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Q&A#126 Thinking About My Thinking

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Today's question: "I have really enjoyed following your writing and podcasts for a long time now. I am often amazed by the (real!) connections you see in the text and wonder how exactly you do it. Could you tell us how you developed the ability to see such connections? Can you give us a peek inside your mind and your thinking process?"

Within this episode, I mention my summary of Edwin Friedman's 'Failure of Nerve' (<https://amzn.to/2IFVjJP>): <https://alastairadversaria.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/self-and-leadership.pdf>. I also mention my post 'The Strangeness of the Modern Mind': <https://alastairadversaria.com/2017/12/07/the-strangeness-of-the-modern-mind/>. I recommend Matthieu Pageau's 'The Language of Creation': <https://amzn.to/2UpYJm9>. The Complete James Jordan Collection is available for purchase here: <http://www.wordmp3.com/details.aspx?id=13689>.

My blog for my podcasts and videos is found here: <https://adversariapodcast.com/>. You can see transcripts of my videos here: <https://adversariapodcast.com/list-of-videos-and-podcasts/>.

If you have any questions, you can leave them on my Curious Cat account: <https://curiouscat.me/zugzwanged>.

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Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, I have really enjoyed following your writing and

podcasts for a long time now. I'm often amazed by the real connections you see in the text and wonder how exactly you do it.

Could you tell us how you developed the ability to see such connections? Can you give us a peek inside your mind and your thinking process? I hemmed and hawed a bit about answering this question. It might seem a bit pretentious to have a video or podcast on the subject of how I think. But in the end, I decided to do so.

A number of people have genuinely asked me this question and they really do seem interested in the answer. There's also the fact that the way that I think now is not something that came naturally to me. I had to work a lot on changing the way that I thought to a way that was more appropriate to the biblical text, to other areas of thought.

And I learned a lot of lessons in the process. And it might be good to share. Those with other people so that they can learn in a quicker way and they won't have to go the long way around that I did.

For all of the intense attention that we give to the questions of what to think, we give surprisingly little to what is probably a far more basic and important question, which is how to think. How do we optimize our thinking to ensure that we are thinking in a healthy and functional way, in a way that is using all the resources that we have to hand? What are some of the environments that are most conducive for good thought? What are some of the ways in which our thinking can become distorted? These are questions we do not give enough attention to. And over the years, there's something that I've been very preoccupied with.

When I've been reading the Bible, when I've been thinking about issues in society, when I've been thinking more generally, I've paid a lot of attention to how I think. Because I think if I'm going to think well about these issues, I can't take my thinking processes for granted. They need a lot of work if they're going to be functional, if they're going to help me to arrive at a true knowledge of the world.

I started off as someone who's a very systematizing thinker, who took details out of the Bible and tried to bring them into this great synthesized abstract system. And it was very elegant, there were many advantages to that, but it wasn't very faithful to the biblical text. And the more that I studied the biblical text and was exposed to different ways of thinking about it, particularly through James Jordan, I realized it was a way of handling the biblical text that did violence to it.

And so I had to change my pattern of thinking. I had to think about my thinking in a way that I hadn't before and comport my thinking in a way that was more adequate to the subject matter under consideration. So there was ways of comporting my thinking to that particular subject matter.

But then there's also been ways in which my thinking more generally has been developed. The way that I approach any area of learning. Now I originally started off as someone who was studying maths at university.

That was very much my area of expertise. My mental instincts were geared in that more engineering mathematical direction. These abstract systems of thought and these sorts of things came very naturally to me.

Whereas the more textual and analogical ways of thinking that I'm dealing in now did not come so naturally to me. That took a bit of work. And although I could develop that skill fairly quickly over time, it was something that was not what I started out with.

I had to develop that. Much of a person's way of thinking will depend upon their personality and their experience, their formative influences, these sorts of things. And these are definitely part of the way that I think.

And we need to recognise and take account of our characters and what we're bringing to the thinking process. Some of the dangers, some of the strengths of our thinking tendencies. So personality factors for me include a pronounced natural bent towards systematising and analytical thought.

Very strong independence of character, an inquisitive personality and high intellectual curiosity. Fairly low sentimentality and a very strong creative urge. And all of those things shape the way that I think, not just the way that I act, but the way that I think.

I was fortunate to grow up in a context where there were books all around me, where my father was a very independent minded thinker and very inquiring in his theological thought. And who read more widely than almost anyone else I knew. And so these were very powerful and positive influences.

Likewise, I had a very deep grounding in the biblical text from an early age. My mother in particular used to read scripture to us every single evening. And so we knew the story really well and we weren't being fed very basic stories.

We were being, I mean, from the earliest age, I was, one of my earliest childhood favourite stories was the story of Ehad and his killing of Eglon. Or the story of the Ark in the Land of the Philistines. These aren't usual kids stories, but they fascinated me.

I thought they were great tales of daring do, but they also were stories that provoked my curiosity. This isn't a usual book. There's something about this book that is a bit unusual, that requires some sort of engagement.

And of course, these are exciting stories and stories of the humiliation of false gods like Dagon, his head collapsing and things like that. But there's more to it. It's a recognition that this is a big, difficult, exciting and remarkable text.

It's not just this safe, domesticated text that you'll often encounter. And so being exposed to that early on made a huge difference. And being in a context also where thought was encouraged, where I was encouraged to think through things, to challenge ideas, to explore, to read books constantly.

We didn't have a TV. That makes a big difference. People who grow up with TVs are more likely to learn their habits of thought from the television.

They'll find it harder to be people who concentrate for long periods of time doing something. And growing up without a TV was huge for me, and without screens more generally until my teenage years. I worked a bit on my dad's computer, but it was mostly work.

I was working with my father, not playing lots of games. And that, I think, was an important factor. The more that you have TVs and screens, the harder you'll find it to develop interpretive modes of thought.

You will tend to depend more upon impressions. So I had those advantages. And in other respects, those can be disadvantages for certain contexts.

There are ways in which they serve you well in certain areas of thought, not so well in others. So for instance, a systematizing and analytical mode of thought can be dangerous when you take it to Scripture. If you're not careful, it can be something that causes you to build these brittle systems and these deep ruts in your mind.

You're thinking very rigorously, very consistently along certain channels of thought. And it's very difficult to break outside of those, to consider are these actually healthy patterns of thought? Are these patterns of thought that are appropriate to the material that I'm studying here? Perhaps they're not. And so I had to struggle with that tendency.

A tendency that used well can be a great advantage, but used in an inappropriate manner can really hamstring you. There are many people who have brilliant minds, but yet they have brilliant minds that run in one particular direction. And they can't break out of that.

It's very difficult for them to consider a different way of viewing the same material. And so they lack an imagination. And imagination is a very important part of the thinking process.

