

TRANSCRIPT

An Undeceptions podcast.

John Dickson:

Deep in the Hundred Acre Wood, Christopher Robin and his friends have had many wonderful adventures. Come now and I'll show you. One day, while Pooh was on his way to Christopher Robin's, he became so very hungry that his mind began playing tricks on him. All he could think about was honey, yet still he walked and he walked until honey couldn't honey any honey.

Speaker 1:

Honey, honey, honey, honey, honey, honey.

Winnie the Pooh:

Christopher Robin, Christopher Robin, Christopher.

John Dickson:

If there was ever a creature on earth that appreciated honey, it would be Winnie the Pooh, that silly, old bear. I know it's meant to just be a children's story, but when the author, A. A. Milne, wrote these stories, the simplicity and innocence appealed to adults and children alike. It was the 1920s and the world was weary of war and looking for escape.

John Dickson:

(singing).

Winnie the Pooh:

Honey, honey, honey.

John Dickson:

Honey is a big deal for Winnie the Pooh. And frankly, I'm in Pooh's corner on this. I love honey, especially the handmade boutique kind with bits of the honeycomb still in the jar. I kid you not, just 10 minutes ago before I came into the studio, I had some honey on yogurt. Amazing. And the Bible's in Pooh's corner too. It has plenty to say about honey. "It brightens the eyes and enlivens the soul," says the Old Testament Book of 1 Samuel. One of the Proverbs advisors, "My child, eat honey for it is good and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste." Of course, the land promised to Moses for the Israelites, what we now call the state of Israel, is described in the Bible repeatedly as a land flowing with milk and honey.

John Dickson:

Milk is another big one in the Bible, and bread and certainly wine, but there's also a lot about rocks, plants, animals, water, and dust. Just when you imagine that Christians are all so heavenly minded there of no earthly use, the Bible itself brings us back to earth. That's where the action is. In fact, in the great

final scene of the Bible in the Book of Revelation, it doesn't have all of us floating up to heaven. It has heaven coming down to earth. Down to earth, there's a lot in that phrase. As far as religions go, Christianity is arguably the most down-to-earth perspective you could imagine. Honey matters. Matter matters. Everything is sacred.

John Dickson:

I'm John Dickson, and this is Undeceptions.

John Dickson:

Undeceptions is brought to you by Zondervan Academic's new book, *Becoming All Things* by Michelle Ami Reyes. Each episode, we explore some aspect of life, faith, history, culture, or ethics that's either much misunderstood or mostly forgotten. With the help of people who know what they're talking about, we're trying to undeceive ourselves and let the truth out.

John Dickson:

Why on earth did God create a world full of things? He didn't have to create things. He could have had a spiritual world or a world of mental ideas or something, I guess. So I'm going to ask you that. Why did he make a world of things?

Andrew Wilson:

The Bible is so interested in physical realities that we don't think about in the Western world at all. So there's an awful lot about the specifics of an animal's innards and things like hair in the Bible, just an awful lot about things that we actually almost feel slightly awkward talking about and the Bible talks about all the time. If you have a mentality, which is, "Oh, the world kind of had to be..." It was going to be physical, wasn't it? Because otherwise there wouldn't be us, and have a slightly human-centric reading of the world, an awful lot of scripture doesn't make very much sense.

John Dickson:

That's Andrew Wilson, author of a new book called *God of All Things: Rediscovering the Sacred in an Everyday World*. Andrew spoke to me from his home in London, where he's a teaching pastor at King's Church. He has theology degrees from Cambridge, London School of Theology, and he did his PhD at King's College London.

Andrew Wilson:

I was literally just talking about this with my four-year-old at breakfast that he asked me for some reason, he said, "Do bees like honey?" So he'd obviously picked up that bees and honey were connected, but he thought that's because bees just ate it and said, "Actually, bees made..." And he start talking about it. He realized, "It's just incredible." God made this thing of beauty and wonder and sweetness to be made by these things of extraordinary yellow and blackness and sting. He did that, but he didn't have to do that. He did could have made a world with nothing in it at all and he's filled it with things that in different ways revealed to us something of who he is.

John Dickson:

A bit of a content warning before we go further, we have loads of listeners who don't believe in any kind of creator. I suppose Andrew's talk of God and the talk of my second amazing guest has the potential to get up the sceptic's nose. But what my guests today are doing, and I think they do it brilliantly, is inviting us, whether we believe or not, into a kind of thought experiment. What would it be like to live each day from first yawn to the final brushing of teeth as if every little thing matters, as if there's a deeper layer of significance within daily objects and actions, precisely because God is somehow present in those things? You might not believe it and that's totally fine on this show, but imagining it, just as a thought experiment, is really the fast-track way to understanding something at the center of biblical faith. God is present, kindly present to every one of us all the time.

