

PRAISE HIM Session 1:

CD Track [2]

GRATITUDE

Hello, I'm Simon Stanley and it's my privilege to conduct you through these five sessions. Let me just say a brief word about our contributors – though really they need no introduction.

Justin Welby is Archbishop of Canterbury, whose interests and expertise cover a wide range of subjects, both inside and outside the Church. His considered comments are always challenging and relevant, and he is a highly respected voice in the public square, as well as the religious life, nationally and internationally.

Sister Wendy Beckett is a Roman Catholic nun, who emerged from her austere life of silence some years ago as a brilliant and fascinating commentator on art. Her programmes on television, and her books, have been widely admired by large audiences for their clarity and charm.

David Suchet has been one of the most distinguished actors of his generation. Although he trained – and still regards himself – as a classical actor, he's best known throughout the world as the very incarnation of Agatha Christie's detective, Hercule Poirot. From his Jewish background he shines a clear and fascinating light on Christianity, to which he was converted many years ago.

The first session is based on Ephesians Chapter 1 verses 3-14, which focuses on gratitude and you may find helpful to read, before we begin. So, by way of introducing our contributors, we asked them what brought them happiness. First,

we asked Sister Wendy Beckett and David Suchet whether they were 'glass half-full' or 'glass half-empty' sort of people.

WB: If we have to talk about halves, I'd be half-full. But, given a free choice, I'd like a full glass!

DC: Predominately three quarters-full. I can be troubled – and I do worry, a lot. But I've always wanted to see the best of things and people, ever since I was a young one.

[3] *Sister Wendy then made a connection between happiness and gratitude.*

WB: Oh, I think there's a close link. The happier we are, the more grateful we are. And the more grateful we are, the happier we are. I think gratitude is instinctive. Not just in a Christian – in human beings. A very prominent atheist said to me one day: 'if only there were someone to say thank-you to.' And I think that's how we're made. But with that gratitude must go happiness, because happiness is a consequence of gratitude – they're part of each other.

[4] *But Archbishop Justin Welby prefers the word 'joy' to 'happiness'.*

JW: I'm slightly cautious about the word 'happiness'. I prefer 'joy'. It's very interesting that the Pope's called his recent publication *The Joy of the Gospel* not 'The Happiness of the Gospel'. So I go for joy, as being slightly more complex and deeper than happiness.

[5] *I then asked what filled them with gratitude. The Archbishop, followed by Sister Wendy.*

JW: I am daily amazed by the fact that God loves me. And that's, that's something that inspires gratitude and joy. I can't – I *can* believe it. I mean, I do believe it. But in a sense it's almost unbelievable – it's overwhelming. I'm profoundly grateful for my family, which is just a huge gift for me, because they're so indifferent to the fact that I'm Archbishop of Canterbury – and that they couldn't care less, and that's brilliant. I have a wonderful staff, and I'm very, very grateful for them, though they're – they're pretty challenging at times. There's so much that I can give thanks for.

WB: Ah, well, I've been very, very grateful for being a Christian. And very, very grateful for being called to be a nun. I can't imagine what it must be like not to believe in God. I feel such compassion for those who haven't been given this privilege. And for me, personally, I couldn't live without being a nun, whose energies are focussed wholly on God and whose desire is for him. I feel almost ashamed of being so privileged. And I pray with all my heart for those who haven't had this good fortune.

[6] *David chose a person as the source of his greatest gratitude.*

DS: So the first person who was *absolutely* instrumental – and in my whole life – was actually St Paul. When you read a Shakespeare play that you're going to be in – or whether you read it in your sitting room, library, bedroom, whatever. And you read it out loud, and that play has been sent to you personally, and it is a *new* play

(forget that it's Shakespeare – it's *new*) so I decided to read Paul's letter to the Romans as Paul's letter to David Suchet, and the letter had just come through my hotel room door.

[7] *So, plenty of gratitude. But if we give credit to God for all the good things in life, shouldn't we also blame him for the things that go wrong?*

WB: Of course it's instinctive for us to feel that what happens to us is ordained by God, and many religious writers say this. And I know that sometimes, when people's hearts are broken with sorrow, the one thing they can cling to is: well, it's God's will. And yet, of course, this is not so, because God *never* wants bad things to happen to us. It's the *last* thing he wants, for us to suffer. He wants us to be happy. What God wants is to be *with* us in what we suffer. And I think the same is true of the good things. God doesn't send them. He didn't twiddle something and so the baby was born healthy. No, it just happened. That's life. It wasn't the Father who put Jesus on the cross and killed him – no, it was life. It was the Establishment. What the Father wanted, what's the Father's will, is to be with him, and to make our suffering, like Jesus, redemptive. I think this is so misunderstood – and yet it's instinctive. We turn to God, and thank you, and things happen – and it's real too, because he's with us in them. He's *delighted* that we have a summer day. He's *delighted* that our headache has gone. He grieves *with* us when our parents die. And the sad thing is that he's there with his arms around us in sorrow – and people just don't see him. It would be nonsense to even *think* of