It's the ability almost to step outside of an existing pattern of thought and just consistency with that. To think of different ways of viewing things, of framing things in a number of varying patterns, and of inhabiting different ways of thinking. And that was something that I had to learn over time.

The other thing is, personality-wise, I was always very independent and spirited. And

that got me in trouble in school quite a lot. But I was always very independent and spirited.

And it was something that was helpful for thinking. It's not something that will be an advantage within much of your formal schooling experience. Which very much privileges more conformist modes of thought.

People who are very good at matching up to expectations, who don't challenge the preconceptions and think about things in a way that goes outside the established frameworks. But when you start to think more rigorously in the future, that's exactly what you'll need. And so, it may be a difficulty for you at first, but in time it can be very helpful.

Likewise, I was very fortunate to have contacts, particularly in my family and church, where rigorous thought and independent thought was encouraged and given space to develop. So, from my late teenage years, I was developing Bible study groups with friends, and lots of other things. Preaching groups later on, where we'd just challenge each other, push each other, and develop our thinking very independently.

And we were given help and assistance. But it was very much, we were given the space to explore. And that enabled me to develop in a way that I would not have developed otherwise.

Now, there are different types of thought. There are ways of thinking that are very conformist. That you have a certain body of material, and you can have someone who masters that body of material really well.

Who learns that body of material and knows all the ins and outs of it. And that's a very powerful way of thinking. But it's a conformist way of thinking, in that it very much takes its bearings from an external body of material.

Very often, it gets its confidence from systems of approval and other things like that, that exist outside. Whereas, there is a different type of thought, and one which I've always sought to develop. Which is a more agentic sort of intellect.

It focuses upon independence of mind, self-definition. So you're defining your own position, and making it really firm. And then working out from that.

And imagination, being able to view many different positions. And imaginatively occupy these different positions. And then act in an informed and agentic manner within that context.

Self-drivenness and confidence. That you need to have the ability to think through things for yourself. And to think through them in a way that's not easily blown this way or that by other influences.

And that you have the confidence of your own abilities. You can measure yourself. Now that involves also knowing where you're weak.

And where you can depend upon other people. But that ability to measure your own ability is very important. That sense of where your strengths lie, where your weaknesses are.

Where you need supplementation by other people. And where to just stick to your guns. And that really is important.

And then also non-conformity. The danger of just fitting into the existing systems and structures that are offered to you. That can often be a huge danger.

It prevents people from learning many things. Because they're so concerned with fitting in with the groups around them or negotiating relative to those groups. That they're not able to develop an understanding of the principles for themselves.

Now that doesn't mean you're just ignoring other people. It certainly doesn't mean that you're just reacting against other people. Quite the opposite.

Rather than reacting, you're defining yourself in a clearer way. Taking on board the strengths of lots of different positions. But neither reacting against them nor just wholesale assimilating them.

You're trying to imaginatively inhabit them. And then forge your own position relative to them. And that's best served within a context of conversation.

Where you're being pushed on various sides. You're encountering positions of people who are expressing their thoughts in a similar way. And they're testing your thoughts and you're testing theirs.

And there are personality peculiarities involved here. Much of this is my natural character. It comes fairly naturally to me.

Other parts I had to develop over time. Other things like the independence and aspects like that. It's results in part from personal experience.

From long term social ostracisation in school. Being the only English Protestant in a school of Irish Catholic boys during the Troubles was not the most positive social experience. And then I had long term illness after that.

So for a long period of time I was detached from a peer group. Which gave me a lot of room in which to develop my own thinking. In an independent way.

So I was less concerned about what other people thought. I paid a lot of attention to what other people thought. But only to the extent that I could gain from it and help my

own thinking.

I didn't feel beholden to their way of thinking. And I didn't feel I had to conform to that. And that helped me.

There are dangers to that as well. So all these things have downsides too. There's also the fact that I've for most of my life have been geographically isolated from other people who are thinking along the same lines.

Even when I've been in university towns or cities. I've been in contexts where very few people are thinking along the same lines as I am. And so that independence gives me space.

I'm not really in tension with other people because very few people are playing the same game. And that has made it easier for me to develop my thinking in a very spacious realm. I'm not having to react against many people.

Because there just aren't many people in my space. And that does make things easier. Many other people will not have that same advantage.

I also have a sort of emotional, social and associational independence. It frees me for a far more aerated realm of thought. And very few other people I think have that to the same degree.

I think there's also just weirdness in my mind. That I have no sensory control over my thoughts. I have no sense of direction.

I have no sensory imagination for instance. I can't imagine sounds, images, tastes, the feel of some texture or something like that. I just don't have a sensory imagination at all.

And that enables me to break things down to a far more minimalistic framework. I'm able to see things in their bare bones. And the structures really emerge to me a lot more quickly.

That may be part of it. I don't know. I've never experienced a different way of imagining the world.

This is just the way that I've always been. I'm sure that's part of it. Formal education, I didn't really gain that much from formal education.

In terms of my deeper structures of thought. Formal education was very helpful in teaching me basic competencies in language and things like that. And giving me the basic content of knowledge that I needed to have of various fields.

It gave me that. What it didn't do so well is develop the traits of agentic thought that have really helped me the most. Within much formal education you're not engaging in

rigorous debate.

You're not developing the strength of argument. You're not developing the ability to hone your thought in a more independent way. And to use your imagination creatively in engaging with areas of thought.

Often that just isn't taught. You've got lots of other skills that are being taught to you. But even to the extent it is taught within essays and seminars and things like that.

It's quite limited. An essay is largely a monologue. You're engaging with other voices but in a way that's less engaged.

And I've learned best in context of oral engagement. Or in terms of debate where you're engaging quite closely with people. And far more intensely with people.

And those contexts most people just aren't trained very well for. There are many people who have PhDs who have advanced education. See them online in an argument.

They lose their cool. They can't keep their head. They can't argue a case well.

And as a result their thinking isn't much use in that situation. Indeed often it becomes a liability because they have these very sharp minds. And then they're emotionally unsettled and unbalanced.

And they get into arguments and they're trying to rationalise. And their minds which are very sharp allow them to rationalise very well. But it's not helping anyone.

And so learning how to think was something that mostly came elsewhere. It came from having contexts in which I could engage with other people who sharpened me. In which I could develop far more independent processes of thought.

Not just independent in a manner of rebelling against other viewpoints. Or reacting or just being contrarian for the sake of it. But developing the space within which to forge my own understanding against the testing of other people.

And that for me was provided in part in the academic networks and environments I was brought into through my education. And those were very helpful. But most of the things that people have in a formal education don't really train you in those agentic skills.

They give you some basic training but they won't take you very far. If you really want to do that, develop that. Spend a lot of time writing.

Spend a lot of time working through issues again and again and again. Debate with other people. Have lots and lots of conversation.