Andrew Wilson:

My guess is if somebody is not a believer, who is even open to listening to the kinds of things that you guys talk about, there's questions like that. There's open-endedness. There's, "No, I'm not certain of that. I'm sceptical. I'm doubtful. I'm not minded to think that way, but I'm open to the possibility. It might be true. A lot of smart people in history believed it is and I'm curious about that. I think it opens some avenues of openness and intellectual possibility that are closed down in other systems."

Andrew Wilson:

If that's the position of a person, then I think what a book like mine and what this whole way of thinking does is to say the world that you are living in, if it has been created, is not simply a brute fact. It's not simply an impersonal, even reality. It's something that reveals something beyond itself. That way of seeing, try on these glasses, if you like, try looking at the world as if everything in it has been created to reveal the glory of God, which is a pretty basic Christian, Jewish, I dare say, Islamic and many other religions as well, would hold to something like that, that the world is shaped this way, because it's trying to tell you something about God.

Andrew Wilson:

Psalm 19, "The heavens declare the glory of God, the works of the sky proclaiming the work of his hands." That's what the world is for, and although probably you've thought about human beings, if you're sceptical about Christianity, you've probably thought about human beings and what it would mean for a human if God was real, as opposed to if he wasn't, but I'm now asking to the same exercise to be done. We go to the material universe. What would that mean? What is the existence of honey say about what a God who created it would be like if he existed? I guess I'm saying that the world, if God created honey, then that's a very different kind of God. What the word God means is different than if God had created an immaterial world or a world in which everything in it was unpleasant.

John Dickson:

C. S. Lewis called this way of thinking a supposal, suppose this were true, and I think your book does that perfectly. A supposal is the act or process of supposing. It's like playing a game of what if. C. S. Lewis, who wrote the Narnia series that begins with The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, referred to his

created world of Narnia as a supposal. In a compilation of some of C. S. Lewis's answers he wrote to fan letters received from children, Lewis wrote of Narnia, "I'm not exactly representing the real Christian story in symbols. I'm more saying suppose there were a world like Narnia and it needed rescuing, and the Son of God or the Great Emperor Over the Sea went to redeem it, as he came to redeem ours, what might it, in that world, all have been like?" In a way this whole episode is a kind of supposal. Back to Andrew.

John Dickson:

I need you to prepare for a quick fire round because I'm using a fire, some material objects at you, and you tell me what it tells me about God in... You can have 11 seconds max per item. Ready?

Andrew Wilson:

Yikes. Okay.

John Dickson:

Dust.

Andrew Wilson:

Dust shows ashes to ashes, dust to dust, shows that we are matter and we are not going to live forever. In the end, we're all going to be behind the radiator in some form or other and that actually, we need to be raised from the dust by a living God.

John Dickson:

That was 17 seconds, but okay. Galaxies.

Andrew Wilson:

God is very big. God is the kind of God who could create the galaxies, is far more enormous and grand and glorious than we could imagine.

John Dickson:

Okay. For your four-year-old, honey.

Andrew Wilson:

God is sweet. There is a tastiness and a delight and a boundless and almost pointless beneficence to God. He makes things simply because they're lovely.

John Dickson:

Pigs.

Andrew Wilson:

As Gentiles, I imagine you were a Gentile, a non-Jews, we are welcomed in. We go from being the most foul-smelling thing to the most beautiful smelling thing when we are after death, which is what bacon is. You and I like that, we actually get included, like pigs do, effectively included in God's purposes as a result of dying to ourselves and raised to something new.

John Dickson:

Okay. I'll let you off this lightning round with one more, cities.

Andrew Wilson:

Cities encapsulate and express in very intense espresso-like form what a society and civilization is like. And so, in gathering together all community, you get the best and the worst of humanity in a city. In doing that, God then uses cities as a picture of the eternals tousle in the cosmos between the city of good, the city of bad, the city of God, the city of man, Jerusalem, Babylon, and in the end Jerusalem wins.

John Dickson:

So there's plenty we can learn from the things around us, but does everything have to take on that weight of meaning? It could get a little heavy.

John Dickson:

I want to ask you, is a pencil ever just a pencil? I mean, do you really have to elevate things to this glorious level?

Andrew Wilson:

So, yes, I think there are clearly some objects that are particularly as human beings have made them that we do not design with any further kind of intentionality, do we? I use the example in Bible. One of the chapters is called tools, which is on human-made objects rather than God-made things. I think the Bible does actually some fascinating stuff with that theme as well, that tools play a very important role, particularly in the first seven to 10 books of scripture, which I think has a lot to teach us on its own. We could talk about that separately. But I don't think that means though that the human intentionality in designing those tools, in designing a cattle prod or a millstone or a pencil or a computer, it's not like we are investing those objects with theological significance, and therefore everything's got to be very deep and profound and strokey beard and all that.

Andrew Wilson:

That's not the case. But I do think that by virtue of being tool-making people and creative people who look to try and solve problems, we learn something from the tool about the way in which other things in the world relate to God, as in my relationship with the pencil is not dissimilar to God's relationship with a pig or a tree or whatever. I certainly don't live my entire life looking at every object going, "Oh, I must look... I mean, here's a pillowcase. Gosh, what does that mean?" You don't want to be intense and weird about it, but I don't think that there is such a thing as physical matter.

