



## MAKING OUR WAY - A McMahon/Cheyne Podcast

A Reasonable Doubt (Season 1; Episode 17) - 3/6/24

### Today's hosts:

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**JAN:** One more thing about that is: in truth, I'm not sure - so I would claim skepticism as part of my approach to life and, in truth, that served me well. In a day and age when we are just inundated with I'll call it information. How do we sort through to know what's true and what isn't? Just because somebody in an authority position tells me something is true. I've been given a brain and reason and I believe that God expects me to use those things, and not just be fed, I'll say milquetoast - kind of Paulish there. But no, I've been given the resources and the capability to think and figure that out, and that's how I approach all things with faith. No matter who tells me something. I'm going to want to know more. And I've grown from that myself, so...

**JIM (voice-over):** Welcome. We had planned that today's episode would be the first installment of Jan and Rob's report on their safari to Tanzania. But there was a slight mishap as they were heading to the airport and everyone's okay. [music begins] Let's just say that Jan puts the "cast" in "podcast." The clinic advises Jan not to try to play the violin anytime soon, which is just as well because she doesn't play the violin. So for today, we're going to revisit the discussion we had for episode 13, which was called "A Reasonable Faith." A lot of conversation

went into that episode and there were some very important things that were said that were not in that episode and I'd like to put them into this one, which we'll call "A Reasonable Doubt."

Is doubt a reasonable and valid part of our spiritual journey? Or does doubt itself show something is wrong with our faith? We rejoin that conversation now.

[music ends]

**JIM:** Skepticism - let me check you on that word. What would be the opposite of skepticism? Would it be gullibility or would it be faith?

**JAN:** Oh, I'm going for gullibility in that.

**JIM:** That's the way you're using it.

**JAN:** Yeah, and I'm not using cynicism. I want to be clear that I am very far from a cynic, which is basically to deny everything or think everything has a hidden motive. I'm not that person.

**ROB:** But you don't believe in blind faith.

**JAN:** I'm trying to think how I would answer that question because as soon as you throw the word faith in, it causes a problem for people. I don't think that's what's required of us to have faith. I would say trust is a good word. I trust God to be able to handle my questions, make room for my questions. It's a trust thing. So faith is a loaded word. I have a lot of faith, but how I use it may be different than somebody else.

**JIM:** What do you do that someone who just says, "Well, I just have enough faith to take it as truth"? Not that anyone's ever said that to you.

**JAN:** Well, first of all, I can only speak for myself. I don't know what their framework is and I'm not going to debate that on a reason level. I would just say that there are a lot of red flags with that because who do you use as your authority for an interpretation of a story? Fundamentally, I would say that that's not my way of seeing the world. So I'm not going to correct anybody who says that. I'm just going to use my own experience for that story. That is not what I want to do because it would make me accept things that I now know are not true. So...

**ROB:** I think when somebody comes to the point of saying that, that, "I just have enough faith to believe it" - it's almost an admission that, "I don't know. I can't explain it, but I'm not going to try. I'm not going to use the reason, the ability that God's given to me to think to try and figure it out." It's almost like capitulation, in my opinion. When people get to that point, I think you're right. There's no point at that point in arguing with them because they've basically given up and just said, "I don't understand it, but I have faith to believe it."

**JIM:** Sometimes I hear it as an accusation, too. "Well, I just have enough faith." The unsaid part is, "what's wrong with you? I just have enough faith." And then other times I think it can also be a recoiling of, "Oh, I hadn't thought about it that way," and they need to kind of recover things. "Wait a minute, you've just upset my cart here," and "I just had enough faith," and maybe they'll have a chance to look at it. I don't know.

