

## **Episode 201- The Bible Speaks to You Podcast Walking in Other People's Shoes with Neil Matthews**

James Early

Hey there, and welcome again to the Bible speaks to you podcast. I am so grateful that you've tuned in to listen today. I have an awesome guest this week. Friend of mine and fellow podcaster, Neil Matthews. Neil, welcome to the Bible Speaks Tea podcast.

Neil Matthews [00:00:17]:

Well, thanks for having me, James. I appreciate it.

James Early [00:00:21]:

Yeah. So good to have you on the show. I wanna tell you guys a little bit about Neil. Neil has always wanted to know why he wants to understand things. This is more of a a bio sketch that sort of on the inside of his heart, not like where he was and where he worked, so which I think is cool because you get a little insight into Neil here. Whenever Neil is speaking with someone, he wants to know what's behind their action and understand what's going on in their heart. and he's always wanted to put himself in other people's shoes to be able to understand where they're coming from and maybe be able to help them out. you know, when you understand where somebody's coming from, you you know, how to help them in a different way, perhaps. He was raised in the rogue Valley in Southern Oregon, and it's a group of communities in this little valley. And But that's really not big enough for Neil. He wants to reach out and touch the whole world. He wants to feel that connection with people everywhere. And that sort of came to be when his wife Elizabeth said, well, why don't you start a podcast? And so he did, and his podcast is called other people's shoes. I've been a guest on his show. It's a wonderful podcast. We'll talk about that a little bit later. He really tries to get people to share where they're coming from, and it Every time I've listened, it's really been a wonderful insight into how other people are thinking. Neil, Tell people a little bit about your podcast and how you got started.

Neil Matthews [00:02:04]:

Absolutely, James. One of my favorite things to answer So I got started roughly about 4 years ago. I lovingly called the show kind of my second child. because my first kid is now sixteen. And so that's exciting on itself. She'll be driving here momentarily. before we blink twice. She's she's gonna be driving on her own. So prayers for that, right out of the gate, maybe. But my second child, if you will, is a fictitious child, but it is the show because it is just as demanding as a toddler would be or a four year old would be and it needs time and energy and effort put towards the four year old. So the show is four years old, and so I started Kind of on a weird scenario sort of thing. We had a change of leadership at our church that I wasn't really wild about. And so I actually stepped away from youth ministry, which I was a part of for a number of years at the at this specific church. And in that process, my wife comes to me one day and says, Listen, I've kinda noticed you need a verbal outlet. And I said, well, hold on a second. I don't even know what a verbal outlet is. And she said, well, You should probably go learn what that

means. And so I was like, okay. Well, so now once I found that out, I was like, okay. So a place where I can kinda go and really express my voice and really share my thoughts and feelings and things like that. And I said, well, where do I go and do such a thing? And she said, I really think you should start a podcast. And I said, First off, what is a podcast? I I don't even know. And she said, how do you have all people not know what a podcast is? And I said, well, I don't. What is it? And she said, it's like a radio show, but recorded. And I said, oh, I love radio shows. And and she said, yeah. It's like that. And I said, so you mean back when we were growing up, I would make you these mixed tapes and I would pretend like I was this DJ, you know, and I was doing all these requests for you and they all the songs lined up and she said, yeah, like that, but not as personal and not as corny as you were on those radio tapes. I said, well, okay. So that's kind of the story, of we started. My wife, Elizabeth, is so brilliant and so smart and so beautiful. And so she says, you know, hey. I think you should do this and And so I did. I I really didn't go out and listen to anybody else. I just kinda found my own way of doing things. And, and yeah. And so here we are 4 years later, almost 5 years now. So yeah.

James Early [00:04:28]:

You know, I think it's fascinating. I'm interested in how you got interested in this idea of walking in other people's shoes, the sense of empathy that's so powerful in your heart. Where did that come from? What inspired that? Was it like a one sudden experience, or was it a little gradual kind of plant growing really slow? What what what's going on there? Well,

Neil Matthews [00:04:54]:

I think growing up, I really was just so curious about where people were from and where people were coming, you know, from and where they were about, you know, and all like a busy body, I guess, lack of a better wording. I always wanted to be have my pulse on what was happening around me and try understand what was going on around me because there was a lot of things I didn't understand. Like, I didn't understand why, you know, my dad being a marine had to be gone so much. didn't understand that. I didn't realize that was his job, and that's what he did. You know? And I think even other kids, like, I would look at other kids, you know, in Southern California where I grew up, and there were there was a a wide variety. There was, you know, Hispanic kids, Asian kids, because, you know, it's military kids. So they're people from all walks of life and ethnicity and all of that. And I I think I just remember thinking, well, What's the deal with them? Why are they the way they are? Like, I remember one time we had a a British kid in our school, and I think his name is Ryan. and he had a weird accent, you know, and and I I just thought, what's this deal with that? Like, why why does he have a different accent than us and And I think that's really where it kind of maybe started the seed was planted in some respects. Yeah. And And in that, I think it grew as I as I got older to be an adult that I I didn't understand why people were being mean. you know, and rude because I've been in sales and customer service forever. And I just thought, man, what is the story with you? Why are you with the way you are? Why do you act the way you are And I think the empathy came a little bit of that with hand in hand too because when I started to understand where they came from and whether they were walking through, think it just broadened my empathy, you know, and and just really exploded in my heart to really oh, that's where you're coming from Oh, that's what happened to you. Oh, that makes sense of why you react this way or maybe why you were triggered in this

respect. So I think that's where it all kinda came from. is just a this idea of of being, again, being in their shoes. And then as we were trying to name the show, my wife is part of that process. And in fact, I asked her early recently. I said, who did come up with the name of it? Because people ask me from time to time. am I should be should I be giving you credit for that? Is that my you know, bringing, working, whatever. And she said, well, it was my idea. I was like, okay. Help me remember that. She said, well, You know, we were trying to think of something empathetic. And I said, yeah. I remember that. And she said, and you love shoes. And so we just naturally thought it would be easy to say, Other people's shoes. And so that's kinda what what stuck. We didn't have, like, this gigantic -- Yeah. -- you know, brainstorming session. I think of it as that, but it probably wasn't. It was probably just us in the car one day, but there was no mind mapping or anything going on or or focus groups or What do they call those think tanks? Yeah.