Listen to a lot of people who are working these things out themselves. As they are

working these things out. And for me the blog was a great form of thought.

And these sorts of videos can be helpful as well. It's thought in a hotter form. Now when we have thought for the most part it tends to be cooled down.

It tends to have solidified. It tends to be the sort of thought that develops over time and then reaches this final stage and then it's published. And when you're reading a book it's solidified thought.

It's something that's reached its conclusion. That's the final report on what someone's thinking. Whereas a blog is thought and process.

It's a sandpit. It's a realm where people are exploring things and developing things. And there's a warmth to that that still hasn't solidified yet.

And there's conversation in the comments. There's engagement with other blogs. And all of that was crucial for me.

It gave me a context within which I was constantly being exposed to challenges. Having to develop my thought to take on board other perspectives. And it forced me to think in a far more rigorous way than I would have done otherwise.

Partly because there was a lot of thought. But there weren't the emotional pressures within that context. And I'll get to that in a moment.

But within the days of, from the early 2000s onwards, the days of forums and early blogging, I think, followed by email discussion lists, you had communities of thought focused on shared conversations. And the conversations were ordered towards truth and largely free from the sort of problems that you have on social media. With the person-focused emphasis that they introduce.

And the charged character of those conversations where people are often in antagonism with each other. These were contexts in which you could sharpen ideas with people who disagreed with you to some extent. And be brought into contact with people much further afield with common interests.

And so they were a perfect context for developing a far more independent way of thinking. And agentic thinking. Lots of writing and formulating and reformulating your own thought.

And it meant close engagement with opposing ideas, but with less focus upon politics and personalities. You have to learn how to stand on your own feet. And then there's this friendly hammering out of issues in conversation with others.

And frankly, it's a lot harder to find such contexts today. They tend to be swamped by social media. And in social media, personal and social and political tensions are far more

to the foreground.

And a lot more becomes about the identity of different people and tribal dynamics. Things like that. And I've found it's very hard to find the context in a general realm that I used to enjoy on blogging and elsewhere.

They are still there in certain places and others are being developed. But they're just not as common to find. And I've found on this front also, having male groups has been very important.

Because in my experience, in male groups you can have these sorts of conversations far more easily than in mixed groups. Or in predominantly female groups. Male groups, you can have these charred arguments and debates and they just don't get personal in the same way.

There can be all this antagonism and argument, but it just is not as personal and it does not become as personal. It's not as focused upon identity as it does within mixed contexts. So I think that's certainly been an important thing for me.

And I think a lot of people do not have these contexts to the same degree today. Other things, I give a lot of thought and care to managing my emotional states and my thinking. And ensuring that I have a healthy emotional relationship to the things I'm thinking about and the people that I'm engaging with.

And this may seem a strange thing to talk about. We often think about thought as if it was just this pure activity of rationality. And it's seldom as easy as that.

If you do not have healthy emotional relations, what you'll end up doing is using your mind just to rationalise things. Or your mind will become fixated upon issues in unhealthy ways. Now you maybe experienced this at some points in the past where, for instance, you see some argument and something about it doesn't seem right to you.

And you're in a panic and you're engaging with it in panic. And when you engage with it in panic mode, your mind tends to get in this narrow path. It's very difficult to see alternatives.

It's very difficult to relate to that issue in a way that is illuminating. You just either will have this aversion against it, spring back from it. Or you'll end up just going straight into it, running into its arms.

It can sometimes be like a fight or flight dynamic. And your mind will be rationalising all this time, but it's not doing you any good. And so unless you manage your emotional states, you will struggle to think well.

And many people, if you look online, look at some very intelligent people who do not

manage their emotional states. And you can see it. It isn't hard.

There are certain people that get under their skin and they end up making fools of themselves. There are other times when you can tell that they just cannot get enough distance from the issue to think clearly about it. They're reacting and they're working with impressions rather than interpretations.

And so reactivity and defensiveness make it very hard for us to be open and attentive to things. If you're engaging with a particular issue and your mind is shaped by this context that you came from and the people that you have an antagonism with. So for instance, let's say you grew up in a fundamentalist background and you're carrying a lot of baggage from that.

That baggage will prevent you from thinking about issues clearly. It will mean that you're always thinking about the issues that are associated with that context in a reactive way. You're thinking about those issues in a way that constantly is determined by the foil of fundamentalism.

So you're either reacting against fundamentalism or doing something else. But everything is determined by what you came from. Self-determined thought is a very different sort of thing.

It doesn't really take its bearings from emotionally charged antagonisms and this sort of emotional plasma that exists between you and a particular background, particular persons, particular ideas. But it is about trying to have a very clearly defined position in yourself. And then you work out from that.

And once you've got that clearly defined position, it's a lot easier to be calm about things, to think about things carefully, to have the distance in order to liberate and reflect. And so much of this is about distance. It's about giving yourself differentiation.

What is differentiation? Differentiation is that space that exists around you in which you're safe. It's that space in which you're not challenged by other things. Now, we talk a lot about safe spaces in our context, but there is some sense there.

If people do not feel safe in their fundamental selves, they do not think well about things. They end up reacting against things and getting into these emotional meltdowns and other things like that. It's very hard for them to be calm and to work through issues in a careful way.

And so I've given a lot of thought to how do I create a space around myself where I can think, where this is my space and within this space I'm not challenged. And within that space, what I can do is think about issues in a calm, deliberative manner and I don't have to feel I'm reacting against anyone else. They're all at a distance and so I don't have to worry about them.

What I'm concerned about is developing consistently my own thought, taking on board the good things that I see out there, learning from the challenges, but developing my thought in a way that is engaged but differentiated. I found the work of Edwin Friedman very helpful on this. It's a very basic idea, but what you need to do is elaborate his idea and take it out and you'll find it's incredibly useful for all different sorts of areas of thought.

I've written a long summary of his book, *Failure of Nerve*. I'll give a link to that below in the show notes. On this front, what does differentiation involve? It involves giving you time, the time in which to think through an issue.

So you're not just rushing to react. If there's some live issue in the news, give yourself a few hours, give yourself a few days. No need to respond immediately.

If it is something that needs a response, it will generally wait a few days and you'll be able to give a better response, one that you will not have to pull back from. Other things? It involves emotional space. So don't be in a socially charged environment all the time.

Spend time in solitude. Turn off your phone, turn off your internet connection, or just step away from everything and read a book. Read a book that isn't coming to you charged with all the expectations and judgments of social context, but read a book simply to engage with it for its own sake.

And try to avoid having contexts that are emotionally charged. You'll find on social media people do not think well in an emotionally saturated environment, where they're always interacting with and reacting against different people. People just do not think well in that context.