**JAN:** When we were in college, we were confronted with someone who questioned our Christianity. Based on some things.

**JIM:** Is this Frank?

**JAN:** Yeah, it was Frank.

**JIM:** I don't want to use names.

**JAN:** That's okay.

**JIM:** It was Frank.

**JAN:** Frank won't be listening to this podcast.

**JIM:** Okay.

**JAN:** When somebody says to you, "You're not a Christian because you didn't do these things that I say would make you a Christian," and in some ways it doesn't really matter what they were. Well, so that was an affront to me, and I felt the need to defend, which automatically means I'm not in a learning mode, but it was an accusatory thing. What it did do, once I backed off of feeling defensive, was, it put me in a position to learn more because I realized I didn't have an answer to that, and so I learned more.

**JIM:** Dee, you were not a Corps Cadet, were you?

**DEE:** No, I escaped it.

**JIM:** You escaped it, but a Corps Cadet was this young people getting together for Bible lessons, right? And we had lessons we filled out. We'd study something. We'd answer some questions about it, and we kind of knew what the answers were supposed to be. They were kind of leading questions...

**ROB:** Oh, yes.

**JIM:** ...and there wasn't a lot of, "We're going to talk about this," you know.

**ROB:** I don't ever remember being asked to question, to think about anything in my early church life, just to accept that this is what it says. This is the answer. Write it down. To that extent -Jim, you know...

**JIM:** Oh, yeah.

**ROB:** ...in Corps Cadets, they would write the answer for us, and we just had to copy it into our little booklets or whatever they were.

**JIM:** They said, "Use your own words." Yes. I can change an adjective.

**ROB:** [laughing] You changed a couple. But it just - I don't feel like we were ever encouraged to question in that setting. Now, at home it was a little different, but at church, I don't recall ever...

**JAN:** I think information was conveyed. I mean, I will forever be grateful for that foundation. How did I learn the books of the Bible? How did I learn how the Bible was organized? How did I learn, I don't know, memorizing scripture? Those kinds of things were a jumping off point for me, and they gave me the place to start. It was like a lot of teaching sometimes is, which is, "I'm going to tell you what you need to know, and you just take that."

**ROB:** "Is it going to be on the test?"

**JIM:** Right.

**JAN:** And it had the added layer of, "This is about God." So, in some sense, questioning it in that environment was questioning God, and not in a good way. It was a foundation, but it wasn't an open dialogue or conversation.

**JIM:** Three of us are public school teachers, right? And that question is, "Is this going to be on the test?"

**DEE:** Mm-hmm.

**JIM:** So frustrating because the value of why something should be known is completely changed into something practical rather than intrinsic. You were talking about memorizing scripture, which we did as kids.

**JAN:** Yeah.

**JIM:** And what made that possible was we all used one translation: the King James. What - do you still use the King James?

**JAN:** No, I do not.

**JIM:** You don't? I used the New Revised Standard version.

**JIM:** New Revised Standard version?

**JAN:** Yeah.

**JIM:** You know, that's just been updated?

**JAN:** Yes. Well, you were telling me, and now I have to go get a new Bible.

**JIM:** From what I understand, it was like a five-year project proposed in 2017. COVID comes right in the middle, and a lot of it was done, rather than sitting around the table and saying, "Okay, what are we going to do with this verb right here?" it was done through Zoom. Um...

**ROB:** "You're mute. You're on mute. You're on mute." [laughter]

**JAN:** Oh, geez. It's a Zoom reference.

**DEE:** Oh, oh, yes.

**JIM:** "If you're dressing only from the waist up, never stand up, please."

**JAN:** Deanna was afraid she was on mute right there.

**JIM:** Yeah.

**ROB:** Sorry, Dee.

**JIM:** She starts hitting the microphone.

**DEE:** No, I was having flashbacks to, yeah, trying to teach an in-person class with a Zoom class at the same time.

**JIM:** When we were up in St. John's, I think the pew Bible was an NIV.

**DEE:** Oh, probably, because that's the one that was most common when I was growing up.

**JIM:** Is that - did you memorize Scripture through the King James or the NIV? Do you remember doing that?

**DEE:** I remember memorizing Scripture in Sunday school. I don't - I wouldn't be able to tell you what version was used. It was probably King James...