James Early [00:07:50]:

Well and for those of you listening, Neil is crazy about shoes and everyone that comes on his show, he always asks them what kind of shoes they're wearing. And when I was a guest, I just found a pair of sneakers, and he was appalled. He likes fashion. How many pairs of shoes do you have, Neil?

Neil Matthews [00:08:12]:

I think we're somewhere in the vicinity of 60 to 80. Now I know that's a big fluctuation because there are some shoes that don't wear, like, on the regular kind of rotation, if you will, I mean, I have some golf shoes that I only wear, obviously, playing golf, but I have, like, cleats and things like that. So I think, like, altogether -- Right. you know, there's there's probably about 80, but probably practicality that I would wear roughly about 60. I just think that's fascinating that you've That's not even a lot, James, by the way. That's not even a lot. It sounds like a lot, but it's not. I have, like, 3 or 4 pairs of shoes.

James Early [00:08:45]:

including a pair of hiking boots. So I have 8 right behind me. I think it's cool that you brought who you are into the podcast in a way made it into a metaphor. I just think that's brilliant. And it shows the empathy that's in your heart. I'm curious thinking about your show. What are some of maybe an example or 2 of people you've had on your show that just really ooze that empathy or you got or you learned something for them. Some a couple of highlights that that really was the reason you do in your show. Can you think of a couple examples that you might share with my listeners?

Neil Matthews [00:09:31]:

So the first one that always comes to my mind is there's a guy that played college football at USC, which is, Southern California University back in 9190 in that era. I was a little kid. But he went on to then get drafted in the 1st round by the Raiders and had just a horrendous story of Being groomed, first off, as as being groomed to be an NFL quarterback. His name's Todd Marinovich, and he ended up trying cocaine in college. and it really wrecked him and really

wrecked his life and really wrecked just his pro career and everything ended up falling out of the NFL partly because of the drug addiction in all of that. So so that one comes to mind because it was just really cool to sit with kind of that quote, unquote celebrity person, especially celebrity athlete, And he's just such a great guy down to earth. So that one always jumps out at me because of how I found him and how I got him, and it was just so fast. It was like a whirlwind. Like, I sent an email, got a phone call that day from him, or we connected that day over phone. And it just happened so fast. And I was like, there's there's no way this is happening in real life because I just watched a documentary that he had done with ESPN 3430 called the Morinovich project, which is amazing. If you're a sports person at all or even a dad and a son, you have that dynamic going on, it'd it'd be worth the watch. So that one always jumps out at me. The other one that comes to mind is we had 2 Muslim moms come on And they just talked about their journey post 911 and how they've been treated and how, you know, we as Americans view the Muslim faith and what was really cool about that. I don't know a lot about the Muslim faith. I don't I mean, I know they they have the Quran. I know, you know, they have a lot and things like that. But out out of that, like, the job and things like that that they wear. I didn't know anything about that, and they were so kind and so considerate. They let me ask anything I wanted to.

James Early [00:11:28]:

I heard that episode. It was wonderful. I I think that was the first episode of yours I listened to. It's like, Wow. Yeah. I just felt so much empathy flowing both directions. It was a real humbling experience, really, to hear them being willing for you to ask some deep questions and you with a sincere desire to understand where they were coming from. And I don't think anybody had really ever asked them or been interested in the way you were. It just did a lot. I thought there was a lot of healing going in that episode.

Neil Matthews [00:12:02]:

Yeah. And and that's another reason why I really like it is, again, they were respectful of me. I was respectful of them. There was You know, I I joke, but it was like Planet Fitness. It's a it was a judgment free zone, you know, which pill Planet Fitness says all the time. So I kinda stole that from them. But Yeah. I mean, the those are 2 that jump out at me right out of the gate. And then I will I will end with This is just a just a fun episode for me. I I actually got a chance to have my wife on the show. And so that one will probably always be very special to me. Cool. But, you know, in that, she was so funny because she didn't she refused to promote it on any of her social. She she refused really talk about it to anybody unless they asked her directly, but I had a number of friends come up at church, come up privately, who said, She needs to be your co host because she she was so good in that episode. So that was a fun one for me too. So, yeah, there we are. Well, you know, the thing I appreciate about what you've said is you a lot of Christian podcasters

James Early [00:13:04]:

only have on their show people that they agree with. and it's all this little tight knit sense of, well, comfort zone. And and there's a place for that. But the thing I appreciate you're doing is you're hearing other people's perspective that you might not normally hear or that you agree with. but you're giving them, an opportunity to express where they're coming from. And I think that's

valuable because it helps us understand someone's position Whether we agree with it or not. In my book that brings healing to relationships, understanding what's going on on an individual base but, you know, you multiply that with what's going on in the world, and we need we need a little more. We need a lot more empathy in the world. Do you feel like your listeners are learning to walk in other people's shoes too?

Neil Matthews [00:13:54]:

I sure hope so. going back to church, I had somebody come up to me actually at church this last Sunday. And he he pulled me aside and he said, hey, man. I I just wanna let you know I I listened to one of your shows, and I was like, oh, man. Thanks. I appreciate that. Which one did you catch by chance? because, man, the the one with Wes, which is a a mutual friend of ours, and I said, yeah, I've really enjoyed, you know, sitting with him and getting to know him little bit better. And he goes, man, he goes, it just brought tears to my eyes how he has changed so much. And I was like, so it really moved you. You, like, you really saw him in a different way. And he goes, really did. And he goes, it really let me know. I can be just as vulnerable as he can. I can be just as, you know, genuine as he can. I said, yeah, man. It's just that's what it's all about. Right? Just learning something, taking from somebody and really using that in our life. And he goes, I really did, man. I just really appreciate what you're doing. He goes, I don't know if you ever feel like quitting, but, man, don't. Don't. Keep going. And I was like, that is so weird because in that moment, I mean, there have been times over the last year, especially. I've been like, you know what, god, maybe it's time. You know, we we had a good run. We've done 200 episodes. High five. Maybe it's time. And it was in that moment. I thought, you know what? Okay. Thanks for that little nudge, that little nod. You know? So that was cool. Right. Right.