It's not a conducive context for careful thought. Give yourself space as well. Space is just physical space, but also other sorts of space, where I find having a room of my own, having a place where I can retreat from other people, having a realm of solitude, having just time to myself, where I'm walking by myself or walking a dog or something like that, gives me time to think and reflect.

And within that space, where there's not anyone up in your environment, it gives you the room in which to think in a far more independent and careful way, in a way that's self-defined rather than reactive. There are other forms of differentiation that are involved, and those are things like separating out conversations. On social media, so many of our different social groups are collapsed into each other.

And so if you're tweeting something on Twitter, you'll find there are people following you who are not Christians, others who are Christians, some have radically different views from you, others have far more extreme views along the lines of the views that you hold.

And these do not generally work well together. And so differentiating conversations gives you space, again, where you're not so exposed to things that will make you reactive.

Much of this is about developing a skin. It's about developing a realm in which you are not exposed to anything that's threatening in your environment. So you can go into threatening environments and feel safe.

You don't have to worry about it so much. And reactivity and defensiveness make it very hard to be open and attentive to things, which is precisely what you need. Now, I found it very interesting to see the way that people deal with someone like Jordan Peterson.

Jordan Peterson is someone who sparks people's reactivity. And so on one hand, there are some people who instantly glum to him and won't hear anything wrong about him. On the other hand, there are people who have this need to exorcise him from the public discourse.

They cannot actually engage with him carefully. They cannot differentiate themselves from him. He's seen as this invader of their social space, and they need to get the antibodies on him to remove him entirely.

They feel threatened by his presence. Now, you're not going to learn much from someone when you're in that sort of reactive mode. You're not going to listen to them.

You're going to try and fit them into your own structures and react against them on terms that are often alien to the terms that they're communicating in. I've found if I'm going to understand Jordan Peterson, I need to leave my baggage behind. I need to listen to him on his own terms and not try and fit him into my camp.

He doesn't fit into my camp, but he's someone I can learn from. He's someone I can have at a distance from me. And that's generally the people I found most helpful, are people I have strong differences with.

So, for instance, last night there was a long debate between Jordan Peterson and Slavoj Zizek. They're both people I really have appreciated, and I've learned from both of them. Now, they have their differences, clearly, and neither of them are people that I could commit myself to in their more general outlook.

I have strong differences with both of them. But yet, why not gain what you can from both of them? If you're differentiated, then you can. You don't have to worry about, is he Christian enough? It doesn't really matter.

What matters is if you are Christian enough to be able to take on board to determine what's good and what is not so good. You need to define your own thought, and if you do that, you don't have to worry so much about everything else that you come in contact with in your environment. You don't have to sterilize your environment.

You can engage with things that are non-sterile and actually gain from them. So pay a lot of attention to the emotional state that you have, to differentiating your thought, to becoming self-defined. And so you're not threatened by opposing viewpoints, but you're curious about them.

And as you're curious about them, you can imaginatively inhabit them, take on board their good things and their strengths, and make your own thoughts stronger. It's what I've constantly done. I've spent hours reading people like Slavoj Žižek, with whom I have pronounced disagreements, but yet he's a great person to learn how to think from.

He has a very unusual way of thinking, and precisely for that reason, if you want to think better, it's great to listen to someone who thinks in a weird way, and yet has great insights. He thinks, his thought moves in this really eccentric manner, but it arrives at great insights along the way. And some insights aren't really insights at all, they're quite confused.

But if you want to learn how to think, you need to have that ability to be open to things that are different from you, without being threatened. And that requires differentiation. Other things are true about Scripture.

This sort of thing is true about Scripture. If your consciousness is dominated by theological and interpersonal tensions, or political tensions within your church context, you will struggle to read Scripture well. It will not be an engagement with Scripture so much as an engagement that's constantly dominated by the preoccupations, and the issues and the questions that you're bringing to the Scripture from that context.

And those will be precisely the things that prevent you from listening to what the text has to say. Now I've seen this a lot in contexts of conversations about theology of the sexes, for instance. People come to the Bible, and they've got all this baggage from their environment that they're not able to get distance from.

And so they come to the Bible, and they bring all these questions, and the Bible isn't intended to answer those questions. The Bible would actually challenge those questions. It would suggest that those questions are not the right ones to bring.

But to actually reach that point of recognising that they are the wrong questions, you have to step back a lot. And to step back, you need to have that distance that is connected. So you're connected to the social questions, you're connected to the biblical questions, but you're at a distance.

So you're able to engage with both without being threatened by either. And that is important. Because otherwise, there are some people who just cannot read the text apart from importing all this baggage from their context.

And it just makes it impossible for them to read it well. And I've seen this so much.

People who have a preoccupation with gender issues, and then that's how they read the Bible.

And they're not able to read the Bible as a result. If you want to understand what the Bible teaches about gender, read the Bible for its own sake. And know the Bible well.

Know theology well. If you're trying to talk about the Trinity and its relation to gender issues, don't just focus upon gender issues and then use that to go into the subject of the Trinity. Be someone who's studied the Trinity in detail.

And then you'll be able to speak about how it relates. But so many people have these preoccupations that they are bringing to the world, to their context of discussion, whatever it is. And it makes it so difficult for them to see anything.

So difficult for them to be open to something that might surprise them. Because everything about their horizon is dominated by their preoccupations, by those things that they've failed to differentiate themselves from. And that process of differentiation is tough.

It may mean just getting off social media altogether. It may mean giving yourself a bit more space. Stop using your mobile phone for a lot of the time.

Switch off your phone. Spend a lot more time in solitude reading. It might mean taking long walks by yourself.

It may mean focusing upon contexts where you don't feel emotionally threatened and rooting yourself in those contexts. All of those things will help you think better. And people don't pay enough attention to those issues when they think about thinking.

Because they think thinking is just about rationality. It's about your emotions as well. And if you're not able to manage your flight and fight, or panic, or whatever it is, all these emotional tendencies, or this tendency to rationalise on the basis of an animosity, or aversion to some particular position, or something from your background, if you can't deal with that, you will struggle to read scripture well.

Or to think about anything well. Now, there's also a way of approaching scripture that you need to learn trust in this. It leads you to a certain sort of patience as well.

I believe that God is a good God. I believe that his word is truthful. And that gives me a certain confidence when I approach scripture that I'm not threatened by it.

If I find something that feels really threatening, I know that God is good. And so I just seek it out. Explore it a bit deeper.

See if there's something that I've missed that I've maybe not understood. And those sorts of things make a big difference. But many people, when they're working in a very

emotionally charged and yet unconsidered mode, struggle in this respect.

Now, this is not to say that emotions are not important. That we're trying to seek rationality rather than emotions. That's certainly not what I'm saying.

Because everyone is shaped by emotions. What I'm saying is that we should give the same rigour to managing our emotions as we should to managing our thought. And indeed, if we do not rigorously consider and develop and shape our emotional life, we will not be clear thinkers.