**JIM:** Probably King James, because that's the...

**DEE:** ...because those are the things that first pop in your head when you start coming back to the Scriptures. So...

**JIM:** That's the cultural reference, is King James.

**DEE:** Yeah.

**JIM:** It's the Shakespeare era.

**ROB:** Yes.

**DEE:** Right.

**JAN:** Well, and what we were talking about, now that people - well, The Salvation Army uses NIV.

**JIM:** Is that an official thing?

**DEE:** Yeah, I believe so.

**JAN:** I mean, it's the version you see everywhere, so I'm assuming it's official.

**JIM:** Okay.

**JAN:** The Episcopal Church uses New Revised Standard. But now that you have people who can have, you know, that have different versions, there's much more choice, which also makes everybody memorizing the same thing a little more complex.

**JIM:** Right, right. I think Phil Needham preferred the New American Standard Bible, and I think those were given out my first year in training. What do you use, Rob?

**ROB:** What's the new one that you got me in? I forgot.

**JAN:** It's the New Revised Standard. [laughter]

**ROB:** New Revised Standard. I mean, there's always been King James, basically, growing up, and then there was a - there's a version that I use frequently, just as



more reference as anything else, is something called the Concordant version, and it's just a very strict, literal...

**JAN:** Word for word.

**ROB:** ...word for word interpretation of the Bible. It doesn't read well at all, but it's very - I think it's very accurate.

**JAN:** I was going to say, one of the things I think comes from all of us growing up in a culture where the Bible is taught is, it's kind of hard to put ourselves in the position of hearing something for the first time. So we hear Scripture and read it through a lens of what we've always kind of thought it was. And so, to me, this has been a recent awakening where I've read some things and realized that the stories are actually quite shocking. When you go back and read the Old Testament and you look at - excuse me, the Hebrew Scriptures - and you look at the number of people God said to slay or anything like that - somebody has to kill their child, how women are treated - all these things would, on a cold reading, would be shocking to us. And somehow, we've had that dulled a little bit because we've heard it before or because we're reading the Bible and somehow we're not supposed to be shocked by that story. But I think, in truth, that presents a problem for people who either are new to reading the Scriptures or who are actually kind of trying to figure out who this God is that would run the world like that. So, I don't know, that's just one of the things that I've been working with through recently is: take myself out of what I already know in a way or how I've become too familiar with the words. And actually approach them afresh. And now, how does that story hit me and what do I need to learn about it to make it more meaningful to me?

**DEE:** Well, that's like you're talking about Old Testament because when the New Testament comes along, it's almost the complete opposite. It's almost like this light. Well, it is. It's this idea of Christ comes into the world and how everything

is different and how He's saying specifically to the Jewish people, His people, to the zealots, to the religious authorities, "No, you got it all wrong. This is what it's all about." So, which then makes you wonder, well, the Old Testament, how much of it is interpreted?

**JAN:** When I open the Bible, I'm going to typically go to the New Testament. New Testament is hope. And I know there are hopeful stories and meanings behind stuff in the Old Testament, but it's the revelation of God... The New Testament is the revelation of God's love. It's love.

**JIM:** And sometime we'll talk about Hosea 11. It's the Hebrew Scriptures' First Corinthians 13, the love chapter in the Old Testament.

**DEE:** Oh, yeah.

**JIM:** It's huge because you're looking at a tormented God trying to figure out what He's supposed to do with an unfaithful lover.

**DEE:** Yeah.

**JIM:** It's an amazing thing.

**JAN:** What I want to say is this. I think it's fascinating. There was a point at which decisions were made as the Scripture was canonized. And there could have been a decision to blend together these stories, but that was not the decision. And people knew that these are different stories, but they included them both. And I think there's a reason for that that allows for us to be able to say, "No, this story is different than this story. Now, what would I learn from this story and what would I learn from this story?" And recognize that they are stories. And by that, I'm not meaning fiction, but I am meaning story.