James Early [00:15:16]:

So just in general, I know that's what you're working on with your show, but in general, as I said, the world needs a whole lot more empathy. How do you create empathy in someone? What's the biblical basis for for that whole concept of empathy?

Neil Matthews [00:15:35]:

James, that might be the toughest question I think anybody's ever given me. Truly. So this is where I may differ from folks. I don't think you can teach empathy. I think either you have it or you don't. And and maybe this is where I you know, things get maybe derailed. I don't know. But I I think either you have it or you don't. And I think you can learn to maybe get it, but again, I think it's a learned skill. You know, it it's just I'm I'm trying to think of something that's a learned skill, like a carpenter. Right? That's a learned skill. Somebody that works with concrete. That's a learned skill. I think empathy is one of those things. You have to learn it. Some people are gifted with it, but I think it is one of those things you do have to learn if you don't have it. Just like if I were to try to go out and build a house right now, I would have to learn how to do that. I I don't have that skill set, and I think empathy is one of those things. I I think you either have to learn it or or you just don't have it. I don't know. I keep feel like I keep saying that, but, yeah, I don't know.

James Early [00:16:45]:

Yeah. I I totally hear that I feel like when I've seen someone else express empathy, it's a little bit like that guy you were talking to at church that had heard one of your episodes is like, if you see someone else do it, you realize, oh my gosh, I'm a jerk or I could have done that or I wasn't really acting in a very loving way in this situation. When you see someone else be unselfish and empathetic and and reach out like that. I think that's probably one of the best ways to learn when you see somebody else's how it actually is genuinely changing somebody else's life. That's what touches me. It's not an academic subject. It's an experiential thing.

Neil Matthews [00:17:31]:

Yeah. And again, I I think that goes back to the idea that it has to be modeled for you in some respects. I feel like like you're saying, And again, I I think even the best modeling of it, somebody could still walk away and go, yeah. Okay. Cool. You felt that way? Okay. Well, I don't feel that way. I don't I can't relate with that. You know, I I I don't know. I I have heard people say that that it cannot be taught or it can be top, but either you have it or you don't. So I don't know. That's a struggle for me. Now you're making me ponder that.

James Early [00:18:04]:

So I'm curious. Are there any stories in the Bible that you feel like help in that regards or have helped you be more empathetic? have sort of opened your eyes to see where where you need to be more empathetic or you might share with somebody else if they were struggling with this.

Neil Matthews [00:18:22]:

So I think the the 2 that come to mind involve Jesus, the first one is in, John chapter 4. He's at the woman at the well. You know, famous story. Oh, yeah. I think he's he's extremely empathetic there. I think we just see empathy on full display for him there.

James Early [00:18:41]:

Oh, yeah.

Neil Matthews [00:18:43]:

The other one is with Mary Magdalene, and she's got in the act of adultery, and he's riding on the ground. writing on sand. To me, I'm always like, what the heck was he writing? Like, I get so wrapped up into what he was writing, what he was not writing. I forget about the rest of the story, but in that story, you know, I think he's extremely empathetic because he's trying to get them to realize, like, listen. You are not without sin either men of the of Israel, you you who is without sin cast the first stone, you know, and then it scripture actually says the oldest go away first. and then the youngest. So talk about the empathy and and modeling that, like, you were just speaking of, you know, to me, that, that's another example of him just being empathetic for her

because he knew he knew what's going on. Right. Right. Yeah. I think those are the 2 that jumped out to me right out of the gate.

James Early [00:19:32]:

Interesting. Interesting. Well and some scholars say that they're questioning whether that was Mary Magdal or not, but Whoever it was, his heart was there with her. And he didn't condone the behavior, but he He didn't condemn her either. You know, he was he was interested in her as an individual and trying to help her. Yeah. Oh, that's a great example. What are some of the ways where you have? Give me an example of how you have been empathetic with someone and how it's Either change the way you interact with someone or brought healing to a relationship or, you know, something in your personal life.

Neil Matthews [00:20:15]:

Well, there's one that that happened fairly recently, and, it still just kinda blows my mind how it happened. I work at a body shop. that's my real job, not podcasting. And then despite what people may believe, podcasting is not my real job. I'd love it to be, but it's not So, anyway, I work at this body shop, and we had a customer come in come through, and he was getting his car worked on. Well, he is from, you know, Asia. And so he's Chinese by his declaration. He's he speaks Chinese. And so we're trying to connect, trying to talk, and he can't talk in English really well. It's very broken. So he has this Google translate on his phone, and so he would type a message in Chinese and then hit send, and it would translate into English. And so I was reading it off his phone. And so we're quite literally passing his phone back and forth as we're interacting. Well, those that know me well know that I hate to write anything anything. Like, I hate even sending text messages or sending emails because I always, like, miss word or I always I just that's a struggle for me. And so I thought in this moment, I thought, god, what are you doing to me? Like, you're making me do something way out of my comfort zone to help this guy. Like, can't you just let me talk to him? Like, I could talk to him a whole lot easier than this whole past the phone back and forth thing. And so he ended up saying that he was gonna go walk to Costco from where our shop was, which is about roughly about miles 2 miles, and it's a really warm day. It's probably about 96 degrees. And first of all, hot day we've had in a while, I thought to myself, there's no way I'm gonna let this guy walk. So I said, hey, man. Let me get your ride. Nope. Wouldn't take it. I was like, let me get your ride. Nope. Wouldn't take it. So finally, he was just so insistent that he was gonna he was gonna leave and walk. I said, well, hey. Let me at least get you some water, you know, so, you know, when you're walking, you at least have something cold to drink, which I thought, you know, here in this moment, like, if you're doing these, the least of me, you've done them for me, you know, you've which kinda what was resonating my heart. And so I go and get the water, bring it back to him, and he starts weeping, James. Just absolutely weeping. Oh my gosh. And I, you know, again, we're doing the phone past thing. And I said, why are you crying? And he said, I just don't understand why you're being so kind to me. He's like, I've been in the States 2 years now. Oh my gosh. And you're the first person that's really been nice to me and seen me. And I thought, oh my gosh. Well, here we go. I said, Holy Spirit in full fledged, you know, mode right now. Like, tell him why. Tell him why. You know? So I'm listening, you know, kinda listening to the spirit in this moment. And I said, there's a reason why, man. I said, I love Jesus with my whole heart. I said, I don't know where you stand