Andrew Wilson:

I don't think physical matter is ever meaningless in that sense. If you take a pencil, I don't think I could look at that without saying, "Man, the fact that graphite exists and the fact that wood exist and the fact that paper is possible, and all of those things and trace them back to what has been created and how I've been given the capacity to fashion them into something, and even the fact that words are so important that we create these objects," that all of those things to me do preach something, even though I obviously spend much more of my time reflecting on a few of those things than others.

John Dickson:

We asked one of the world's great theologians, Miroslav Volf, a similar question for an episode later in the year. I can't wait for you to hear his take on the good life. Anyway, he tells me in that episode about his pen. It was given to him by his father. It's not a particularly special pen. He could purchase a much better one if he wanted to, but of course, for him, that simple object is overflowing with meaning. It connects him to his dad.

John Dickson:

Miroslav gets to enjoy the object itself and the abundance of meaning attached to it. His point, and he puts it much better than I am right now, is that it's possible to live all of life like it's a gift of love from a parent. But again, is this all too heavy? When Producer Kaley read Andrew Wilson's book, she said to me that as a young mom, she can barely juggle all the objects in her life, let alone find deeper meaning in all of them. So I put that to Andrew.

John Dickson:

Producer Kaley wanted me to ask you this question. Andrew, is it just exhausting being so spiritual about things?

Andrew Wilson:

Obviously, like I was just saying, you don't live your entire life like this, do you? To me, I find it the opposite because I do find... Again, this makes it sound like I'm living in a sort of eternal floaty world of worshiping, but I find it quite the opposite because I find what is exhausting is living in a mechanical world in which everything is functional. Now, I'm very blessed, but this last 12 months has really shown me this. I'm blessed by living 200 yards from the sea. I'm speaking to you now just next to the English Channel, but it's not really a sea in Australian terms, I fear.

Andrew Wilson:

But for me to go out in the morning, I think everybody who is spiritual at all, whether you define yourself as Christian or not finds some kind of touch point. Some kind of transcendence is made available to you by very strong winds or surging waves or bright sunlight, or the laughter of a child, all of the stereotypes and the cliches and things in many ways, our cliches, because we regularly find ourselves reconnecting spiritually as a result of that thing or that event. So, obviously, it's exhausting if you're spending the whole time trying to live up to a, "I must be continually spiritually connected." That's not what I'm doing

at all, but I think it's more like God has filled the world with clues and reminders, things which you can trip over and go, "Man, that's been given and that's been given to join me back into relationship with my Father, which I otherwise would easily turn the world into a machine." I don't know if that'll satisfy Kaley, but that's my defence.

John Dickson:

So, what have you got to say to the person who loves your sweet idea? They can look at the sea and feel small. They can look at the stars and think that's beautiful in the sunset and go, "Wow." But they just can't see it as transcendent. They just feel like they have these synapses that just respond to external stimuli, and that's really all it is.

Andrew Wilson:

I don't think there's a biblical imperative to be moved by the created world all the time or even most of the time. I'd be very surprised if there was anybody who isn't moved by it some of the time, but it's not like an imperative that we have to stay there. But I think some of us engage with the world in very different ways. Some of us primarily process things like that at a quite an intellectual dispatch note level. A lot of our greater scientists have been people exactly like that, who have look for the works of God. And then they've followed them through in a laboratory and they've studied them under a microscope or a telescope and they thought, "Wow, I may or may not be a particularly emotional person, but I am worshiping with my whole mind as I consider these realities and crediting God who made them."

Andrew Wilson:

I think that's simply a function of the way we are made. I don't think a book like this or the theme I'm talking about is only for people who are quite emotionally attuned at all. In fact, I think most people who know me would say I'm quite sort of much more of a thinkery kind of person than a feelery person anyway, but I don't think that lets us off the hook at the same time as believers, if that's who we are, of reflecting on the world as it is and concluding things about God, because scripture does that so much of the time and makes many of these connections for us.

Speaker 4:

At the In Bloom exhibition, it's time for the class to explore.

Speaker 5:

So many flowers. How many flowers are there?

Speaker 6:

Where are we going?

Speaker 5:

We're going to walk around.

Speaker 4:

And with more than 20,000 flowers to see...

Speaker 5:

This went together.

Speaker 4:

... the children aren't wasting any time.

Speaker 5:

Three, two, one, go. Sibyl, look how many flower there was. There's hundreds, there's one million flowers. I'm going to wait for the chocolate tree.

John Dickson:

That's a clip from the popular TV show here in Australia called Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds, where a group of older adults living alone join a group of lively four-year-olds in an intergenerational play school. It's a reminder of how amazed children can be at the little things of life, a fallen leaf, a bunch of flowers. They're delighted by each new day and all the things they can see and explore. I remember when my kids were that little. They'd see a rock and kick it and be puzzled about how it moves and most of us lose that sense of awe at the world as we get older.

