can sit down and listen to you and weep with you and pray with you and look you in the eye and hold you accountable and see you the next week and the next week and the next week because in my experience, most serious pastoral problems cannot be dealt with in one session, let alone in one comment or point.

Which takes us back to the things we were talking about in the previous podcast about church and the importance of community and so on. One of the great benefits of podcasts like this and the many others that are available for Christians is just being able to access all kinds of wonderful teaching and so on. The downside I find is that sometimes that makes people think, "Well, I can do my Christianity completely by myself.

I can simply listen to the people I like to listen to, and I don't ever really have to have proper sort of relationships with other Christians." And actually pastors and bishops can get into that trap themselves. They're so busy giving out. And then because they're the expert, it feels odd to turn around and say to somebody else, "Now will you pastor me?" And I'm in this strange position now where when I need pastoral helpers, I do from time to time.

I'm sometimes turning to people who are considerably younger than me, which feels very odd. I'm not sort of looking up to them as senior people, but they're people who I respect as pastors and they're experienced. And if they know and love me and are praying for me, then hallelujah.

That's great. Well, with those provisos, let's look at some of the questions that have come in on this theme. Belinda is in Hong Kong and asks, "What is the ultimate purpose of being on earth as a Christian?" I know it's to glorify God, but what does it actually look like for someone who's a homemaker, who doesn't do world-changing ministries, who leads simple day in, day out sort of life, is being faithful and obedient to the call of God in your life if it's to be a homemaker, a mother and a wife, more important than seeking for bigger and more prominent ways to glorify God.

Will God find my smallness in life unacceptable? Should I aspire to do more for God? And if so, what? Wow, this is a great lady I'd like to meet her. One of the things that I regularly do is I contribute to a particular mission to society and I get their monthly newsletter, and each day there's a particular personal or couple or group to pray for. And one of the things I'm constantly delighted by is the small things that they're doing, the things that will never make headlines if it wasn't for this particular thing.

But actually, they are making a kingdom-shaped difference where they are. And if that's in a home, speakers a father of four and a grandfather of five, the older I get, the more I realize, the absolute vital importance of being there for the little people, the younger people, and being a homemaker for that. I'm hugely grateful that my mother was a homemaker.

She never had a job outside the home while we were growing up. And I and my siblings were richly blessed through that. And I very much regret that that's become harder in our culture because real estate agents say, "Oh, if only you were both working, you could afford this and that," etc., etc., you know the scene.

So I want to say, no, those are enormously important roles, but even if somebody isn't, in that sense, a homemaker, God has things for you to do. And I think the answer is both in your regular church worship and in your own private praying and reading of scripture, to open yourself. It happens at moments of vocation when somebody come into the end of a degree course, for instance.

What should I really be doing? That to be praying both individually and with friends for wisdom and then to be open to a nudge here or a nudge there, something you hear on the radio, something that you, somebody you met who was talking about something and you just think, "Oh my goodness, I could actually do a bit of that." And it might be teaching Sunday school just once a month, or it might be, "Oh, maybe in a couple of years' time, if I did some training, I would be able to do that." And there are a thousand things, a million things that are possible. But having said that, the small things are the things that matter. And in a sense, the stuff that people like me do bouncing around, giving lectures, yeah, that's nice.

But it means absolutely nothing if it's just sort of big entertainment, unless there are people, including myself, on the ground doing the basic things day by day, in an unsung way. In a slightly different environment, but I think it relates somehow to this question. I saw an interesting comment on Twitter, I think it was the other day.

And it was in response to quite a large public ministry sort of going belly up because of a big fall from Grace, a particular pastor. And the person said, "My father was the leader of a very small, humble church." And you often felt that he made very little difference to anyone when he looked at some of the big, thriving other congregations and things. And he said, "That story of that fall made me realize just how much he did do actually." He served that community faithfully.

He didn't have any grammars. But I look back and think, "Gosh, I'm so glad he did that." And it didn't go the route of, obviously, in another situation, to fall dramatically. Of course.

And I often think about this in terms of the communities that Paul founded. Most of the people in Paul's churches were ordinary, poor people who would live in Thessalon-Nikra, or whatever, all their lives. They'd be born there.

They'd marry there. They'd have children there. They'd die there.

A lot of them were slaves. A lot of them were very poor. What did it mean for them to follow Jesus? Paul was going around, you know, preaching the gospel, being stoned, shipwrecked, whatever.