in your faith. but I said, you gotta know that this guy Jesus loves you more than I could ever love you. And he's called me to love people and to give you water. I mean, that's the least I could do for you. I said, you know, what what do you think? And I said, here you go. And and you can have it. And and, again, he's just sobbing now. And he goes, I don't I don't understand. And I look at him like eye to eye and I go, you know, kinda make the eye to eye gesture. And I said, I see you I see you, and I value you as a person. And now he said, like, just tears. And so he leaves. And I thought, okay. Made a difference on that one. Awesome. Nice job. And so couple days go by and he comes into my office at work and he says, he calls me Mister Neil. He says, Mister Neil, Mister Neil, and now he's speaking English because I think he feels comfortable enough that he can, you know, we can work through that. and he brings me a coffee. And I just thought, man, what what's this for? And he goes, I don't know. I just I wanted to say thank you for what you did the other day. And I said, man, that's awesome. I said, you got into rental. That's great. And he goes, yeah. And so we talked about that. And now this guy, like, comes back kind of on a weekly basis and just checks in and says, hi. And he's brought me food a couple of times because he loves the cook. And people at work are like, what is the deal with you and this guy? I'm like, I don't know. I said, I just feel like he needs a friend, and I'm gonna be that friend. You know? So

James Early [00:24:28]:

Wow. You literally gave a cup of cold water in Christ's name. Yeah. A bottle of water. That's alright. It works with today. It was that smart water too. So I feel like maybe that was a smart decision. Okay. Bad joke. Oh, yeah. When you can see someone, so many people feel unseen, unheard, unknown, uncared for, unvalued, And when you put yourself in their shoes in that way, where you you're kinda walking there with them. What a difference it makes? I'm gonna invite everyone listening to this. Here is an experience Neil just shared where Out of the blue, it seems like somebody came into his his work and and it turned into something beautiful because Neil was really operating through his heart. So I'm gonna invite all of you listening Look for those kind of opportunities. They're probably right under our noses all the time. Really, really cherish that opportunity when it comes up and let the Holy Spirit guide you what to say, what to do, what not to say, what not to do, and just let people know that you care. That can go so far. I really appreciate that story, Neil. I love it. Are there any Bible stories in the Old Testament that you sort of feel there's that empathy been going on? Well, that's a good one too, James.

Neil Matthews [00:25:57]:

That's my what are we up to 4 now? 3 or 4? I'm gonna make you work here. I guess so. Yeah. I gotta see an old testament survey. So I don't I don't know. I'm just an average old testament guy. I'm not a I'm not an above or an excellent. Boy, you know, I've always thought about I've always thought about Moses, and this is a weird take maybe. So I don't know. if you want this or not. But I wonder about pharaoh's daughter when she pulls out Moses from the river, the the Nile River. Oh, yeah. I wonder if she was struggling with infertility in any way. Oh. And I'm we don't know. I mean, this is We don't know. This is huge conjecture. Right. I'm gonna just put that out. This is a huge conjecture, but I wonder and this is just me and my wondering. I'm wondering when she pulls the baby out of the water, and sees that he's crying. I wonder to myself if if in that moment, she thought, you know, even though the Egyptians didn't believe in god, that specific

god, the god of the Hebrews. I'm wondering if maybe in that moment, she thought, man, that is an answer to prayer. and and she had some empathy in that moment for that young child. You know? I I I mean, because again, she coulda just push the basket along its way and, you know, who knows what would have happened. Right? Right. But it was in that moment as she's pulling him out of the water. There I think there's just a mother's heart there. You know? Oh, that is so beautiful. Yeah. Totally. I know. Again, huge conjecture, huge conjecture, but I I wonder about that, but the other one too would be Hannah, you know, with with Samuel. I think there was an element of empathy there because she no matter what, she was always gonna tell that story for as long as she lived, how the fact that god answered her prayer and what she did in honoring and respecting and, you know, giving Samuel back to god, which You know, who does that? You know, I mean, she could have easily been like, sorry, god gave me my kid. Cool. Thanks. Onto the next thing. you know, but I I wonder about those ones. You know? I'm gonna go back to the baby Moses story.

James Early [00:28:10]:

and thinking of the Chinese guy who was in your shop. You never know when you express empathy where that could go. I mean, Ferro's daughter had no clue who Moses was going to be. and yet she was an instrument in that process. And so I would say, we never know. When you're led to be kind to someone, you know, you try to understand where they're coming from. You quote, unquote, literally or figuratively walking their shoes. You never know how god can use that. We think those things only happen in the Bible, but they happen today too.

Neil Matthews [00:28:51]:

Well, a couple of years ago, I I think it's almost 3 years now. I started it at the end of my signature, my email signature. I started putting in his sandals, and my old executive producer, Garrett, He read that on an email one day when we're emailing back and forth about a guest when he was still helping out with the show. And he he wrote to me privately in my private email, not my show email. So in my personal email, he writes to me, he said, I don't understand why you're writing at the end of your email in his handle seekers. That seems very, very just uppity, just really -- -- arrogant. -- arrogant. Yeah. pretentious. that was the word I was looking for. It was pretentious. And he goes, I I don't like it. It just seems gross to me. Like, I really think you should rethink this if you're gonna continue to put it out there. And I wrote him back, and I said, Garrett, I said, I wanna be in his sandals every cent of the day. Oh my gosh. Yes. If I'm in his sandals, like, Good things are happening. If I'm not in his sandals and if I'm not in his footsteps, I said my world and your world, by the way, is Iraq. And he said, oh my gosh. I hadn't thought about it from that standpoint before, and I said, I wanna be in his footsteps. I wanna be in his sandals. I wanna be rear ever he is. And he's like, okay. I get it. You can keep it. I'm like, well, thanks for the permission slip. But I don't need it. because my dad already signed it. So but thank you. But it got me thinking about that, and I've had a couple guests right back. Like, what do you mean in his sandals? Like, what's that about? and I wrote back, well, think about what it means. And then I just leave it alone.