Andrew Wilson:

I think that the capacity to be freshly amazed by novelty is... I mean, we would use words, wouldn't we, like becoming cynical or becoming jaded. I think one of the challenges of both physicality and sin in a fallen world is that as you get older, you have experienced not just very ordinary things many times, but even super extraordinary things so many times that it's quite easy to lose touch with how spectacular they are and overuse can lead you to dullness. And so, I think it's probably a mixture of innocence at novelty, but also innocence in a moral sense as well, a sort of the moral corruption of just having seen a lot of evil things and having done a lot of evil things that can numb you. I think a lot of the happiest adults I know are people who do have that sense of childlike wonder, which may or may not be innate. It may not be something that they just happen to be those kinds of people. It's often something that's even practiced and learned.

John Dickson:

Have you watched Ted Lasso. It's a series that's very endearing on this level. I think when Producer Kaley looks back at this interview, she'll probably find a scene from Ted Lasso, a beautiful series, all about that.

Coach:

Hey, Sam. Come here a sec.

Sam:

Coach, I'm sorry.

Coach:

You know what the happiest animal on earth is? It's goldfish. You know why?

Sam:

No.

Coach:

It got a ten-second memory. Be a goldfish, Sam. Yeah.

John Dickson:

Huh, nice one, Kaley. Best TV show since the West Wing. Well, it was American physician and poet Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., who first said that Christians could be so heavenly minded that there of no earthly good. The criticism has stuck, sometimes deservedly so, but the truth is, at least in theory and often in practice, that biblical faith is very earthy. I mean, Christianity is the only religion that says God entered the world as a human being, not in an apparition, not in a dream, not just in a holy book, but in the flesh. In fact, in the founding centuries of Christianity, educated Greeks and Romans criticized Christianity for being too down to earth. They were repulsed at the idea of the infinite, eternal mind of the universe becoming flesh. More about that later.

John Dickson:

Andrew's book is a great reminder that earthly everyday things have a significance beyond their material value. That's objects. But what about activities? Much of our life is humdrum. We don't all get to be astronauts or Director Mark. We bumble along from first yawn to the final brushing of teeth with a lot of mundane things in between. Where is God when you first open your bleary eyes or when you boil the kettle half asleep, fold the laundry, hit public transport to get to work? Where's the sacred in that stuff? Well, my next guest has quite a bit to say about that.

John Dickson:

Today's Undeception is brought to you by Zondervan's new book, *Becoming All Things: How Small Changes Lead to Lasting Connections Across Cultures* by Michelle Ami Reyes. If you've ever wondered where to start on the journey to examine unconscious bias, yes, I know that's a bit of a boo word, this could be a really safe launch point. Michelle is an Indian-American and wants to help us all examine our own cultural lens. It's a book that's going to make some of us feel uncomfortable, and I reckon there's plenty to feel uncomfortable about. Christians and others can often think about issues of race as an outside problem, but we've dealt with this issue on the podcast before and it's clear, there is racism in all communities and yes, within the church.

John Dickson:

Becoming All Things gets to the heart of the problem. "Disregarding the needs of the weak," writes Michelle, "is akin to diminishing the gospel. And by and large, throughout human history, minority groups have proved more vulnerable. God has been preparing people of colour," she goes on, "to help white people understand that white is a colour and white people have a culture," she writes. Read this book if you are prepared to start asking yourself hard questions about the choices, both conscious and unconscious that we make every day. Check out Becoming All Things by Michelle Ami Reyes available on Amazon. There's a link in the show notes or head to Zondervan.com to find out more.

John Dickson:

Tens of thousands of people fled their homes after severe flooding in South Sudan last year. They're now living tents in the new Mangala refugee settlement. Many won't be able to return home for years. There is no access to clean water in the settlement. Refugees walk for over an hour to collect water from the Nile River. They take the dirty water back with them in jerrycans each day, water that carries disease into the overcrowded camps. Anglican Aid is trying to change this. Through their Waterworks campaign, they're trying to raise money to sink boreholes in the Mangala settlement, which will provide safe drinking and washing water for thousands of refugees. You can help make this happen. Please visit Waterworks.org.au. That's Waterworks.org.au to find out more.

John Dickson:

Whose idea was this? Well, it's 5:58. That was my daily alarm. Some Coldplay song without a name, I think. It's tea time.

John Dickson:

We wait. In my house, the day never begins for me or my wife and kids without good, old-fashioned English tea. Yes, milk and sugar, not for Buff, but for me and the girls.

John Dickson:

Hey, Gail.

Gail:

Hi.

John Dickson:

Sorry. It's a bit early, but I got to get out.

Gail:

It's fine.

John Dickson:

You sleep okay?

Gail:

Yeah.

John Dickson:

Making tea in the morning is probably my most regular family ritual. It's a given. It's almost automatic, which is just as well some mornings. My next guest reckons these ordinary habits are actually brimming with the stuff of life.