They were just being Jesus followers in Thessalonica and probably having a hard time. But Paul sees that as lighting a candle in that place, which will not be put out. An

anonymous person asks, and there are a few, actually, anonymous because of the nature of some of these questions.

This person says, "I had to divorce my husband as he was unfaithful, not very nice to me at the beginning of the year. This was last year, I think, that's speaking up." My question is, "How do I forgive myself for believing his lies, for hoping that he would change? I took out an order to stop him from contacting me or coming near me. I never shed a single tear the day he left.

I suppose I feel unworthy with low self-esteem. I've started going back to church regularly as it's been my faith that has got me through some very low times. But it just keeps playing like a broken record in my head and I want to stop torturing myself and move on.

Thank you for any light you can shed on this matter." So the question this person says is, "How do I forgive myself for believing his lies, for sort of keeping that relationship, which was evident to me?" Not a good one. My heart goes out to somebody who can write that. Forgiveness is a complicated thing and the need to forgive oneself is certainly part of it.

But what I'm hearing there as well is the need to forgive the ex-husband, but also then the need to be assured of God's forgiveness, which is the context in which we learn to forgive ourselves. All of that says, "This will take prayerful pastoral care on the spot." And I think most people from time to time have things in their lives that they realize, "I really messed that up and it may not be as big as that, but things that we really, really regret, that we wish with all our hearts we've done differently." And learning that that's okay and that God is the God of fresh starts, which doesn't mean so who cares what we do because by the next morning you can all be alright. That's certainly not the case.

There are lots of things we can do which have lasting damaging, horrible effects. However, learning that nevertheless, one of the great biblical words, "But God, nevertheless." And then I suppose my way of approaching that would always be to say, through the reading of Scripture, and through, depending on the person's temperament and that's something that only the pastor could see, through new patterns and pathways of prayer, there are styles of prayer where you can bring a problem in prayer to God and may well need help to do this and then wait for some kind of a mental picture of either Jesus or the Holy Spirit taking that away and dumping it in the sea or whatever it may be. And things like that, it does take time and it can be quite hard work in prayer, but it really can make a huge difference.

And trying to do that by yourself is very difficult, if not impossible, because the self that is trying to do it is the self that is having difficulty for giving itself, etc., etc. But I would say in terms of Scripture, read the gospels and do the Ignatian thing of imagining yourself a character in this scene. You know, here is the woman who comes into wash Jesus' feet and imagine that you're sitting beside and what's Jesus now going to say to

you and what are you going to say to him when that little episode is over? Or that many, many scenes in the gospels, which one can do that with, that's a wonderful way of prayer.

And I would always say to anybody like this, please read five Psalms a day, just read the next five and the next five and the next five, because again and again it will astonish you the things that the Psalmist is expressing, which are exactly what you're going through. The frustration, the anger, the bitterness. Absolutely.

It's a very human thing. God, what's going on? What's this all about? And many times, even now I've prayed this harm all my life, and I sometimes find myself thinking, "Sure, that wasn't there last time, you know, just jumps off the page with you." So there are disciplines of wise spirituality, but this doesn't almost certainly need a spiritual director to come alongside. Well, prayers for that situation, and I hope that whoever that is, they find some sort of a breakthrough.

This is Anne in Missouri who says, "Can you speak to the theology of honoring one's parent as an adult when that parent is an abusive one? In your Matthew for everyone commentary, you use the phrase "emotionally manipulative mothers who wreck their children's lives. What does it look like to honor such a mother when a healthy relationship feels and maybe is impossible?" I think the honoring of the parents is quite practical in the original Ten Commandments, Honor One's father and one's mother. Doesn't mean pretending that they're super people with no flaws.

I think pretty brutally it means that when they are of an age that they can't earn their own living anymore, if you have the wherewithal, you should be supporting them. That's clearly what Jesus is talking about in Mark 7, where there's the controversy about people who say, "Well, I was going to honor you, but now I'm giving it to God, so sorry you weren't beginning anything." I'm let off my duties. Exactly, exactly.

And they're the honoring, as in the pastoral letters where Paul says, "Let the elders who rule well be worthy of double honor." That means double stipend. It's not just, "Oh, wow, they're so great." It's actually this is hard cash we're talking about. So I think even the abusive parent is still your parent, and if you have the wherewithal to support them, to do things for them, I happen to know somebody at the moment who is still supporting their parents, even though the parents do not seem very nice people.