James Early [00:30:30]:

So, anyway, just another little one. I love that. Actually, that was one of my questions that I wanted to talk to you about is, well, I come at it a little different metaphor, different, idea, but it's the same thing, really. And I talk a lot about this on my show. And first Corinthians 2 16 Paul says we have the mind of Christ. He doesn't say we will have the mind of Christ. It's present tense. Like, if we have the mind of Christ, well, maybe we should start using it instead of using our own mind and our own shortcomings and limitations, It's a pretty bold statement. So if we have the mind of Christ, then what does it look like for us to walk in his shoes or his sandals, as you say? I love that idea. It doesn't mean we're taking his place. It doesn't mean we're suddenly the Messiah or the son of god, obviously, but We're walking in his footsteps. Think of the closeness. I mean, Let's just imagine, literally, 2000 years ago,

Neil Matthews [00:31:34]:

you sneak in his room and you put his sandals on, you start walking around. Well, what little kid didn't do that. Right? What little kid didn't sneak into dad's room and try on dad's shoes. You know, walked around the house.

James Early [00:31:47]:

Yeah. So imagine you knew those were actually Jesus' sandals and you were walking in them and you knew who Jesus was as the Messiah, I think that would change the way you took every breath. Every step you took would think Oh my gosh. You know, I can't abuse this. It's not that the shoes or the sandals themselves have any innate power. It's more the sim symbolism, I think. the awareness of that. What if we, like you said, you wanna be in his sandals all the time? What if we consciously had on in our minds, Jesus' sandals, and walked the way he did, put our feet where he put his feet. And he said, you know, I only do what god tells me to do. I only say what he tells me to say. I only do what I see the father doing. So his feet only went where god told him to go. What if we acted that way? What a difference our lives would be and all the people we come in contact with?

Neil Matthews [00:32:52]:

Exactly. You know, I grew up in the, you know, eighties. So, you know, I was born in 80, and so I remember as a kid watching Michael Jordan, you know, as a kid. And I remember my friend, Eric, getting a pair of Jordan Shoes. They were Jordan Ford for the shoe nuts out there. So they'll they'll know what that means. James, you might not. It's okay. But it's a it's a it's a it's the iteration of that version. So is the 4th version of those shoes. And I actually have a pair. I know this comes as a shock to some. Of course, you do. I have 2 different versions of it, to be honest with you. Anyway, in that, as an adult, I bought them recently, and this is so silly, but I put them on. And as I put them on, I thought back to my friend, Eric, who who got him for his birthday. I'm sure his mom saved for a while to get them because they were not cheap even in those days. But anyway, As a kid, I remember Eric putting them on, and I thought to myself, he's gonna play just like Michael Jordan because he has his shoes on. He's gonna be just like Mike. know, everyone wanted to be like, Mike, Adrian, thank you so much for that amazing advertising. So fast forward now, like, 3 or 4 months ago, I bought these shoes. And as I put them on, I thought, I wonder, I wonder, can I fly like my can I jump? No. I'm a grown adult. But it was in that

moment that I thought, man, I wonder what it would truly be like to have greatness on your feet. Now I know I'm making a maybe lame parallel. Michael Jordan's pretty amazing at basketball. Some have said he's the greatest of all time. Yeah. Now there is one that is greater than even him. Jesus. But going back to your analogy, like the idea of really knowing for a fact that these were his sandals. And the idea of that to me is like mind blowing. Like, again, when people pass away, we go to their home sometimes and maybe it's an aunt or a grandmother or a son and we're like, oh, here's so and so's Bible or here's so and so's sewing machine. Like, my uncle died. I got his flashlight. You know, I mean, that was cool. But imagine, like, if somebody got forbidden, I were to pass and somebody were to come and go, oh, these are the shoes Neil really love to wear. You know, and they were maybe an honor of me. Who knows? I don't know. I don't want that. That seems weird. Maybe go there. But it's the idea of this idea that you're in his shoes and experiencing what he's experienced to me, that was just mind blowing to think about. You know? So I love that. I love that a lot. You did that. I was thinking about this ahead of time because

James Early [00:35:30]:

John the Baptist said He was not worthy to either carry or unlatch. Jesus' sandals. Different gospels put a different way. The one in Mark won't verse 7, he says the straps of whose sandals, I'm not worthy to stoop down and untie. And I feel like, well, actually, John the Baptist probably was worthy to do that. Look at all God had John the Baptist do to prepare the way for Jesus. And Jesus even says there's no greater man on earth. Of course, he was not including himself in that lineup, but Jesus totally valued John the Baptist. And everything he was and represented, everything he did, and do you think sometimes maybe we don't give ourselves permission to go that far to walk that closely with Jesus? Because we think, well, he was Jesus. Hey. That's the son of God. You know, I'm just a little old me. But back to this whole idea of Paul says, we have the mind of Christ. Let mind B and U, which was also in Christ Jesus. We're supposed to not just follow blindly or copy Jesus. We're supposed to literally follow him. Understand what we're doing. Follow his example. Follow his teachings. So are we worthy to walk in his sandals? Well, maybe in so doing, we become more worthy, you know, the disciples weren't perfect at following him, neither are we, but the more we do it, the better we get. Right?

Neil Matthews [00:37:03]:

Well and I think you're absolutely right on. And to me, when I hear that again, I just think little that I know that would be such a profound thing for me, but it also here's the other thing. The flip side of that coin would be it's a very convicting statement too because my walk is my life is my whatever. Is that really demonstrating that I'm walking in his sandals when I'm, you know, maybe mean to my wife or rude to my daughter or guy cuts me off in traffic or gal cuts me off in traffic. Am I in his sandals in those moments when I'm at my lowest or my weakest? That's the part that really challenges me to walk forward to say, okay. If you're gonna be in his shoes, you better not you know, disdain or disrespect or hurt, you know, that name. Right. And really those shoes. So I mean, because I know this is crazy to some. I have shoes that I have not even ever worn because they're that important to me. So that's why I feel like his sandals would be like, I'd look at him and go, That's what Jesus is. I can't I can't even I can't even try him on even if he wore it in 11. I don't know.

James Early [00:38:15]:

You know, there's an interesting comment, and I'm gonna use this as a metaphor. I'm not sure how this is gonna come out, but So you got some shoes you haven't worn because you value them so much. Do we have favorite Bible verses? Do we have ideals about how we feel about Jesus. And we value them so much. We never put them into practice. You know, Jesus wanted us to not just say love your neighbor as yourself, not just say, oh, yes.