So those two go together. And our thinking needs to be determined by the subject, not by our emotions. Other things I've given a lot of thought to, and you can see this in my writing, is contexts and modes of thought.

And if you're going to think, you need to create an environment for thought. Now, for many people, their environment of thought is something like Twitter or Facebook. For others, it is the solitude of private reading.

And those things will shape you in different ways. They're not neutral environments. Social media presents us with material in an emotionally charged manner.

So you're primed to respond to it. And you're primed to respond to it in rapid succession. You've received the information and you respond to it.

And things move often in a viral fashion. There's a sort of wildfire where something moves without any sort of interruption. Whereas your ability to respond rather than react depends upon you having a context that provides you with differentiation.

Or it really needs some sort of differentiation, whether in yourself or within your context. Now, if you've got a very differentiated self and you've got a context around yourself in which you're not threatened by things in the same way, if you're able to negotiate hostile contexts where there's constantly things pushing you to react, then that's good. But most people can't do that.

So they need to manage their environments a bit more carefully. They need to step back from social media, other contexts that are emotionally charged, and spend a lot more time in solitude. Spend a lot more time engaging with things that aren't as charged with the urgency of the now.

Give yourself time. Don't respond immediately. Sit on your responses.

If you feel angry about something, sleep on it. And then come back to it. All these sorts of things are necessary to provide us with emotionally healthy thought.

And if you're going to create context for that, you probably wouldn't come up with context that we have on social media. And the way that you see people thinking on

social media is a consequence in large measure of a breakdown of the contexts that are conducive for careful, deliberate thought. It speeds everything up, it emotionally charges it, and it loses the distance between people.

The distance that helps us to think in a careful and independent way. And not just to stampede with whatever herd is stampeding at the time. Other things that I've done, I've produced a lot of material externalizing my thinking and developing the skills that I've learned from others.

And this has been crucial to strengthening my thought. The process of objectifying your thought and practicing conceptual skills through writing and speaking is something I've found invaluable. I've written thousands upon thousands, millions literally, of words.

Just developing my thinking. Every week I probably write around 20,000 words in some form or other. And those words are ways in which I'm honing things and testing ideas and reformulating ideas.

And as you go through them again and again, they become better and clearer. And you get a sharper grip upon them. You can simplify them, perhaps in certain forms.

On these videos, I've challenged myself to produce a lot of videos without notes. So I'm thinking off the top of my head, I'm having to be a lot more alert, a lot more informed more generally. So I'm not relying upon lots of research for each particular video.

I'm relying upon my general knowledge. And that solidifies things in my mind. It strengthens the connections between things.

And pushing myself in that way is one of the ways in which I've learned. If I didn't do things like this on a regular basis, I wouldn't be developing. I wouldn't be pushing myself in any direction that would force me to grow.

And forcing yourself to grow is huge. Read books that are a level above you, that are beyond your current level, that challenge you to advance. And I look back on some of the books that I used to find so difficult to understand.

And I can understand them easily now. It doesn't come straight away. You have to work on this a lot.

But it really makes a difference if you persevere at something. Openness to and curiosity about ideas is really important. Because unless you have this sort of receptivity towards ideas, and curiosity to go out and seek them, you will end up being very stagnant.

You will just be taking upon things to confirm you in your initial impressions. You won't be testing things and developing things or growing. In every single conversation you enter with someone who's thoughtful, who disagrees with you, you should be able to

come out of it stronger.

Either your position should be replaced by a better understanding, or you should hone your way of thinking and sharpen it as you engage with another viewpoint. There's always something to gain from these engagements. And I've found that I've pursued them for that reason.

Read people who disagree with you. And read people who push you to think in different ways. When you do that, you'll find that your own thinking, if you are receptive and open and curious without being uncritical, and all of this again is about differentiation, it will enable you to strengthen your understanding.

Now, again, this openness and curiosity involves a certain degree of giving yourself over to what you're listening to. Or attending to. You have to allow that to set the terms of your understanding.

To imaginatively inhabit that person's ideas or something that you're being presented with. The example I'd like to give on this front is Marco Polo going to the East. And he knew, as a man of his time, that there were strange and wonderful beasts at the far end of the world.

And so he went to the Javan. What was he expecting to see in the far parts of the world? He was expecting to see a unicorn. Because that's what all his books told him, that he should expect in the far end of the world.

Sure enough, he sees the unicorn. And the unicorn just happens to be something that surprises him. Although he's expecting this wonderful, graceful beast, he finds that it's got a hide like an elephant.

Feet like an elephant. Or hide like a buffalo. It's got a face more like a warthog.

It is dark and black rather than the white, graceful, horse-like creature he was expecting. Of course, what he saw was the rhinoceros. But he wasn't able to inhabit that imaginatively.

He was so bound by his initial conceptions and impressions that he wasn't able to move beyond them. I think this is one thing that particularly frustrates me in engaging with many things online. There are so many ways in which we all are seeing what we are primed to see and are unable to inhabit other viewpoints or ways of thinking.

We're not able to step back to differentiate ourselves from other people. So we're not reacting to or being defensive against them. But just openly inhabiting their way of thinking and giving ourselves over to that way of experiencing the world.

So we imaginatively inhabit their position, take it on board, and then develop the

strengths and the weaknesses and relate them to our own position. We're so often looking for some sort of emotional catharsis. We want to either expel them, to cast them off, to say they're ridiculous or stupid.

Or we're trying to conform them to our position, to say that they really hold exactly the same thing as us. You're not going to grow that way. You're just going to confirm yourself in your existing prejudices.

And there are others that just have an instinct to attack anything that opposes their categories. Everything has to fit into the existing categories of the world. They can't imagine a different set of categories.

There's also a way in which many people work, particularly on the internet, and reading online just tends to produce this in us. People work with impressions rather than interpretation. So how does this feel to you? What impression are you getting? It's a sort of subjective emotional response to what someone is saying.

And very often that can be a matter of triggering words or expressions. And people are listening to that rather than actually engaging interpretatively with what is being said as an objective thing within the world that they have to engage with as something other to them, as something that is independent from their emotional impressions. And so many people, their emotions just get in the way of everything.

They've not learnt how to manage their emotions, and so they can't think. Or they struggle to think clearly in emotionally charged situations. What we need to do is to ensure that our emotions work for us.

And that involves dealing with sin as well. It involves forgiving people so that you do not have this bitterness or rivalry with them. It involves doing things like dealing with the antagonisms you have with people.

I find this, that I have to do this a lot. There are times people just annoy me, certain people. And I see them come up in my feed, and I think, that person again.

They're opinionating on this issue, they don't have a clue what they're talking about. But yet if I were to challenge them, they would get all worked up about it, and it would become a thing. And I just can't be bothered, but they're annoying me.