**JIM:** Yeah.

**JAN:** So we take from them different things.

**JIM:** Here's one. You've got the member of the synagogue, Jairus, and he has a daughter. This is told three times. Now, why do you have to have it three times? Well, because a community may have only one version. This story is an important story. But two of the Gospel writers talk about Jairus who shows up. He says, "My daughter" - and the age is important. Twelve years old is important - "She's near death. Can you come and help her?" And Jesus is kind of distracted by other things. Along the way, he meets a woman who has had a blood hemorrhage for - it's important - 12 years. And then he gets to the house and the servants come out and say, "It's no use. She's died," you know, in the interim, while Jesus was taking time to get there, the daughter has died. And then Jesus is laughed at for saying, "She's merely sleeping." Goes in and he raises her. Good. One of the Gospels, though, has Jairus coming to Jesus and saying, "My daughter has died. Can you do anything about it?" All the other things are kind of the same. But that is a flat difference. Someone has the story going this way. Someone has the story this way. I don't think it impacts the belief that I'm going to have because of what I'm reading in the passage. But that detail is important to say, "Yeah, there are some things in here in this scripture that shows that human effort has been made to get this story out." But you will run into this: Someone who was a Bible literalist was presented with this. And he said, "Well, she died twice." When you have to do that to try and preserve a certain idea of how scripture should be read, you realize that that's not the person that I'm going to go to to get some insight into other issues. This is a person who has a certain way of seeing it and he does not want it disturbed. Some of those folks - because I've run into them - use their own perspective as a polemic against everybody else. And that's when "I just have faith to believe" becomes, I don't want to say weaponized because that's a cliché, but that's when it has a sting attached to it. And so I just don't see it that way.

**JAN:** We've all been in different communities of faith in the course of our lives. And I don't mean denominations. I mean groups of people. Some groups of people, some communities, you know that you really shouldn't bring up an idea that's different from the majority view. You just know it. And if you've ever crossed that line, you've probably paid a price for that. I have. Rob has. I know about us. Then you know when you're in a group of people where actually there is an openness to explore and to say, "Well, maybe, what have you ever thought about this?" Or, "Have you ever thought about this?" And in that space, it's not threatening to people. You know, they don't take it as an affront to their faith. They take it as something to be considered.

**JIM:** You don't want to be confronted by having your question kicked back at you. And then you're made to feel foolish for having asked.

**JAN:** Well, like, why not explore? You know, why not just consider that God is big enough to handle that? So I, in my old age, gravitate toward those spaces where I can feel safe, and say, "Well, have you ever thought about this?" Or, "Do you see a problem with this reading of that?" So I gravitate there and I'm open up to all kinds of new learning because of that.

**JIM:** That's my program for approaching Scripture, is finding out what it meant to the people who were writing it, what it meant to the first listeners of it.

**JAN:** Right.

**JIM:** And, like the book of Revelation, just to take the most famous example, I don't think the Bible is supposed to be some sort of Nostradamus game. You know, like they're saying some strange things that no one will understand until finally us. And probably this generation, "We are the ones that have the real truth and we're the only ones that can understand what was going on in history

back then.” No, I think that the writings, including Revelation, would have been understandable to the people of the time...

**JAN:** Yeah.

**JIM:** ...and even if it had to be written in a little bit of code that only the believers would know, and they could escape official scrutiny because of that, it's still understandable to the community that produced it.

**JAN:** That's one of the things that we discussed in our most recent gathering at Holy Trinity about Genesis was that the writings would have been understood by the people at the time. And the temple was discussed during our course as when did this writing occur? Post-temple destruction.