John Dickson:

What do you think our broader culture misses in its constant search for the extraordinary, the entertaining, the novel, instead of entering into the meaning of the ordinary?

Tish Harrison Warren:

I think a lot of our resistance to the ordinary is a resistance to being human, to being creatures.

John Dickson:

That's Tish Harrison Warren, a priest in the Anglican Church of North America and the author of the award-winning book, *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life*. She has a new one just out called *Prayer in the Night*. I've followed Tish for years on Twitter and elsewhere, and so I was thrilled to get her on the show.

Tish Harrison Warren:

I think that we think that we can somehow break free of the ordinary, that everything in life that feels mundane, all the things that make us doubt our own meaning or doubt if we're actually special, or doubt if there's anything more in life than just same old, same old. We want to escape all of that. We want to escape all of those questions and get to what I call the bonus round. When you're playing a video game and you do-do-do, you get the points and you go up and everything becomes more vivid and more beautiful. We want that and we think that there's some bonus round that we're all missing, but it's not true. And so, we think that if we got enough money, we could be not ordinary anymore. If we got enough fame, we could be not ordinary, but it's not true.

Tish Harrison Warren:

I'm not saying that everything in our life feels mundane. Obviously, we have great moments of ecstasy in life, great moments of deep, deep pain, but what's interesting to me is that even in those moments, the very best moment of your life, you'll still be limited. You'll still have complex relationships that are unsatisfying. You'll get sore throats. You'll still have to deal with a body. You'll still get weary and tired and need to sleep. You'll still have to get dinner somehow. All of this, it's just inescapable. We're just creatures. I think that we want to believe that there's something that will make us unlimited or make joy unending, or make us God somehow. But I think I say in this, I really think the president of the United States to the three-year-old child, all at the end of the day, we are all ordinary and you don't escape that

in some sense. We're human beings. We all go to the bathroom, right? We just have this inescapable vulnerability that we can't get past.

John Dickson:

Yeah. That's the thing, you are not just saying, "Hey, stop striving for the stars. Just put up with the fact that you are a clump of meat and insignificant." That's not what you're saying. You seem to be saying that actually in shooting for the stars all the time, we are missing the real beauty.

Tish Harrison Warren:

That's exactly right. That's right. We're missing actually the complete glory of ordinary life, which is always there and always available.

John Dickson:

Let's press pause. I've got a five-minute Jesus for you. A dominant theme in the gospel of John, which seems to have been written for both ancient Jews and philosophically minded Pagans is that we can know the source of reality in person in Jesus Christ. The opening line of the gospel says, "En arche en ho Logos. In the beginning was the Logos, the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God, theos en ho Logos." The repetition of the word Logos, that's Word, clearly speaks to one of the most basic longings of both Jews and Pagans, the Greeks and Romans. Jews believed that God's first act was to speak the universe into existence. In Genesis 1, we read, "Let there be light, and there was light." So God's Word is the source of everything for Jews, but this idea also has a happy connection with important Pagan concepts.

John Dickson:

The most sophisticated Greeks and Romans, like the poet philosopher, Cleanthes, believed that everything in the universe operates according to the Logos, the Greek word. Here's what he wrote. "The universal word of reason, Logos, moves through all creation in all things. One everlasting word of reason, Logos, reigns." So the Logos, the Word was this mysterious operating system behind the rational order of creation. By opening his gospel with a reference to the Logos, who turns out to be Jesus, John makes clear that his gospel is way more than a biography. It's the answer to the fundamental longing to know the source of reality. The theme comes into really sharp focus a few lines later, where John writes, "Ho Logos sarx egeneto," the Word, God's Word, flesh became, that's Jesus. It's really confronting language.

John Dickson:

In the Greek of John's day, the word pneuma, spirit, referred to the spiritual aspect of being a human, sukos, the soul, referred to the mental or psychological dimension, soma, body referred to the total mind-body package of human life, but sarx or flesh referred to the earthly material component of existence. So if pneuma or spirit is the part of the human being that connects us to the divine, sarx or flesh is what grounds us in the earth. The Logos, the source of all reality, didn't just take on spirit or soul or body. He became sarx, flesh. This is how we get the doctrine and the word incarnation. It's just the Latin incarno or in flesh.

John Dickson:

Now, all of this was really confronting for John's original Pagan readers. Greeks and Romans had such a low view of created matter. It was really difficult for them to imagine that infinite divinity could take on flesh. In fact, this was such a problem that some early Christians, like in the second century, tried to change the whole basis of Christianity. There was a group called the Gnostics, that's the word for special knowers, who said the whole point of Jesus was to deliver our spirit from this fleshy world. They even insisted that the God who created flesh, the Old Testament God, was a lesser deity and we actually need to be rescued from that deity.