Neil Matthews [00:38:47]:

Love your enemies. He wanted us to do it. Yeah. And I I think you're right on with something because, again, I think we get so wrapped up into the well, I do. I'll make it a nice statement, not a not a we statement or a you statement. but I get so wrapped up into the appearance sometimes or they'll show or the look or the whatever that I forget that he wants me to be above that. He wants me to be beyond that. And To me, I I think that's that's right in line with what you're saying is is that we get so I get so wrapped up into sometimes my theology of how I think Jesus should be or Jesus would not love this person or not love that person. It's like, wait a second. He he didn't come to do that. Like, even the worst of the worst he's hanging out with and chilling with. Now was it on the regular? Probably not, but he at least went to them and gave them an opportunity to say Like, listen. I'm the son of man. I'm the son of god. Like, I came to bring good news and set the captives free. Oh, you don't want that? Cool. I'm gonna go on to the next house in see if they're interested. You know? Just as a little side here, can I invite you to

James Early [00:39:56]:

pick out one of the pairs of shoes you haven't worn ever and embrace their shoeness on your feet and wear them in honor of Jesus.

Neil Matthews [00:40:09]:

Well, the the problem is I'll get them. They're right behind me. Hold on. So the problem is is I I haven't even, like, tried them on, like, like, look at that. That sole is is clean, and this is why is it has a North Carolina logo on the tongue. These are Jordan Fors in case anyone's wondering. so the shoes I was just talking about, but they're they're, specially made. They're called the Players Edition, and they still smell new too. And that's the thing. Like, I look at these and I think about them and I think, man, I I just am so afraid to getting them dirty, and I don't wanna get them dirty. And what if I spill something on them? Like, there's so much silliness and and irrationalness to why I haven't worn these yet. But I'm going to North in November, and my brother-in-law had told me I need to wear them on the plane and wear them around town. And so I might in November wear them. James. But Okay. I it might be a while.

James Early [00:41:09]:

Well, as a metaphor, though, we don't wanna have the prettiest Bible leather gold leaf on it and not ever open it and use it. So it's just a metaphor, obviously. Of course. Not a condemnation

Neil Matthews [00:41:23]:

or No. No. No. No. No. judgment. I know you're not. No. No. No.

James Early [00:41:29]:

I'm just amused mostly. Well, so you brought up something interesting about theological this or that or what your expectations of what you think Jesus would do or think or say. Sometimes we have that with fellow Christians. We don't always agree on Theological point, sometimes small things, sometimes big things. How can we walk in other people's shoes in that respect? It's like politics too. You know, you're so set in your way of thinking and you think you're right and all these other people must be wrong. And yet, Maybe we're all seeing something a little differently. What has worked for you to be empathetic and walk in someone else's shoes you disagree with theologically?

Neil Matthews [00:42:14]:

Yeah. That's a that's a tough one. I will say when I started going to my current church, I see, I grew up again, grew up in the church, walked the aisle as an Awana kid, got baptized. I was immersed. Please say what Awana is because some of my listeners may not know what those letters stand for. Yeah. It probably does stand for something. I don't know what it stands for. I could Google it really quick. But I wanna it's like, I always thought of it as, like, the cub scouts for church. Oh, okay. You earned, like, little badges and little, you know, if you memorize the verse, you got a jewel on your badge and your vest and I don't know. Okay. It's this. Yeah. Anyway, so there we are. And so I re and and I was baptized at 9. I went all the way under. So that's immersion, I think, all the way under always get that one confused. Right. And so I remember, you know, growing up in a church, Christian, Mission Alliance, evangelical church, who, you know, you made a decision for Jesus, and it might be 6 months before you get baptized. You know? I mean, that's just kinda how the schedule works. And so leaving that church to go where we are currently, the pastor and I were meeting one time when I first got there, and he said, hey. You've been baptized. Right? And I said, yeah. Of course. When I was 9, he goes, you were 9, really? And I was like, no. Yeah. Seriously. I was 9. I was in a wan kid told him the whole story. because tell me why did you get baptized? I said, well, you know, it's an outward expression of an inward heart. He goes, cool. Show me that in scripture. I was like, what do you mean? It's it's in there. I'm sure it is. Paul talks about outward expression inward heart. He goes, cool. Show show me chapter and verse. And I was like, Yeah. It's oh, wait. It's not in there. Oh, it's not in there. Yeah. Okay. Neil was wrong. So it's not in there. And so I said, well, yeah, I guess it isn't in there. And he said, okay. So why should we get baptized? And I was like, well, I don't I don't know. I mean, it's what you do. Right? And he goes, but you have no reason why? You just it's just what we do. And I said, well, you know, it's one of the tenets of our faith and, you know, like, communion and other things. And he goes, okay. But but why? And I was like, I don't really know. And so is him explaining it to me saying, hey. It's an obedience thing. You get baptized because it's obedience. And I said, okay. Yeah. I I get that. I said, we don't have to be baptized to go to heaven. Like, the thief on the cross didn't get baptized, and he he still got to go to heaven. And he's like, That's a bad example, and it's an isolated example. Like, okay.

But it still happened. So what do we do with that? So I guess the empathy in that was hearing him out Hearing where he stood on baptism and saying, okay. It's a discipline, but it's also a command from Jesus. When you accept Christ, when you accept him, what did he do? He went and modeled that for us in the Jordan River. Like, we were just talking about with John the Baptist. And so to me, that was that was a perspective shift, and that was an empathetic shift to say, hey. I wanna hear where you're coming from on this because I I might be wrong. I might have always thought something that was that was right that is now in my mind that was wrong thinking. So I tried to at least hear where he was coming from and not just shut him off saying, oh, yeah, outward expression inward heart. That's my belief. That's what it's sticking with. You know? Interesting. Yeah. I think we need a little more empathy

James Early [00:45:36]:

among different groups of Christians sometimes because we can get so set and the way we see things. And it doesn't mean you have to agree with somebody, but it means you're trying to understand where they're coming from. I have learned a lot from people that I disagree with because when I try to understand why they believe that what they do, it gives me a fuller picture. And sometimes I realize, hey, they've got a good point on part of this and, you know, it makes me go back to the Bible and see, okay. What is this versus what are these passages saying to me? I have grown a lot when I've tried to see something from somebody else's point of view, and and I think that's really important. What have you learned about yourself in this whole journey