I happily don't know them, but I hear the stories. But this person will turn up and help them and do things for them, because they're their parents. So I think this is cognate with other questions we've discussed about the sheer outward physicality of it.

The Judaism and Christianity really are about getting on and doing the stuff, and the feelings may or may not come into line. Because we want to feel love, we think that everything must start off with the feelings. And again, quote, "Yes, there is one more

time." Actually, if you want to love somebody, if you behave as if you love them, the feelings may follow.

They may not, but try it. Try behaving as if you love them, because, "Okay, I'm going to look after you. I'm going to help you with this." But honoring one's parents certainly doesn't mean pretending, as you say, that they are people that they're simply not, if they've obviously been a troubling relationship.

I hope that's helped in some way and with that particular situation. It is difficult, and there may be some context in which an adult child has to say to a parent, "Look, I'm sorry. This is really messing me up, and we're just going to have to step back for a bit." Without knowing the particular situation, obviously, that will be very much dependent.

But, yeah, I appreciate that. Another anonymous person asks, "What is repentance?" Can a person who has addictive, sinful habits be considered in active repentance if they relapse regularly into the same sin? This is sometimes to use the terminology, sometimes called a besetting sin, isn't it? You know, the idea of something that's very hard to shake. We may constantly sort of come back to God and say, "Sorry, but then the next day, maybe we're doing it again." Are they really repenting if they're simply going back again and again? Yeah.

I mean, we know a lot more about addiction now than we did, and clearly there are many behavior patterns that different people can get into, which are repetitive, and there is in the psyche, there's an electric loop or whatever, and if you get into that, we're just going round the loop one more time. That can be broken with help, with therapy. That's what alcoholics and onus do, it's what various recovery platforms do.

However, when, in Matthew 18, Peter asks Jesus how many times should I forgive my brother if he sins against me? As many as seven, and Jesus says, "Well, actually, how about 70 times seven?" Which is a jubilee line, by the way. It goes back to Daniel. And for those who are wondering, that doesn't mean work it out mathematically, and that's the number of things.

Precisely. Yeah. Now, with 70, one, we're right, you're going to get this done.

Obviously not. It just means, now, I want to say what makes us think that God would not be as generous with his forgiving as Jesus wants Peter to be. And that doesn't mean, just like human forgiveness doesn't mean, so all right, just hit me again because you know I'm going to forgive you again.

It doesn't open the door to an anti-nominism. It just means that at no point will God turn away a genuinely penitent sinner. Even if they're back at it, they're following you.

Yeah. I mean, this is obviously a regular pastoral problem that one meets. And then one wants to say, "Pastorally, now, let's see, are there things in your life elsewhere in your

life that actually put you in the way of this?" And if that's so, can we see about readjusting some of those triggers so that you avoid, as the old pastors used to say, the occasions of sin, you know, don't go to the place where you're likely to be tempted into that, etc., etc.

And there are ways of working at it, and so serious repentance would also be about, "Okay, God forgives me, but now I need to do some work on..." And as I understand it, the word repentance does have that sense of a turning around and going in a different direction. Absolutely. It's not to be a saying sorry for something.

No, quite. It's a change of direction. The word in the first century is very specific.

At one point, we meet it in the works of Josephus, who's the younger contemporary of Paul, who talks about confronting a brigand leader in Galilee, telling him to repent, and he doesn't mean give up your sins. He means you're going about this business in the wrong way. I've got a better idea.

Turn around and come with me. And it's very, again, very practical, very out loud and public. The Ask NT Right Anything podcast is brought to you by Premier in partnership with SBCK and NT Right Online.

SBCK is Tom's UK publisher, and they've created a special discount for podcast listeners on a selection of Tom's titles. So when you buy one, you get a second half price. There's a number of titles in the deal, including some of Tom's most popular books, surprised by hope, simply Jesus and simply Christian.

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This is a much longer one than I'd normally include, but I thought worth doing. It lies out quite a bit of the story of this person, but this is anonymous in Texas. So bear with me while I read out the full story here.

And they say, "I don't know how to ask my question in a sentence or two. Please don't toss this message in the bin because of its length." Because I ask it as someone who really needs some help. I am a pastor, and I'm afraid I'm becoming an atheist.