John Dickson:

Then there was another group of semi-Christians called the Doxitas. That word comes from the Greek to seem or to appear. They didn't quite go so far as the Gnostics, but they did say that God couldn't actually have become flesh. He must have just seemed to be flesh, appeared to be flesh, but there's no getting around John's language, the Word became flesh. Christianity teaches incarnation. Some of John's Jewish readers will have had a very different problem with this incarnation. Jews were fine with flesh, of course. In the Jewish view, all creation is good. Their difficulty was what the incarnation said about God's otherness, His majesty. The incarnation threatens the honour of God.

John Dickson:

The 13 principles of Judaism is a kind of Jewish creed composed in the middle ages, and number three offers a direct rebuttal of the incarnation. It reads, "I believe with perfect faith that God does not have a body. Physical concepts do not apply to him. There is nothing whatsoever that resembles him at all." Our Muslim neighbours have a similar objection to the incarnation. The Quran is pretty clear. They do blaspheme who say, "God is Christ, the son of Mary. Christ, the son of Mary, was no more than an apostle. His mother was a woman of truth. They both had to eat their daily food." That's in section five of the Quran. The fact that Jesus had to depend on daily food is thought to be the knockdown argument against the incarnation. The majestic creator could never find himself in the inglorious position of depending on food.

John Dickson:

But of course, that's not the half of what the gospel says about the inglorious ordinary acts of God in the incarnation. If you go forward in John's gospel to chapter 13, it tells how Jesus got down on his knees and washed his disciples feet like a household slave might do. The disciples are scandalized at the dishonour to Jesus this might imply, and even that's just a precursor to Christ's fleshy, bloody death on the cross for our sake. The incarnation says not only did God take on flesh, he served and suffered in the flesh for us. Christianity is almost by definition down to earth. You can press play now.

Tish Harrison Warren:

I'm not saying that you have to be super blissful and over-spiritual about folding the laundry, but I do mean that folding the laundry isn't just this meaningless task on the way to death. I mean, that folding the laundry is a place of holiness, even a place of beauty, a place where we get to participate in the

renewing of all things. To work, relationships, our neighbourhood, our place, having a body, having children, having or not having children, that all of these things that make up our lives are actually... And even little moments. I mean, in the book, I talk about being stuck in traffic. I talk about losing keys. I talk about eating leftovers. There is deep meaning to be found in these moments.

John Dickson:

You'll be glad to know that I made my bed this morning, just in preparation for talking to you. You say that we are shaped by the mundane things that we do and how you chose to start making your bed instead of jumping online each day. Can you tell me about that resolution, why you did it and what earth you got out of it?

Tish Harrison Warren:

Well, I didn't realize that this was something that grownups, that adults did. I thought that the second that we no longer had a mom making us, we stopped this. And then I just got curious one day like, "Whoa, maybe everyone around me is making their bed." I asked a friend and she said she did make her bed. And so, what had been my morning ritual without ever really considering it, I never thought much about it, was that I slept with my smartphone next to my bed. I would just grab it first thing in the morning and scroll through it and read the news, or look at Facebook or Twitter or email, check my email.

Tish Harrison Warren:

There's nothing unspiritual or sinful or bad about reaching for your cell phone, but it shaped my whole orientation of my day where I... And I still to this day, see this, I struggle with this still, where any empty second I have, I habitually go to it. I fill up the day with screens, with information. And so, it oriented me by this practice that I'd adopted without even thinking. It just shaped my heart, my affections towards this device, and not just towards the device, but towards what it meant to be a human being in the world. So for Lent that year, I just gave up having my screen and I just banished my cell phone from my room.

John Dickson:

Lent, by the way, is the 40 days or so leading up to Easter. Historically, Christians used the time to focus on Christ's sacrifice by picking up some small, tangible, personal sacrifice, like giving up meat, dairy, or in Tish's case, her mobile phone in the mornings. Nowadays, it's mostly just the old-school traditional churches, like the Anglicans, the Catholics, the Orthodox that still practice Lent.

Tish Harrison Warren:

And so, the first thing I would do is get up in the morning. After I sat there stunned for a while, because I still always sit there stunned when I wake up, but I would make my bed. And so, it's a very normal practice, right? It's nothing special, but it was a way to deal with the tangible world, to create a little bit of order out of the chaos in my life. And then I would sit on the bed and just be silent. I just practiced silence for really like five minutes, I mean, very short amount of time.

Tish Harrison Warren:

So it wasn't profoundly spiritual. I didn't have a vision from heaven or anything, but it was just this way to remind myself in the morning that what was most true about me wasn't consumption, but that it was that I miss human creature with a body that can sit in silence and be still and pray and interact with the world and with creation and with the Creator. So I use that to talk about how these practices and habits that we mostly take for granted or don't think about it, or actually deeply spiritually formative because they're forming our ideas about what it means to be human, what it means to know God, what the good life looks like.

John Dickson:

Earlier, we heard Andrew Wilson suggest that the objects around us can point beyond themselves to something deeply significant. Tish is saying something similar about our regular mundane activities. The word she uses for such ordinary daily habits is liturgy. It's a word usually reserved for the activities in a church service, like singing, praying, reading scripture and so on. She takes the concept outside the church.