And that prevents me from thinking clearly. It's not a good thing. And so I need to deal with that, and I find that praying for that person makes a big difference.

And so I try and relate to that person in a way that differentiates myself from them. So I'm relating to them through my relationship with God. And that relationship, as a good relationship, is one that enables me to seek their good.

And that makes a difference. Now I relate to them in a way that is not so charged. Another thing is creating context that you share with people.

You don't have that online for the most part. We tend to be dealing with people sort of face to face, and that's a context within which antagonism really develops quite easily. Whereas in actual living conversation, you'll find that there are mediating contexts that you can share.

You have a common good, you're sharing a coffee, or you're eating a meal together, or you're doing some activity together. And that enables you to mitigate the tensions that you have with people. So negotiate your context in a way that's very deliberate, that considers how certain contexts lend themselves to antagonism developing.

Whereas if you want to create a peaceful interaction with someone, where they'll actually be able to hear you out, do so in a context which is a common one. Establish that context. Develop peaceful relations.

Give them something. Share something with them. Engage in ways that are not just about your beliefs and ideas, and the antagonisms that you have with other people's ideas.

Share some fun hobbies you have, or the delight that you have in some aspect of the world. These sorts of things create contexts in which people will be able to hear each other better. They create mediating contexts in which the emotional antagonisms that we have can be relieved.

So think about that. If you want to become better at thinking, create those contexts for yourself. Now, that was the more general understanding of how I think.

Let's get to some more particular things on reading scripture. My general concern is to be attentive to the text over everything else. So I try to avoid bringing any of my own questions to the text, and I focus on listening above all else.

The best questions will almost invariably emerge from the text itself. And so if you want to discover these questions, you need to begin by practicing openness to hear the text itself. In all what is often is strangeness.

There are various ways to do this. One of the ways I do is just listen through a text again and again, or read through it again and again and again, and just listen. What are some of the odd details that jump out from this? Where have I heard this before? Or why is the text shaped this way? Why have this story in this particular part? All of these questions shape you in a way that's more attentive to what's before you, and less concerned by the baggage that you're bringing to the text.

Just deal with that baggage so you're not bringing so much baggage to the text. Put that

baggage to one side. Give yourself the emotional space so that you can then understand the text through openness to the text, and then bring the text to your baggage.

That's the way that you should do it. Bring the text to your baggage rather than the baggage to the text. It takes a bit of work, but practice this.

Practice it by setting good contexts and good practices. You need to ensure that you do not come to the text always forearmed with elaborate systems of thought, pressing questions or preoccupations or antagonisms within your context. If you're having a particular debate about something that you've really worked up about at the moment, maybe that's not the best issue to be going to the text with, because it's just going to make it very hard for you to read the text on its own terms.

It will take quite a lot of discipline for you to do that. People's encounter with scripture is often far too purposive to be attentive. You come to the scripture and you're wanting to do this study, to prepare this sermon, to whatever it is, to answer this pressing question, or to use the Bible to argue this particular point.

And that does not open you up to the text. What it does is it presents you with a very narrow field of vision into which you're hoping the text will expose itself. So you're hoping the text will speak into that narrow field of vision that you've come to it with, rather than actually relaxing that vision and allowing yourself to develop a far less focused and narrowed understanding of the text.

As you open up your peripheral vision, for instance, just be present in the text and hear what emerges from it. And I've found, for instance, if you're reading the story of Abraham and his family, these things come out a lot of times. You need to just read them and be attentive to what emerges.

Read the story of Joseph sold into slavery. Who are the Midianites? Why are the Midianites within this story? Why mention particular details like sitting down to eat bread? Or why have the period in Dothan? Why does he go to Dothan? What's happening there? Why all these details about the pit and no water in it? Why use the same word for pit as we have later on for the dungeon? These things, you won't see them if you're focusing upon answering questions. But just be attentive to the text.

And that takes practice. You don't initially see these things. Often you'll just have to do this again and again.

And these things develop over time. You need to learn also from people who do this well. It takes practice.

And there are certain people who do this well. And the more time you spend with them, the more you'll be able to do it well. Particularly look out for the details, again, that stick out in a strange way.

So today is Holy Saturday. And maybe think about the way in which in Luke's Gospel, you have Christ wrapped in linen and laid in the tomb by Joseph. And then you have Mary appearing later on.

Why those details? Where have I heard that before? It seems so similar to the beginning of the Gospel, where there's Joseph and Mary, and Jesus wrapped in linen garments and laid in a manger. Which probably looked very similar to a casket in a tomb. What is going on there? First of all, you will not notice that if you are just reading through the text for some particular purpose.

If you're listening to the text, though, that's the sort of thing that jumps out. Why in the beginning of the story do we have Jesus going to Jerusalem and being lost there for three days, and then being found in the temple by his parents? Mary keeps that in her mind. And of course, at the end of the Gospels, we see Christ's death and resurrection following a similar pattern.

Again, at the time of Passover. These are patterns, and unless you're being attentive, you don't tend to see those things. You're reading very much at the surface of the text, and you're reading for a purpose.

Think about the story of Mary and the way that that has parallels with Pentecost. Or the way that the presentation in the temple and the ascension have these parallels. But notice these things.

Don't rush to fit everything together. Just be patient. These things will emerge with time.

And over time, as you're patient, they will tend to take more of a shape. And the advantages of paying attention accumulate almost exponentially. The more that you pay attention, the easier it is to pay attention in general, and the more practiced that you will be in recognising various features that reward attention the most.

Someone just starting out won't find this so easy, because they're not yet alert to some of those areas where alertness is most likely to be rewarded. But the more that you practice this, the more natural it will be, and the more you'll find that your radar is developed and honed, so that you're able to see things that you would not be able to see otherwise. And that brings out other things in turn.

And from attentiveness, there can be a very fluid movement to the discernment of patterns and commonalities. So I hold potential patterns lightly. I often compare it to a tree, where you have this big trunk, and then you have large branches going out from that, and then smaller branches, and then twigs, and then leaves.

And there are many details in the text that are just like twigs or leaves. You don't put any of your weight upon them, but you register them. And they may be connected to something a bit bigger.

And then you work out from those branches, and the more that you fill these things out, the more weight you can put upon them. But holding them lightly enables you to explore several at once, and not become locked into things. There's always a danger with certain people who have a very systematizing mode of thought, that they over-determine these patterns.

They don't hold them lightly enough. And so what you end up is over-determined, brittle systems, which are imposed upon the text, and are no longer attentive to the text. So you move from attentiveness to the text, to the system, and then you bring that system from one text to another, and impose it upon the text.

That's a great danger. And it's a danger that faces everyone who wants to recognize patterns in the text. Be alert to your dangers there, and bring your thinking constantly into engagement with the text.