Neil Matthews [00:46:22]:

of walking in other people's shoes? Well, I've learned it's really hard. I've I've also learned I don't always wanna do it. I think those are the 2 things I've learned. And I've also learned that if I'm really gonna, again, going back to it, you know, the the statement we're talking about of being in Jesus' shoes or sandals, I don't wanna be a hypocrite in that regard. I've learned I don't wanna do that either. I think those three things. I've learned that it's hard. I've learned sometimes I don't wanna do it, and I've learned I don't wanna be a hypocrite. And in that, like, I I have to, on the daily basis, say, I say this phrase at the end of the show, and I don't even know where it came from. I think I set it on a whim and it just kinda stuck, but I said, you know, when you walk in other people's shoes, you really do get a different perspective on life. And to the point where I put it on a bracelet, those Lance Armstrong kinda stretchy kinda rubbery band kinda bracelets. Oh, yeah. I put it on a bracelet. It says other people's shoes and as a different perspective because all that wouldn't fit on a bracelet. But I looked down from time to time when I'm dealing with somebody difficult or something you know, maybe that doesn't jive, right, or, you know, maybe I'm person's being rude or who knows what, or maybe it's a person that's upset or in tears or whatever. I looked down on the bracelet. I I just use it as a reminder too to say it's a different perspective. Let me let me try to get that different perspective from that person right now and try to understand where they're coming from. I remember I had a lady freak out on me fairly recently. And I I think I actually said to her. I said, hey. Something going on, and it caught her so off guard. She said, what? I said, I'm just curious. I said, sorry if that's, you know, unprofessional, inappropriate, whatever. I said, I'm just curious. Is there something going on? She goes, yeah. I'm I'm dealing with blah blah blah blah blah. I was like, oh, okay. That makes sense. I could see why you're upset. I said, but can we just do me a favor? Like, as we go forward

together, can you just, like, remember that's why you're upset and not directed at me? Is that okay? She goes, Yeah. I I guess I was kinda kinda dumping it on you. Wasn't I? I said, well, you know, maybe. But it was just the idea of of right slowing down that conversation of of having that moment to say and being bold enough to say as scary as it may be to say, hey. What what's really going on? You know? And I think I think I tried to do that a lot more because of the show because the show's taught me to do that.

James Early [00:48:58]:

So if somebody's listening right now and realizes they need to step up their empathy game, They realized there's some areas in their life where they could do a little bit better job of of seeing something from someone else's perspective. All these things we've been talking about What would you say to encourage them?

Neil Matthews [00:49:18]:

Well, I would say start, you know, really, really truly start to say and and maybe that's where the mindset kinda gets shifted is to say, okay. Where is this person at right now? You know, I remember one time in in in traffic. Like, this guy was just blasting by everybody. And, you know, there's this long line of cars that get on this little expressway that we have in in our little community here. And I he was cutting people off, and I thought to myself, man, That guy's being such a jerk right now. And then I thought I had this kind of holy spirit check moment that was like, What if he needs to get somewhere faster than everyone else does? Maybe he's late. Maybe his wife's in the hospital. Maybe his kid's sick. Who knows what? We don't know the reason. I'll never know the reason because it's not like I, you know, drove up, flagged the guy down. It's like, hey, man. Do you have 5 minutes? I'd I'd love to know why you were being such a, you know, tool back there. I I didn't do that, but it's in those moments that I think to myself, there's more to the story. And I think if somebody starts to realize, like, hey. There's more there's more going on here. There's a a Sawyer Brown song. It's a country song, so I don't know how people feel about country. And it's an old song. And I remember hearing that song, and I and this the name of the song I think is they don't understand And it's talking about this. It starts out by this mom's on a city bus, and the kids are going crazy. They're bouncing around, jumping around, doing all this other stuff. and the mom's just sitting there letting them do whatever. And I'm wrecking the song for people, but at the end of the song, she's telling people on the bus, like, their dad They were up all night with their dad, and their dad died this morning. And she hasn't had a chance to really tell them that their dad's dead. Oh, wow. And it's, like, terrible. But It's in that moment, like, and the chorus goes, they don't understand. They don't understand what she's been through. They don't understand what's going on. And so to me, before I'm ready to slam down the gavel and judge somebody. And, you know, I know what's going on. I know their life. I know their situation. I kinda have to stop, and I would encourage people to to stop and ask a question like, what's going on here? There's more to this story. There's more of what's going on. people aren't just wake up every morning and go, I'm gonna be a jerk and I'm gonna yell at everyone that I come across. Like, that just doesn't happen. You know, but if we slow down enough and ask somebody just slow down and say, hey, man. What's going on here? What? You know, engage people. I think would be my encouragement, being an engager of conversation. Yeah. That's profound. I don't know. I just kinda came up with that. But -- No. That that is.

That's That's really powerful, but I think it's just so profound. It's just being an engaging in conversation.

James Early [00:52:01]:

So, what's god doing in your life right now, Neil?

Neil Matthews [00:52:04]:

Well, he's, he's working with me on so I'm I'm trying to be more patient. It's really hard having my kid driving. Like, that is that is that is really wrecked my world, I think, because we're letting her go. You know, we're we're really saying, hey. We we trust that you're gonna be where you're supposed to be. We're we trust that you're gonna drive the way you're supposed to drive. My concern has always been having a girl is I've never worried about her I've worried about the other boys around, if that makes sense. And now I'm having to worry about other cars around her because I see every day how bad cars can get mangled and every day I see cars that have been damaged and hurt by other people not paying attention and and that's my fear. and it's kind of irrational in some respects, but, that would be one. The other one is that I think god's really showing me is to love my wife more. And not that I've been bad at it, but I can always be better at it and and I think he's really showing me that. The other thing that he's showing me so this is a great reveal is I've really been struggling with with some identity issues of my own. and I've been walking through counseling since, the latter part of November till now. I'm just walking through some some child trauma from kid trauma. And, you know, my parents were great people. They really were. They they did the best they could. but I think he's really showing me in that some some things that I gravitated towards that weren't really healthy for me. of wanting to be seen and wanting to be heard kind of what you were talking about. But I went to the extreme because I thought, man, if I can just be better at this or get you know, really amazing at this, then then everybody's gonna like me and everyone's gonna love me and everyone's gonna want me around. And, you know, he's showing me that, you know, even in that, You know, he loves me, and that should be enough. So I I think those are some of the some of the things he's working with Beyond. So the great reveal would be I I just came across this passage probably about a month ago. The speaker, I was at a a men's event, and the speaker was talking about David and Goliath And there's this part in where David's gonna go out and fight Goliath. And we all know this famous, you know, story, by the way, spoiler, he kills Goliath. takes him down with his sling. Oh, really? Yeah. I know. Shocker. Right? What a surprise. Yeah. What a surprise. Oh, it's so surprising. But in that, right before he goes to fight Goliath in, first Samuel chapter 17, I I promise you this was not there before hearing this for the first time ever. This was never there. Somebody has now Mandela effect gone in and written it in, but, 2nd Samuel 17:32 It says, don't worry about the Philistine. David's told Saul, I'll find him. I'll go find him. That sounds awesome. Right? 1st 33, Saul jumps in. Here he goes, Don't be ridiculous, Saul replies. He says there's no way you can fight this Philistine and possibly win. This is not gonna happen, but this is the part I'm keying in on. It says you are only a boy. And the part that I wanna reiterate is you are only. And I think for me, lately, god's really been telling me, like, you are only what? Like, you are only gonna be that that limiting belief system. I think has really been in my heart lately. You are only A podcaster? No. You're much more than that, Neil. You are only a dad. No. You are much more than that. No. You are only a husband. You are much more than that.

James Early [00:55:38]:

And so you are only this is really, I think, what he's teaching me of late. So they're rare. Could be a season. I don't know. We'll see. Well, you know, that's what the world does. It says you're only this. It defines us in these little narrow ways. And god says, nope. I love what you said. You're so much more than that. Neil, I see you, and I know you a little bit. I'd like to get to know you better. You are so much more -- Come on out to Oregon. Alright. Well, you could come to Connecticut. I would go to Bristol. I just don't offense to your little community, but I'd be in Bristol. But, anyway, that's not too far from me. No. I love what you said. I love the way god is working in your life, and I really appreciate that. Neil, we're gonna close-up here in just a little bit. I wanna honor you for really the amazing empathy in your heart and that all you're doing to help instill that in others and bring it out in others. I I really feel like the world needs a lot more people like you, and you're just such a blessing. I just wanna honor you for that. Are there any final thoughts that you'd like to share with my listeners? Or is there something that I didn't ask or did we didn't talk about a point you'd like to make. What thoughts would you like to leave with my listeners?

Neil Matthews [00:56:47]:

Well, I'm I'm just gonna say if people aren't listening to you, they they should be. because you are in my mind, a very profound, amazing, highly intelligent person. And so if anybody's not listening to, you gotta ask yourself, why are you not? on the daily basis. I'm just saying. So we'll we'll say that. But the other thing I would say, you know, if people wanna connect, I I've had a few folks say through the years, like, well, how can we connect with you? So the best way I always tell people is is the website, ops podcast.com, It's kinda home based. Socials are there. There's a cool thing. You can leave a voicemail actually on the website. It's kinda cool thing. But, yeah, definitely if if people are interested in hearing more about the show or wanting to be a guest because I'm always on the hunt for the next guest, and they wanna see if they're a good fit for us. they can definitely reach out. But other than that, no, man. I I thought you did a fantastic job. You are a great interviewer. So, well, thanks. You're a great interviewee too.

James Early [00:57:43]:

I will have the link for that. It is OPS standing obviously for other people's shoes. Opspodcast.com. And as I said, I'll have that link in the show notes. I always ask my guests three final questions. And so the first one is if you could talk to any bible character other than Jesus, Who would it be and what would you ask them?

Neil Matthews [00:58:09]:

Oh, man. I'm gonna go Steven from axe. He famously was really the 1st new testament murder. I would wanna know I would I would just wanna know what it looked like when he looked up and on and he saw Jesus sitting at the right hand of the father. Like, what what was that moment like? You know? Not getting hit by all the rocks, but What was that moment like? You know? Wow. Yeah. What was that moment like? Did your faith really become real in that moment, or was it

real before? So Wow. That's a really great question. Nobody's ever mentioned Stephen before I wanna ask this question. That's great.

James Early [00:58:49]:

Second question, is there any Bible character that you especially identify with?

Neil Matthews [00:58:54]:

I'm embarrassed to admit this, but I I kinda think I'm a soul King Saul, like, we were just talking about. I'm tall. I'm about 63, but I don't know. Saul always kinda makes me think of I was thinking him because he's very moody at times and very just, you know, he can get real angry. And and I have those tendencies, shamefully admitting, And sometimes it takes kind of some some kind of slower kind of spa kind of type music to kind of calm me down like David would provide for salt. So, yeah, little fun fact. I I do enjoy spa music. So, yeah.

James Early [00:59:30]:

Okay. The third question is, The Bible speaks to you podcast is all about getting back to the original Christianity of Jesus and embracing his mindset. How would you describe Jesus' original message of how he wants us to live our lives?

Neil Matthews [00:59:50]:

I think he put it pretty easy for me at least is love god, love people. And I think to me, if I'm doing that, I think I'm truly following what he originally intended because I don't ever remember him not loving the father. I don't ever remember him not loving people no matter where they were, no matter what they were doing. I mean, you know, the the woman at the well, like we talked about, She was a Samaritan. They did not like them. Not at all. Right. And I think to me, for him to intentionally walk through Samaria was just profound. And even the way he treated nicodemus in his disbelief And the fact that he loved him no matter what, you know, hear of him, you know, healing the the sick, the the lame, you know, to me, that's what it's about. It's about loving god with all he had and he had it. and then loving people. And to me, that's sometimes the hard part, but that's what we're called to do.

James Early [01:00:57]:

Well, I think you're doing a pretty good job at that. I have enjoyed this so much. I really think, like, I got a little window into your heart more than I had before, and I really appreciate the time you've spent.

Neil Matthews [01:01:09]:

And just thanks again for being on the show. It's my pleasure, James. Thank you so much for having me.