After listening to episode three of your podcast in which you spoke about Bart M and Tom said that Bart came from a tradition where the Bible is either all literally true or is not true at all. And that's exactly where I'm coming from, and I don't know how to think any differently about it. I grew up in a theologically conservative home in church tradition.



We were fundamentalist Baptists of the KJV only a strain of fundamentalism. I was a six day creationist and believed that the universe was 6,000 years old. I believed that the entire globe was flooded, that no one in his family had survived.

There was nothing in those stories that I didn't trust. I believed all of it for most of my life, but sadly, I no longer am able. Though I left the fundamentalist movement years before going to seminary, I still maintained that view of scripture upon my enrollment.

But that view of scripture began to crumble. As brick by brick, my professors took their exegetical sledgehammers to my faith. They weren't liberal professors, mind you.

I went to a conservative Presbyterian seminary. But when I lost that literal interpretation of Genesis, I lost my trust for the rest of scripture as well. It's not just Genesis anymore.

It's in the six years since graduating seminary, my skepticism has grown and mess... Trying to pronounce this word, metastasized out of Genesis and into the rest of the Bible. I will skip some of the rest in terms of... He talks about some of the various issues he got with not being able to trust whether, if Adam and Noah weren't actual people in real history, what about people like Paul and Jesus who talk about them as though they were. And he goes on to say, "For a while, I thought I could afford to lose the Old Testament as long as I had Jesus and his resurrection.

But now I've had these unwelcome thoughts that perhaps the entire Jesus story was also made up out of whole cloth by some Jewish men who needed to make sense of their Judaism after the temple was destroyed. Did they simply mind the Old Testament for prophecies about a Messiah figure and figure out how to make him also become the new and enduring temple? I don't know. Maybe Richard Carrier is right.

And for those who don't know, Richard Carrier is a prominent mythicist. Anyway, let's keep going. I don't know how to unsee what I've seen just in it.

I don't know what inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy even mean anymore. I'm such a miserable mess. I promise you, there's been no shortage of tears over the past number of months over this.

I do not want it. I wish I could just unsee it all and go back to my naivety. So finally, with that context here are my questions.

One, he wants to know about if, so we say, the Adam and Eve were mythical figures in an allegory about Israel. How can we...how do we treat those who treated them as actual people in the New Testament authors and so on? And secondly, how can I integrate a new hermeneutical approach to the Bible that allows me to harmonize these incongruities without feeling like I'm just deluding myself? And they end this way. In other words, I want to read the Bible once again without experiencing the cognitive dissonance that I currently experience.

I've lost the ability to read the Bible devotionally for myself and the ability to teach the Bible passionately to the church that I serve. How do I get back to that place I once was? Thank you, Justin and Tom, for hearing me out. Wow.

Yeah. Again, my heart goes out to anyone in that situation. The good news must be that there have been many, many people who've made this journey and there is a well-trodden path into a healthy whole Bible reading which can leave behind those agonized ex-fundamentalist worries.

Now, I'm not from a fundamentalist tradition. At the same time, I grew up in quite what would now be seen as a relatively conservative church, but we didn't think of it like that. We just read the Bible and got on with it.

But so many of the things which this correspondent has raised as the starting points, at least, are the classic things that American fundamentalists have worried about. And I fear that that's a culturally specific thing. And I would want to try to help ease him out of that and into the larger world where the church, whether it's Eastern Orthodox or Catholic or Anglican or whatever, has always read the whole scripture without needing to worry about odd doctrinal words beginning with the letters "in" infallible, inerrant, whatever.

Just put those to one side. Those are modern rationalist doctrines about designed to protect scripture from modern rationalist skepticism. But both the skepticism and the protectiveness are 18th century rationalist things which have come through, particularly, say, in American culture.

And I want to say, there might be something to be said for trying other spiritual disciplines at the moment other than just reading the Bible. And maybe going to a quite different church and saying to the priest, "Please, can you just help me to pray quietly over the next three months? Please, will you teach me how you would expect me to pray?" And in some cases that might be forms of silent prayer. In some cases it might be simply repeating something like the Jesus prayer, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner with the rhythm of one's breathing.

In other words, if scripture seems to be so toxic, there might be other ways to sneak around the back. But then reasonably soon I would hope. What I would say is try reading the Bible quite differently.

Try once a day reading the whole of Isaiah 40 to 55, for maybe three weeks, once a day for three weeks or six weeks. Start with Isaiah 40, just go straight through until you're almost bored and familiar with it. Or try that with the letter to the Romans.