**JIM:** Right.

**JAN:** So therefore, it means something different to people who are hearing it through that lens.

**JIM:** Right.

**JAN:** That was something I never knew before. It gave a whole new understanding for me.

**JIM:** I had an assignment. I had a course as an undergraduate. It was with Richard Klausli, was the professor, and the course was called Music and Worship. I said, "Okay, I got this one. I'll ace this. No problem." And then he gave out different assignments, and I was assigned to investigate the Arian heresy. I'm, "Sure. Got it. What's that?" You know, you go and look it up. Oh, okay. The guy didn't have a full idea of the divinity of Christ. I'll take care of this. In fact, I'm going to interview my religious studies department chair and say, "Tell me how did Arius affect the idea of the divinity of Christ?" And then he came back to me

with - and I had a whole page of questions. I had a yellow pad. I was ready - he said, "Well, it depends on what you mean by the divinity of Christ."

[laughter]

**JIM:** Hit the brakes, and then he's presented me a new idea that ended the interview right there. I said, "Okay. I've come with... I've come completely from an assumed narrative point of view, and I did to hear this again." And then I need to find out who Arius really was, and then that takes me to the Nicene Council. You know my favorite Nicene Council story? You got...

[laughter]

**DEE:** You have favorites?

**ROB:** You have one.

**JIM:** Well, this is where...

**DEE:** Oh, let me see.

**JIM:** No, the Nicene council... Constantine calls this council. It's the first ecumenical council because you've got this guy named Arius, and he has some idea of Jesus. And then you've got another guy, Athanasius, and he's got an idea about who Jesus is, and they're going to duke it out. One group against another and figure out - and it's out of that you get the Nicene, the beginnings of the Nicene Creed. They came up with a creed which was incomplete, and it took a couple of other councils to kind of fill it out. So the Nicene Creed you read now is a little bit different from the one that they came up with. They had to figure out what was Jesus' relationship to God, and they were the ones that came up with "begotten, not made." But in it, there's a guy who's getting really upset. He was on the side of Athanasius, and he was really being irritated by

some guy who was on Arius' side. Hits him upside the head. Now, I like this. We've got a battle. The guy who hit him is the one and only, the real, the authentic Saint Nicholas.

**JAN:** Seriously.

**JIM:** He wasn't wearing a red suit...

**JAN:** No, no.

**JIM:** ...with a nice cherry nose. But the original Saint Nicholas was there at that council, and it's the famous "brawl of the Nicene Council."

**DEE:** See, and you started this out by saying the first thing to go is Santa Claus. And here we are.

**JIM:** Well, Santa Claus. Now, I've got to rethink who this Santa Claus is, and his naughty and nice list that we were talking about...

**ROB:** That's right.

**JIM:** ...who makes it and who doesn't? I think I'm going to take him a little more seriously. This is not some children's story. I was saying - pointed at Rob because we have discussions about the Trinity. And it, you know, this is like the fourth century after Christ. This is at least 300 years after Christ, that they're still trying to figure out who is, what's his relationship with it. And they come up with things that work in language, but your mind melts when you're really trying to conceive of what they're trying to say. You know, you have people who are adoptionists, people that believe that the one baptism story of Jesus, where, "Today I have begotten you, you're my son," actually it changes. The idea of Jesus's divinity, when you put the Gospels in a chronological order, you'll see there's kind of a

development of, here's this guy, and no one understands who he is. The disciples don't get it. Mark's Gospel is all about, no one gets this.

**JAN:** Right.

**JIM:** Even the people that get it don't get it. You know, and then you get a little bit more about of when he became Christ, till you get to John's Gospel. And he, they identified Jesus the person - I think - as pre-existent with the Father as the Word. And that he is the agent of creation. And you can say that, well, God spoke that becomes the Word, but it's actually as Logos, this Greek idea of Logos is, is now, you can see the change in Christian thought and how it develops in our different Gospels. And then the other Gospels that didn't make the cut, for whatever reason, that's the conflict. And it's taken him 300 years, and Constantine, you know, whose conversion is as a turning point, and then Christianity becomes acceptable in the Roman Empire, but he's got, what, "Can't you guys sort this out?" So he calls it counsel. And St. Nicholas dukes it out. Turn in your receipts, we've had our counsel.