And ideally, with many other people who are reading that text, and noticing different patterns. It's a great way to test how good your patterns are, is to listen to these other patterns, and think, well, here are some other suggestions of patterns that there could be. How does mine match up? Am I just seeing this? Or is there something... First of all, many other people will see the same patterns as you.

If they're a good pattern, you'll often find it. I find this with James Jordan, for instance, a lot of the time. That I've read a lot of James Jordan, and he doesn't have to tell me a certain pattern is in the text.

By this point, I can see these patterns, and then I come to his work, and he's recognized it as well. This isn't original to me. And then I'll read someone else, and yeah, they've recognized it too.

A number of Jewish commentators have seen this. This is the way that I've found it. Often, as a confirmation of these patterns, as you can go to all these different authors, and they've seen it too.

These skilled readers. But if you're just using these brittle patterns, often it can become an esoteric system. Whereas we need to keep very close to the text.

There are many people who will leave the text for a system. Stay in the text. Stay close to the surface of the text.

And for me, this has involved a certain suspicion around common forms of typology that are looking for patterns of Christ in the Old Testament. I've wanted to see Christ in the Old Testament, but in a way that moves through the Old Testament, that reads the text on its own terms, and shows how the trajectory from that text leads to Christ, rather than moving directly from that to the other. As if we could airlift ourselves from the Old Testament to the New directly without moving through.

And so moving through, I think, is a way of keeping things close to the text, avoiding these grand systems that impose themselves upon the text, and exercising the discipline of following the movement of showing within the text. Other things I've found helpful. The best way to retain any body of material in your mind is to have a strong glue that holds details together.

So I'm not someone who has an amazing memory. I just don't. What I do have is the ability to glue details together very well.

And that actually helps you to remember things well. In the past, I used to be an avid word gamer, and memorized lots of words and anagram sets. And I found that if you were going to memorize each word one by one, it just wouldn't work.

You wouldn't memorize these things well, and you wouldn't be able to play them well in a game. What will help you is memorizing sets and clusters, so that you can always move from one to the next, and they're always connected in different ways. So when it comes to biblical knowledge, I use much the same principle.

I'm constantly corralling my thought and my knowledge into a deeper exploration of patterns. So I'm working on the family of Abraham at the moment, for instance. And alongside that, I'm thinking about the stories of Samuel and Kings, and how the thematic and typological resemblances give me a tighter grasp on those stories.

So I'm reading the story of David and the story of Saul, alongside the story of Esau and Jacob, or Isaac and Jacob. And then I'm reading the story of Nabal and Laban alongside each other. And all these things are brought together.

Then I'm reading the story of Christ alongside that. And so the more that I deepen my understanding of the story of Jacob, the more that I'm gathering the rest of my thought into that connection, seeing what the rest of my knowledge of Scripture looks like from that vantage point. And so I'm doing deep dives, but also trying to bring a wide range of thought into engagement with that.

And this is very much what biblical study is like, that you're bringing a lot of thought to a lot of context to any particular passage. And while bringing a lot of context to any particular passage, you're also having to go deep into that passage and its particularities. So I'm bringing all the stories of the Old Testament to reading the story of Luke, for instance, Luke's Gospel.

But that context will help me to go on a deeper dive in Luke. So you're having to deal with the particular very closely, but also the general. And much education, theological education, won't prepare you for that.

It does not give you that deep or that extensive general knowledge of the Bible. Nor does it help you to integrate that with a deep dive into a particular text. And as a result, you

have people who are very well versed in a particular text, but they've not really seen it from the vantage point of the whole.

And they miss so much, even though they've spent maybe even years studying this particular passage. I've found that if you want to think about these things well, you constantly need to be integrating those different areas of your thought. Integrating the part into the whole.

And constantly shuttling between those two. And if you're dealing with the close details, deal with the big picture. Or deal with a particular story and then think about all the other stories that resemble that.

And the ways that they will help you to read it. So if I'm reading the story of, as I just did a couple of days ago, the story of Joseph being sold into Egypt. That story has echoes of the story of the binding of Isaac, the Akedah story.

It has echoes of the story of Ishmael being sent out into the wilderness. It has echoes of the story of Isaac and the deception of Isaac by Jacob, presenting goats and coats. Now, all of those patterns will help us to read Genesis 37.

As will the following chapters, particularly in chapter 38, where we see similar patterns playing out in the life of Judah, as we'll get to next week. All these things will help you to read the particular passage in front of you. And if you're excluding those things from your view, you can spend hours reading that text and you'll get little out of it by comparison.

There's a great discussion of this in Yoram Hazoni's *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, where he observes that each text of the Torah is poor within itself. It doesn't have much content. But in terms of the whole, it is rich with insight.

So constantly shuttle between the two, between the particular text and then the broader narrative. And that's the way that I constantly do this. If you're listening to me, you'll see I start off with a text, and that text may seem odd and difficult to understand.

And so I'm grasping at what are some of the parallels? What are some of the contextual and thematic issues that I see playing here? And I'm trying to bring all these other things to bear upon it from different sides, and then read the text again. And you'll find on that second iteration, it opens up often in ways that it would not previously. That way of approaching things really lends itself to dealing with the extensive intertextuality of the biblical text.

The other thing is typology done very well can be a profound servant of attention. Once you've recognized a type scene, for instance, every text where that scene is found has a new salience in both its similarities and its differences from every other appearance of the type scene. If you're reading the story of women and wells, for instance, they all tell

that story slightly differently.

And as you read them alongside each other, you'll find that those similarities and the differences are part of the meaning that the type scene exposes. And if you're reading those stories just in abstraction from everything else, neither the similarities nor the differences appear to you. If you're dealing with it merely in terms of this grand archetype that can be abstracted from the text, you will not notice the differences.

On the other hand, if you're unaware of the similarities, if these are just detached texts, you'll just end up with something that's flat, that's not really charged, that isn't really playing off anything else. And so reading these texts alongside each other enables you to be attentive to things. And every single detail within those stories sticks out because you think here you've got the fundamental paradigm, the fundamental type scene, and here are all these differences, here are all these similarities.

And then you remember the particular scene and the similarities and differences because you know the type scene, the glue that holds these different stories together. Remember, if you do not have glue, it's very hard to remember things because it's just isolated bits of information. But if you want to remember things well, get a glue that fits them together.

Think about fundamental symbolic patterns as something like Matthew Pajot's, the language of creation is really good on that sort of thing, giving you fundamental structures to think about these larger patterns and the glue that will help you fit stories together or realities within creation. If you do not have a good knowledge of typology or symbol, you are really at a disadvantage for learning your Bible. It doesn't mean that you can't learn your Bible, it just means that you're going to have to take a really long way around.

The easy way is to know symbol and typology well so that all these things glue together. And as they glue together, you don't have to depend so much upon knowing each passage individually. They come in clusters.