I once had a friend who was severely depressed and his pastor said, "Read Romans every day for a month." And he said, "You mean a chapter a day?" He said, "No, the

whole thing, every day. Come home from work. Sit down.

Just read Romans." He said, "Did it change his life?" Most of us don't read the Bible in large chunks like that, but the Bible was not written to be read in little bits. So allow some of the great texts, perhaps John's Gospel as well, to wash over you like R.S. Thomas has a lovely line about overflowing with God as a chalice would with the sea. Sense of the wave upon wave of Scripture, which can come over you so that you're not taking in the details and didn't ever exist, etc, etc.

Just forget all that stuff. And just let it come over you and drown you and see what happens. There is no automatic way.

But I think the other thing is, I bet in the same town where this poor man is, there will be some churches, maybe different traditions, with some wise pastors. And that person needs because I suspect that was in the... Was it someone who's tried a similar sort of part to come out the other side? Could well be. Come out the other side, that's the thing.

And it grieves me because actually I have seen so many people who've started in that King James Version fundamentalist Baptist tradition, who have then gone to college, realized actually I need to grab a bit, but haven't lost their faith and have matured into, I mean, actually some of our brightest students that we've had in St Andrews recently. One of the reasons they're so good is that they learnt Greek and Hebrew at an early age because they believe very firmly that's what they should do. And so now, in their 20s, my goodness, they're firing on all cylinders.

And the thing that on a personal reflection that this tradition reminded me of is so many stories I've come across through the other show I host in the book, where people have gone through a sort of deconstruction phase. And some people do reconstruct and they go through that process. And in a sense, my advice always to someone who's in that process or trying to figure it out is don't expect to come back to the same feelings you had before.

You can get back, but it might feel different. You're going to have... There's going to be a different way shape that faith takes. But that can be a very positive thing.

Right. And again, I mentioned my late-nomenited friend Marcus Borg, who grew up in a quite conservative Lutheran home in North America and went right away from the faith in his, I think early 20s. And then was kind of lost and didn't quite know what was going on.

And then gradually, gradually, gradually came back. And it wasn't the same as it had been before. And indeed, to his dying day, he didn't want to go anywhere near the conservative beliefs that he'd grown up.

He felt that to be a sort of a little like a coffin to climb back into. He didn't want to do

that. However, there were quite new things which were very positive.

And Marcus was a deeply praying man. I think he was muddled in some ways. And he would have said the same about me, bless him, but a prayerful lover of Jesus.

And so that journey is certainly possible and actual and does happen to people. Whether somebody in that position ought to go on being in ministry while that's going on, that's really difficult because there's a sense of, am I being a hypocrite to stand up on a Sunday morning and preach a sermon that these people expect? And that's really difficult if somebody's profession. And I fully appreciate that.

That's when wise elders in a denomination might be approached to say, I'm having a real struggle at the moment. Perhaps I need three months off or whatever. Could you support that? And wise elders would say, yes, we can help you with that.

But finding pastoral hope, because the other question which obviously isn't there is what else is going on in this person's life. But that's something which we can't ask but needs to be asked. I hope that whoever you are that you are able to find some wise counsel apart from Tom who, as we've said at the outset of the program, is not able to pass to people via podcasts.

That's not his job. But I hope that some of what he said has been helpful or might point you in the right direction. Well, we'll leave some of those other questions we had because time is already out.

Perhaps we'll do another session of a similar nature in the future, Tom. But for the moment, thank you so much for dispensing some wisdom. And yes, if you have a question for Tom, we're looking for further questions for the podcast.

This is a good time to write in with yours. You can do that as usual from the website. AskNTRight.com. We've still got something for you on today's podcast going long because Tom's back with the guitar for a little bit of a special rendition of a Leonard Cohen tune.

Next time, another important subject that we'll be tackling prayer. We'll be hearing your questions on that and what Tom has to say in response. Look out for that in your podcast feed.

And again, don't forget to book in now for this year's Unbelievable UK Conference, [premierChristianradio.com/unbelievableconference](http://premierChristianradio.com/unbelievableconference). Use the promo code speak truth or one word capital letters before the 20th of June to get a 10% discount on your booking. Details for all of the things I mentioned on the podcast in the podcast information. As ever, you can get more from it by subscribing to our newsletter bonus video content, exclusive updates, access to the book giveaway and a chance to ask questions yourself.