**JAN:** Well, and then you eliminate the people with whom, who you determine are now heretics. I mean, that's one of the things that happens when, when you decide to make a call like that on what is, I'll say kosher for lack of a better word.

**JIM:** Mm-hmm.

**JAN:** Then you just get rid of all the people who disagree, which is what the Church has done through history. I mean, when you look at how the Church has treated science, as we're discussing today, historically, it's not real good. There's no space in there for a new idea. The sun is - the earth is not the center. "Wait a minute. You have to go because that's the way I understand this creation story." But, but that isn't the way it is. You know, so if you just eliminate the people who bring up interesting ideas, um, this is where I have a problem with authoritarian.



This is why if you just are going to decide what's true and what isn't before we can actually process the story, you've lost me.

**JIM:** Yeah, the focusing of all the diversity that was in early Christianity into a mainline idea of orthodoxy is unfortunately fraught with a lot of political intrigue...

**JAN:** Yeah.

**JIM:** ...and whose area should have political supremacy, and who's got the bishop to back it up. And that's been the history of the Church forever. I mean, the - but it wasn't until Athanasius, I think, has the first canon - doesn't he? - of the 27 books, the first time that the 27 that we have now are viewed as: this is the Testament.

**JAN:** Right.

**JIM:** That's, he's the guy that, that's the bishop that says, this is my list. And a lot of excellent writings didn't get in, some kind of weird ones did, but it, you know, the common view is that, okay, you have the apostles. Here are these 12, okay, let's say 11 guys writing stuff down. Or people that know them, like Luke and Mark, aren't part of the 11, but they know the guys. So they're writing all this stuff down. And because they were there, we can trust their words. And it actually turns out to be something different, that the writings are all over the place. And they've got to kind of, well, let's figure it out. And if they can connect writings to an apostle, then they'll say that it's got apostolic authority to it. But like Matthew, Mark, Luke, John are anonymous. And we don't know who really wrote them.

**JAN:** Nor do we have the originals.

**JIM:** Something like 5,700 manuscripts that we have to go through, which to me, this was early on: I could hear a lot of my friends say that the Bible is inspired every word, done, done, done, done, done. Great. If God went to all that problem to make sure the words were exactly right, why didn't he do the extra thing of figuring out that the copies weren't messed up? You know, why are all the copies different? Well, it's because they're in community. Some of the mistakes are just spelling mistakes, but some of the mistakes are really kind of serious. And so you've got to figure out, well, hmm. So you go to textual critics, and it has that unfortunate word critic to it, because it sounds like it's someone who's got some sort of agenda. So you've got these people who are trying to figure out what the text really says. And there's a huge divide in the church. There's a huge divide between the Textus Receptus, which was the one behind the King James Version, and you still have King James Version diehards, and they'll come at you full force. And that's the - those are the manuscripts you use. And then you've got the other saying those manuscripts are just not as valid as what we found since then. And so it's an ongoing thing. So that's why we have even now an updated version of the New Revised Standard Version. And we've learned more about how words were used.

**DEE:** I'm going to throw out a question that if my mom [were] here, she'll probably pull over the car and stop it and say, don't ever say that again.

**JIM:** Anytime your mom pulls over the car, makes it safer for everybody else.

[laughter]

**DEE:** Well, yeah, that is true.

**JIM:** I'm not going to include that comment.

**DEE:** Do you question the existence of God?

**JAN:** Whoa.

**ROB:** Yeah.

[commotion]

**JIM:** "We're going to need some water."

**JAN:** Okay, well, can we bring the wine out now?

**DEE:** Well, I'm hoping, I'm hoping.

**JIM:** "I need some coffee here."

**DEE:** Well, I'm just, like, I think, honestly, I think everybody, if they're being honest...

**ROB:** Uh-huh.

**DEE:** ...has asked that question and struggles with it.

**JAN:** Most certainly every day.

**DEE:** Okay.

**ROB:** All the time.

**DEE:** So, hey, I don't think there's any problem with asking it because...

**JAN:** There isn't.

**DEE:** ...I think it's real. And I think if you fear it, you're just saying, well, my God isn't big enough to, you know - I'm asking it. I think it's a healthy question to ask.