Tish Harrison Warren:

When I talk about liturgy, I'm talking about a repetitive, formative practices. So let me unpack that word. Repetitive, things we do again and again, whether we decide to do them again and again, or we just habitually do them, things we do again and again. Formative means things that shape us, so things that form our view of the world and who we are, and as I said, what it means to be human, what it means to go to live, what is the purpose of life. So they form us and shape us. Now, most of that is subconscious, as I said, as the analogy of the cell phone I just said. We don't usually enter these things to be formed, right? But they shape us and form us nonetheless. And then practices is stuff we do. So stuff we do again and again that shapes us and forms us as human beings, that's what I mean. So by that definition, obviously, not just religious people have liturgy because we all do things again and again. So every church, whether [inaudible 00:46:10].

John Dickson:

The word liturgy, by the way, comes from the Greek leitourgia, which originally just meant any act of formal public service. So ancient Greek soldiers performed liturgy, so did the temple priests. In a Christian context, where the word appears a dozen or so times in the New Testament, it refers to things like the service of Jewish priests performed in the temple, the preaching of the apostles around the world and the charitable works performed by churches for the needy. On just one occasion, in Acts 13, leitourgia is used to mean something like the activities that go on in a church service, the praying, the singing and so on. All of that's to say, I really like Tish's attempt to reclaim the word liturgy for activities outside, as well as inside the walls of a church.

Tish Harrison Warren:

We have rock concerts to have liturgies. We know that there's repetitive practices that we know again and again that shape that experience and that end up shaping our interaction with that experience. And

then James K. A. Smith, who I got a lot of my work really builds on his, or it flows from his might be a better way of saying it, but it's [inaudible 00:47:24].

John Dickson:

It's James K. A. Smith is an uber nerd from Calvin University in Michigan, where he's the professor of philosophy. He's quite something. We should try and get him on the show one day.

Tish Harrison Warren:

He talks about cultural liturgies, that there are things that we do as a culture that point to big questions about what meaning is and what our responsibility as people is. So examples would be in the United States, when the national anthem plays, everybody stands up, or you put your hand on your heart or there's... I mean, everything. I've gone around the country and said, "What are some cultural liturgies?" People will say everything from going to the pub when you turn 21 to eating at McDonald's when you're a kid, or voting. Voting is a great example of an elections being a cultural liturgy.

Tish Harrison Warren:

So these are practices that we engage in that agent that make assumptions about what it is to be a human being. All the liturgies are sort of little... They're Trojan horses for belief and values and assumptions that we don't usually unpack. It makes all these kinds of assumptions about who we are, what matters in the world that are part of the liturgy. They're packaged in, but we absorbed them without knowing they often work under the hood as it were they work in our imaginations and shaping us and forming us.

John Dickson:

Okay. Let's fast forward through her ideas. I threw some rapid fire questions at her, just like I did for Andrew Wilson.

John Dickson:

Okay. What we can learn from these things? We've already talked about making your bed. Okay. Here we go. Ready? Losing your keys.

Tish Harrison Warren:

I lose my mind when I lose my keys. I talk about how I went through the house angry, cursing, hating myself, hating everyone around me and how basically I'm a fairly nice person, most people think so, but it's often because I have a high degree of control in my life. When something goes wrong, very small, like losing my keys, and I sense my lack of control, I spiral downward. And so, I end up using that chapter to talk about confession and the truth about ourselves, I think is what I call it, something like that.

John Dickson:

Drinking tea. I ask you this with a cup of tea, a cup that I got in Dallas, Texas, in fact.

Tish Harrison Warren:

Great. I wish I had... Actually, I have nothing from Australia to drink tea out of, but I love tea very much. I mean, I collect it.

John Dickson:

Interesting.

Tish Harrison Warren:

I'm a big tea fan.

John Dickson:

Hey Siri, remind me tomorrow to get Tish an Aussie tea mug and send it to her.

Siri:

Okay. Your reminder is set for tomorrow.

John Dickson:

Thanks.

Tish Harrison Warren:

I mean, I collect it. I'm a big tea fan. And so, I talk about pleasure and savouring and what it means to receive beauty in the world of pleasure as a gift, not just that makes us love the thing itself, although I think it's fine to love and enjoy tea, but as C. S. Lewis says that the mind runs up the sunbeam to the sun, that we began to contemplate not just this is a good gift, but what is the nature of a reality that is so good that we might experience tea, the great pleasures of tea.

John Dickson:

Speaking of C. S. Lewis, as we often do on this show, one of the funny things about his conversion from staunch atheist to convinced theist and eventually Christian was how unremarkable it all was. It didn't happen in a blaze of glory or a moment of spiritual ecstasy. It happened on a bus up the Headington Hill on the outskirts of Oxford. "Without words and I think almost without images," he later wrote about the moment, "I felt myself being there and then given a choice. I could open the door or keep it shut. I could unbuckle the armour or keep it on. Neither choice was presented as a duty. No threat or promise was attached to either. The choice appeared to be momentous, but it was also strangely unemotional. I was moved by no desires or fears, in a sense I was not moved by anything. I chose to open, to unbuckle, to loosen the reign." Lewis hopped on the bus outside Magdalen College an atheist and stepped off 10 minutes later knowing God was real. God found in the ordinary, or perhaps better, God reaching us through the ordinary.