Just get yourself subscribed over at askNTRight.com. We're probably going to exhaust your repertoire soon enough, Tom, with all these songs you kindly bring to the podcast. Well, that wouldn't be difficult because I've played so little in the last decades that I'd have to go back and look at notebooks and old texts and so on, but still. Well, we're going to hear one, which is very well known because it sort of had a renaissance in the last decade or so.

Hallelujah. And then, again, one of those sort of poet musicians of the 60s, only relatively recently passed away, obviously. Again, one of the all sort of folk heroes.

Yes, sort of. I don't think I knew Cohen's stuff until we moved to Montreal in 1981. And I think I'd known Suzanne and one or two others of his famous ones before them, but hadn't really associated who he was.

And then getting to know Montreal and realizing the Jewish community of Montreal, which is very big. I think there's one suburb of Montreal, which has the highest concentration of Jewish people outside Tel Aviv anywhere in the world. And Cohen was very much from that sort of post-war generation of people very much in the shadow of the Holocaust, and then being Montreal Jewish, which was a kind of conflicted identity anyway, with the big Catholic presence and so on.

And Cohen is very conscious, both of the Jewish tradition and of the Christian tradition, and in that song, Suzanne, which I've never actually played, but he has that amazing line. Jesus was a sailor when he walked upon the water, and he spent a long time watching from his lonely wooden tower at the cross. And when he knew for certain only drowning men could see him, he said, "All men will be sailors then until the sea shall free them." And then he has this line.

He was forsaken, almost human. He sank beneath your wisdom like a stone. Oh, my goodness.

Extraordinary picture that he's kind of, he sees that Jesus is representing something, being something, and can't quite get to what it is. And I sense some of that in this Hallelujah as well, that the line which Cohen must have known that his own name means "priest." And it's very much straight out of the Jewish tradition, and even though it all went wrong, I'll stand before the Lord in song with nothing on my lips but Hallelujah. That is a deeply Old Testament, sarmic thing to say.

It's all gone horribly wrong, and we just present it before God and say, "Hallelujah." And there is the gritty wisdom of Old Age, and as I'm approaching Old Age, I think, "Yeah, good guy. He got it." Let's hear it. What's that? I've heard there was a secret called.

The David played, and it pleased the Lord, but you don't really care for music to you. It goes like this the fourth the fifth the minor fall and the major lift the baffled king

composing hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah your faith was strong but you needed proof you saw her bathing on the roof her beauty and the moonlight overthrew you she tied you to a kitchen chair she broke your throne she cut your hair and from your lips she drew the hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah well baby I've been here before I know this room and I've walked this floor I used to live alone before I knew you I've seen your flag on the marble arch but love is not a victory march it's a cold and it's a broken hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah you say I took the name in vain but I don't even know the name and if I did well really wants it to you there's a blaze of light in every word it doesn't matter what you heard it's a holy and it's a broken hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah well maybe there's a god above but all I've ever learned of love is how to shoot at someone who out drew you it's not a cry that you hear at night it's not someone who has seen the light it's a cold and it's a broken hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah I knew your name from long ago I always hoped it might be so I never understood how I should view you I remember how you smiled that day so was it real or was it play or were you softly praying hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah perhaps I should just tell the story about what happened last October I had been with my son watching Wagner's ring the Covent Garden and I came out late at night and my son got the tube to go back to where he was going I was walking back to where I was staying and I had Wagner's music gloriously in my head and I walked down from the strand to the embankment as I came under the arches there was a busker singing hallelujah and there were several people around listening and there were two girls walking the other way and they started to join in and they started singing hallelujah with this busker and I was walking the other way and I started singing it as well and we just kind of passed to me gave each other a high five and the busker was busking and I just thought from Wagner's let it go in an extraordinary moment and I walked so walked back to where I was staying with Wagner in one part of my head and Leonard Cohen in the other part could have an odd combination so I did my best it wasn't much I couldn't feel so I tried to touch I've told the truth I didn't come here just to fool you and even though it all went wrong I'll stand before the Lord in song with nothing on my lips but hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah and even though it all went wrong I'll stand before the Lord in song with nothing on my lips but hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah you've been listening to the Ask, Enty, Write, Anything podcast let other people know about this show by rating and reviewing it in your podcast provider for more podcasts from Premier visit [premier.org.uk/podcasts](http://premier.org.uk/podcasts)