**ROB:** So, what we're talking about, we're listening to, um, Peter...

**JAN:** Enns.

**ROB:** Enns talk about doubt.

**JAN:** Yeah.

**ROB:** And what's, you know, what's wrong with having doubt? Doubt is a good thing. It makes us think. It makes us question.

**JAN:** I don't think there's a day that goes by when there isn't some moment.

**DEE:** Mm-Hmm.

**JAN:** You know, in so many ways, I choose to accept the existence of God.

**ROB:** Yeah.

**JAN:** I've had these conversations with my good friend - and he wouldn't mind if I mentioned him - my good friend, John McMahon. We would go back and forth, you know. He came to the conclusion that our beliefs are not our choice, you know, that we're led certain ways by what we acquire along the way. And so you can't just decide that you believe. And I argued the opposite, that you could. Because at each point, you're making choices about how you're going to filter in the information and what you're going to do with it. So, I have come to the place in life where I choose today to say yes.

**DEE:** What you were just saying reminded me when I worked for a Baptist church in Ontario. Calvinism and predestination. I remember having this discussion with the pastor, and he said, "Well, God chooses who's going to be saved." And I'm like, "What?" And he's like, "You have no will when it comes to

it. You know, if God chooses you, you're predestined to be saved." And I mean, that's what it sounded like, what you were saying, John. I mean, that's how I heard it.

**JAN:** Yeah, he's not saying that, but I know what - what he's talking about is just by your intellect.

**DEE:** Mm-Hmm.

**JAN:** You're going to go a certain path, and you're going to continue in a certain path, and the information is going to be part of your decision. And the information is going to determine, the information is going to determine that you no longer believe in God.

**DEE:** Mm-Hmm.

**JAN:** And I would argue a different position there. And we still have these discussions from time - I love that we could have that discussion. Where else can you go to have a conversation about the existence of God, unless it's with somebody that you trust with that conversation? Otherwise, you are a heretic.

**DEE:** Yeah, yeah.

**JIM:** There were some letters found that Mother Teresa had written, that she would write them down in - like "A Reasonable Faith" - write them down. That's fine until they're found by somebody. [laughter] And then she's up for canonization. And the office of Diabolus Advocatus - the devil's advocate - had been done away with until then. And then Christopher Hitchens is called in to do the role of that. And he says, "I just realized I've just represented the devil pro bono." These are the letters that would come out and say, she should not be

canonized as a saint because of all this doubt. And I'm thinking, no, no, no, no, no. That's exactly wrong.

**DEE & ROB:** Right.

**JIM:** Someone who never has doubts...

**ROB:** Scary.

**JIM:** ...does not reach as high as she could.

**ROB:** Brings to mind the theologian, Billy Joel.

[laughter]

**JAN:** Well, this is why I've had Billy Joel right here. My Billy Joel is about explaining my, I'm going to say my comfort with doubt. But it's the Shades of Gray lyric. So the lyric is, "Some things were perfectly clear seen with the vision of youth, No doubts and nothing to fear, I claimed the corner on truth. These days, it's harder to say, I know what I'm fighting for, My faith is falling away. I'm not that sure anymore." The truth about that lyric - just that part, because I'm going to share one more part - I would say my faith, in fact, has developed, not fallen away. There may be, like when we were talking about our belief in God, there are days that I can accept that I question that. But it doesn't unnerve me like it would have an 18-year-old Jan. No, that's part of the journey. That's part of how you explore and find out. I love this - and this is a bit of a stab, but I'm going to say it because it's true. "Now with the wisdom of years, I try to reason things out, And the only people I fear are those that never have doubts; Save us all from arrogant men and all the causes therefore, I won't be righteous again. I'm not that sure anymore." So that is, I guess, a mantra for me, I'm going to say, because as soon as somebody is absolutely sure they know, I'm concerned

about them. I'm not sure they've thought it through. And I am much more comfortable saying, "I don't know."