When I'm reading scripture, it's a process of moving into deeper attention and that swiftly moves me below the surface level of textual phenomena into inquiry into the rationale and purpose of patterns. So I see these parallels between these stories of Abraham's life, for instance, the pattern of the firstborn and the secondborn being switched in these different stories. Then you're asking yourself, why do we see that repeating itself? That moves you into deeper attention and into an understanding not just of some surface parallels of the text, but of what is it that's making this text tick? That's the constant question that's in the back of my mind.

How is this text ticking? What's underneath the surface that explains why this particular detail would be mentioned here? This is something I practice more generally. If someone

interests me, for instance, I'm far more interested in how than I am in what they think. I mean, you can learn what someone thinks quite easily.

The far more interesting thing is how they are thinking in the way that they are. And then when you learn how someone thinks, you can inhabit that imaginatively, and you can reconstruct their thought, and you can develop their thought in areas that they haven't developed it. It's something I try and do all the time.

When I'm reading someone, I try and incorporate as a sort of new voice within my mental repertoire of viewpoints. I get a different voice, and I try and inhabit that way of seeing the world. And as I imaginatively inhabit that, I can develop it or bring it to bear upon a different conversation, or expand it in some area, or steelman it.

Think, well, I see all these problems with this person and the way that they're approaching this issue, but I can take all this on board, and I can strengthen it in this, that, and the other way. Why not do that? You'll find your thinking is far more developed as a result. I want to understand these texts and people on their own terms to imaginatively inhabit them, and to be able to appropriate and apply that way of thinking for myself.

And in an argument, I find the same thing. I'm often far more interested in the meta question. Why are we having this debate? Why are we having it in this particular way? Why has this particular issue prompted it? What has made this the presenting problem, rather than something else that would have been in the past? Why is it that these particular people are arguing about it in this way, and these people are arguing about it in others? You see these issues come up a lot in my writing.

They're things that I get interested about, because thinking about how we are arguing, why we are arguing, it's far more productive than just the issues about which we are arguing. Because if you're thinking about those former issues, you can retool your way of thinking, and then think more effectively about issues. So you're not just working according to a trigger, but you're someone who's able to think about your way of thinking, and bring the best mode of thinking to particular issues.

And that means developing new ways of thinking. Now, I'm not naturally gifted at certain ways of thinking, but I've had to work at them, to think about how to relate to issues in ways that are most appropriate to them. I want to understand the internal mechanisms, so that I can operate better in terms of them.

I often find myself frustrated and perplexed that most people don't seem to be interested in such an inquiry. It just seems, why wouldn't you be? I mean, you can improve your way of thinking, you can take on board so much from what you learn from other people. Why not be open to approaching things in this way? Knowing whether someone is right or wrong is typically a question I find rather boring, compared to the

question of why they are wrong in the way that they are.

What is it about the situation, or the way that they're seeing it, or the social conditions that have shaped the way that they're approaching this question? How could they adjust their conceptual mechanisms and social environments to enable them to think more clearly? How could I apply what I have discovered through this inquiry to myself? And this is something I'm constantly asking myself, and I've found it very helpful. I've also found it very, absolutely essential, to apprentice myself to gifted readers, and learn to inhabit their mind, so that I can replicate their readings. In particular, this has been my experience with Peter Lighthouse and James Jordan.

Back in the day, particularly, I devoured James Jordan's material, and I've forgotten much of the content of it now, but I know how his brain works, or more particularly, how the textual features that he's alert to work. And I frequently can reassemble his readings for myself at this point. And that is a huge advantage.

If you're wanting to learn how to think well, focus on people who can do it well, and spend hours just attending to what they're doing. I'd recommend getting James Jordan's complete collection, and just listening through it. It'll take hours and hours, but you'll learn a lot in the process.

I've done that, and it took me about a year, but I got through it all. I've also done that with Peter Lighthouse's blog, read just about every single post he's written, and I have a mental catalogue of these things now, that I know where to go if I'm looking for something on the subject. I've also listened to people like Rabbi David Forman, most of his stuff now, read most of his books, because these are people who I admire, their way of reading the Bible is something I want to emulate, and they are seeing things that enable me to see things.

So spend your time apprenticing yourself to these sorts of people that you admire. Don't just do it to one thinker. That can be dangerous.

Focus upon inhabiting the minds of several thinkers, and routinely bringing them into imaginative conversation, so that you're not just depending upon one voice, but you can see the strengths and weaknesses as you bring them into dialogue with each other. And that process, finally, of imaginatively inhabiting a different way of thinking, is particularly important to understand the world of Scripture, because it operates according to a very different pattern than the modern ways of viewing the world, which are abstract. So I've given a lot of thought to thinking about modern ways of thinking, and how they are inappropriate to the way of thinking about the Bible.

Why is it that we find it hard to see certain things in the Bible? Why is it hard for the modern mind to understand the existence of God, whereas it was commonsensical to the ancient mind? I've written something, *Strangeness of the Modern Mind*, on this. Again, I'll

link that in the show notes. But think about the Bible on its own terms.

Try to imaginatively inhabit it. And do that for other people as well. Be able to get inside their shoes, get inside their head.

Learn what it would look like to view the world from the perspective of the sacrificial system, from an analogical way of thinking. I've found in these sorts of areas, gravitating to the stranger parts of Scripture can often be the most helpful, because they're the most promising parts of the text, to become attuned to a different way of thinking. If you're always going to the texts that seem most familiar and approachable to you, you're not going to stretch yourself.

You're not going to be able to inhabit something different, because those texts will be the ones that are least unsettling, the least strange, whereas the ones that are strangest are the ones where you see a different mode of thinking in its strongest expression. So go to those and try and inhabit them. Anyway, I've rambled on far, far too long.

I hope this is of help to someone. It may or may not be. But these are things I've found helpful in my own development of my thinking.

Not sure if I mentioned it, but again, one last thing. Get yourself material around you, resources. Know your resources well.

I use things like Bible works. I have a lot of books. You can see some of them behind me.

And just behind me, you can see a lot of Bibles that present me with different ways of engaging with the text. And I use those. So I have interlinears.

I have the Hebrew Bible by Robert Halter with his commentary on it. I have two sets of reader's Bibles behind me. All of these present me with different ways of engaging with the text.

I find hearing the Bible read aloud hugely important. Reading the Bible in the context of the church and the people of God. Thinking about learning the text as an act of discipleship and learning to master yourself in the process of reading the text.

The process of inhabiting the text as something that we perform as a group of people within the context of the liturgy and elsewhere. All of these things are crucially important. But I won't ramble any more.

Thank you very much for listening. Lord willing, you are having a good Holy Saturday. And I hope to be back with you again on Easter Sunday.

God bless.