John Dickson:

Can I ask you to speak, especially for my listeners who don't know what to make of the Christian faith, how do you suggest that they find God in the ordinary?

Tish Harrison Warren:

Yeah, that's a good question. Well, it doesn't have to feel spiritual. I think that's really important. I think that we can associate spiritual reality with a certain feeling or certain spiritual consciousness or fireworks or emotionalism. God loves the ordinary. And so, He enters into very quiet spaces, I think. So some things I would say, I mean, I don't know if this is fair, if someone's wrestling, if they even feel like they can pray, but I do think that asking God, if He's there to show up in ordinary ways and just watching for that would be... I think that's a good practice to start.

Tish Harrison Warren:

I think that idea of gratitude is so important that we... To notice that gifts in a day is also a good place to start, but also notice the crappy things, the terrible things in a day, and not just the terrible things, but the ways that we're limited, the ways that we aren't made to be God. Wendell Berry said, "The next division in the world is between those who want to live as humans and those who want to live in as machines." And I think more and more [inaudible 00:54:10].

John Dickson:

Wendell Erdman Berry is a celebrated American poet, writer and cultural critic. He's had a lifelong career of trying to humanize the world against the trends of mechanization and digitization. Anyway, it's interesting that both Andrew Wilson and Tish Harrison Warren warn of this tendency to live like we're machines, moving from one thing to the next through force of habit or drifting toward entertainment or just apathy without thought or intention or meaning.

Tish Harrison Warren:

I think more and more, our culture is pushing us to live as a machine. And so, in what way are we human? I think connecting with our own humanity actually often reveals God, but also one of the things that draws me to the Christian faith is it explains why I want more. If there's nothing to the story, if there's nothing more, if we weren't made for truth, beauty and goodness, if we weren't made for some transcendent reality of glory and joy, then my longing for things to be just, my longing for the world to be better, my longing for my work to be less frustrating is really just... There's no meaning to it. Things are the way they are. We live in a world where the strong prey on the weak. That's what nature tells us, nature, red and tooth and claw, right?

Tish Harrison Warren:

So we live in a world where people die and that's just life, right? And so, why do I have a longing for more than that? Why do I have a longing for a wholeness? I feel like maybe this is wrong, but that the material view of the world says that somehow that longing doesn't point to a truth. It's not like a fantasy, but it doesn't point to something real. And so, there's something deeply comforting to me in the Christian story that says it feels wrong because it is wrong. There is a wrongness to the world that we were made for

glory that we do not yet know. I would say pay attention to your longings, pay attention to what feels wrong, but also pay attention to beauty, to the goodness of the world and be curious about why there is such a glory to things that is more, it seems, than the sum of its parts.

John Dickson:

Head to Undeceptions.com for more about this and other episodes. While you're there, send me a question, either written or recorded and I'll have a crack at answering it in our upcoming Q&A episode. If you're interested in other good podcasts, check out SALT, Conversations with Jenny Salt, part of the Eternity Podcast Network. Next episode:

Speaker 8:

How does one explain the Egyptian culture and the gods that they believed in and afterlife that they believed in? Was there any part of the God that we worship today? Was he the same God then? It's very confusing.

Speaker 9:

My question is regarding the seven deadly sins.

Speaker 10:

I'd just like to know what you think about the idea of machines being persons.

John Dickson:

Yep, it's Q&A. See you. Undeceptions is hosted by me, John Dickson, produced by Kaley Payne and directed by the ordinary Mark Hadley. We established ordinary was a compliment in this episode, didn't we? Yeah. Editing by Richard Hamwi. Special thanks to our series sponsor, Zondervan, for making this Undeception possible. Undeception is part of the Eternity Podcast Network, an audio collection showcasing the seriously good news of faith today.

Speaker 11:

Brought to you by the Eternity Podcast Network.

John Dickson:

How can you listen out for that carefully, Mark, without headphones?

Mark Hadley:

That's good.

John Dickson:

And Mark is finally wearing headphones, like a professional.

Mark Hadley:

There you go.

John Dickson:

Ooh, I just heard of weird sound.

Mark Hadley:

Yeah. That's-

John Dickson:

Like a dog or something.

Mark Hadley:

Yeah, that's your end.

John Dickson:

Is it?

Mark Hadley:

Yeah, but I heard it because I was wearing headphones.

John Dickson:

You're a professional.

Mark Hadley:

That's me.

John Dickson:

Much of our life is hump. Oh my goodness.

Mark Hadley:

Okay. That's definitely you.

John Dickson:

Bonnie. Bonnie.