**DEE:** Can I put in my Billy Joel quote? Am I the only one who hasn't had one? "I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints." And you know what?

**JIM:** "The sinners are much more fun."

**DEE:** That's what Jesus did. "Sinners are much more fun." Yes, that's true.

**JAN:** Well, and they know who they are...

**DEE:** Yeah.

**JAN:** ...kind of. You know what I mean? I mean - well, we could go again down to some rabbit holes here about who people think they are and who they really are.

**JIM:** It seems inevitable that everyone is going to be a Jacob that comes to a river, sends everyone else ahead, so he's there by himself, and he has this nighttime struggle with some being.

**DEE:** I was just thinking about that.

**JIM:** Yeah. Jacob, "Yacob," the river, isn't it called Jabbok, a play on his name, kind of switching around, that you would hear if you're listening to it in the Hebrew. And he has this struggle. It's a struggle that is so incredible that he's injured during it, but somehow he's able to kind of fight it off. He's asking this other being what the name is, and he can't get a name out. They won't give a name. But it's someone he defeats, but then his hip is put out of place. And then he names that place Penuel, El being God. And "This is where I struggled with God." And his name is changed to Israel at that point. Rather than Jacob the

supplanter, he changes. I think everyone has to go through that to become a new person. And he was this miserable guy, deceiver. He's just cheating everyone left and right and getting away with it. And then he struggles this. He's already even set up Bethel, House of God, where he has this vision of the ladder going up and down. And so he names that place Bethel, House of God. Naming in the Hebrew tradition is a powerful thing. To get a hold of someone's name is to have power over it in some way that is hard to know. When Moses is doing his burning bush thing, God comes to him and says, "You're going to go do this thing." He says, "Ah, not me." "Yeah, you're going to do this." "No, no, no, no." He's doing everything he can to get out of this job. And he says, "Well, if I'm going to go, they're going to want to know who sent me." He's asking for God's name. And God says either, "I am who I am." "I will be what I will be." "I bring into being what I bring into being." And we get from that Yahweh or Jehovah. I don't think that's his name. I think he's basically said, "I'm not going to tell you. I am who I am. Deal with it." But we still have this idea, "Oh, his name is now Jehovah." I don't think he was giving his name. In the Bibles, the English Bibles, that's always printed as the small, all-upper case, LORD. I think that's an important point to point out that God is basically saying, in that tradition, "You can't have my name," because once you've named it, you have circumscribed it. You have given it a limit. And then you have some sort of way of manipulating that and having control over that, when you have a name. That was the ancient understanding of what a name is. And so I think that also goes straight against this idea of, "Can philosophers, anyone, prove there is a God?" No. It is outside of that realm of possibility. "Can you disprove there's a God?" Same answer. It cannot be defined. It can only be kind of, every once in a while, you'll find an interface to it. Jesus. Interface. This place where there's actually a touch, but it's like it's an entirely different way of thinking. And I like the way that Stephen Jay Gould tried to do it, but he still did it in a way that is susceptible a little bit to a rational approach about God. But I like this idea of Jacob struggling. "Give me your name." Can't get a name.



**ROB:** Go fish.

**JIM:** Yeah. Moses. "Just tell me who's sending me." "Not gonna happen."

**ROB:** Bruce Almighty.

**JIM:** Bruce Almighty is the name. Morgan Freeman.

**JAN:** I think the search for authenticity and faith is the most profound thing I can do in my life. And I think, I hope, that when people look at me from outside, they see a search for authenticity. I think authenticity is incredibly attractive. And I think when you look for reasons for why the church is in decline in general, I would propose that it is a lack in some places of authenticity.

**DEE:** Yeah, I would agree with that.

[music]