

Michael: So with me today is Sophie Killingley. Welcome to the podcast.

Sophie: Hi Michael. Thanks for having me.

Michael: It's a pleasure. For those who haven't come across you, could you take a moment just to tell us a little bit about yourself and particularly your artistic work?

Sophie: Okay, sure. So I'm Sophie Killingley. I'm a freelance artist based in Surrey. I live with my husband of nearly 18 years this August. Two children who are 15 and 12 who are both on the autism spectrum and our cat, Major Tom. We were in pastoral ministry for 10 years. That recently ended and I've been an artist practicing for about eight years I'd say, probably nearer 10. But yeah, I have a book out currently, which is a spiritual journal ([Draw Near](#)). So I'm very interested in trying to help people connect their spiritual life and their kind of creative lives. I think just trying to help people be a bit more holistic in general. I always found growing up that I kind of almost shut my brain off when it was time for my quiet time. It was like, well, here's me over here doing all my creative stuff and creative problem solving and enjoying this, and now it's time for quiet time. So it's like we approach the Lord without our personalities intact.

So it was only as an adult that through a period of bad mental health, I started doodling because I couldn't read the Bible very well. And so I started doodling Scripture and stuff and then started realising, 'Oh well actually this is really helpful'. And then just kept on having a pad and pen always at my side when I was trying to speak to God and I just felt, 'Oh, actually this is connecting the whole of me to God'. So I'm very interested in that.

And I do a lot of artwork, which is text-based. It kind of started off more Scriptural based, but as I've gone on I've, I've been leaning more into the more my taste, which is kind of absurdist and a little bit peculiar at times. But I really like to find the absurd moments of life because life is very strange. It's just very peculiar and a lot of what we Christians can do at times is very peculiar too when you stand back and look at it. So yeah, I always say that I take God seriously, but the rest of us Christians not at all.

Michael: That's interesting. And does that help you I guess when going through more difficult times? Just seeing the lighter side, I don't know if this is a very British thing. That is something we do a lot of, isn't it?

Sophie: Exactly. Yeah. I've got a very naturally dark humour anyway. I find dark comedy is hysterical. That's my family's kind of humour and it's very much my daughter's humour. Now that she's 15, we've actually started watching various hilarious sitcoms together now that she's old enough and a bit of Monty Python as well. And it's really lovely to see that develop in her too. So yeah, I definitely like to find some of the absurd parts. So yeah, some of the artwork I've created in the last year has definitely leaned into that. I'm a big fan of an artist called David Shrigley who is largely a text-based artist. It's all quite naïve-looking art and it's kind of when you read it at face value, whatever, he just writes big letters and big words down. It just kind of makes you laugh. It looks like a child's done it, but then actually when you start to peel back the layers, you actually realise, oh actually that's a really profound thing to say. So, I really like to try and get into that kind of place where you both laugh but also it makes you think.

Michael: Yes, excellent. It's the best kind. I particularly wanted to have you on the podcast to explore some of the other aspects of grief that perhaps don't normally spring to mind as what we might call grief. In fact, the other day somebody asked me if my album is just about the grief of death or does it speak to other griefs as well? And of course I wrote it against the backdrop of death, but even as I was writing it, and I think early on I shared a song with you because of the situation you were going through and realizing that all loss is grief. That we suffer grief as a result of it, but we perhaps don't always name it as grief. Now there's a grief that we've both experienced, a similar grief, but in possibly slightly

different ways, in a place that probably shouldn't be causing grief. And that's the church. So I wondered if you would be willing to share a little bit of your own story and then we'll talk about some of the art that's come about as a result of that.

Sophie: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, you are right that all kind of grief is to do with loss and feelings of loss. And that's very much what my husband and I found ourselves in in this past year. And like I said, we've been in pastoral ministry for 10 years. He was eight years pastor at a particular church and that came to quite an abrupt end last year. And the situation was just very unjust. It was really painful, it felt very unfair, unjust. We didn't feel very heard. It was very confusing for the congregation and it was shocking to see people that we had trusted betray us essentially. It was deeply painful. And so in the space of a few weeks, we kind of had planned to be in ministry at this place for 15 to 20 years, that was our plan, and we went from that in our future to being that we are going to have to leave this church. We have lost our church community through painful circumstances, we've lost friendships and we're also losing our house that we've lived in because it was attached to the job. And that's where my children have grown up. And it was just loss after loss. And going from being a very involved pastor and his wife constantly interacting with our community, serving them, it kind of just went completely silent. And again, a lot of people, I don't blame them for that because a lot of people don't know what to do. They don't know how to respond, they don't know what to do when things are being said, so they just go quiet. But it felt like such a loss. It felt like a divorce, like a death. It wasn't something we chose. We very much felt forced out and it was deeply grieving and both of us said, 'This is grief'. We both felt that we were going through the five stages of grief where we'd have these moments where we'd be bargaining almost like, 'What can we do God to make this work out? What can we give up or compromise here?' And then, okay, that didn't work. No, this can't be happening. Denial. Just all of these things. And there's so much anger, I can't believe this is happening to us as a family. This is so out of the blue. Until you get to that place of acceptance. And I still feel like we are cycling around it even though we're far removed from that situation now and in a new house and my husband has a different job, but it's just been an extremely painful time at the deepest kind of level. I think especially because it's connected with your spiritual life and your spiritual community and that is your family. This is the Bride of Christ, this is who you want to hold with and be with.

And so to feel that kind of rupture, it was so difficult. And then even trying to go to a new church just as regular people, I found that I literally just cried every Sunday for the first three or four months just because everything just felt so raw. And we'd be hearing sermons about church as family and my kids would just be looking at me and crying and I was like, 'No, I don't know what to say. Church is supposed to be family. And that's not what we've experienced right now. And it feels confusing'. And I don't know how we hear these truths about God, about how He is loving and how He wants the best for us. But right now our life feels in tatters and we don't know. There's nothing, there's no easy answer. So it was deep grief, just a sense of loss.

Michael: Well, and you can just see the similarities with death. Death removes relationships, it breaks and severs relationships. And sadly we experience those deaths of relationships while people are still alive as well. And I guess in some ways we know death will come (unless Jesus returns), we know death will come to relationships at some point in terms of actual death, but when those relationships are severed and people are still alive, it's kind of, I don't know, there's another depth too that's wrong.

Sophie: Yeah, absolutely.

Michael: And how you speak to the continuance of that grief as well. That's something I've been reflecting on in terms of physical deaths, and this whole, 'Oh, people should get over it!' whereas until the person is restored, that loss is still there.

Sophie: It just becomes part of you.

Michael: And God willing, by His grace there can be restoration of those severed relationships on earth, not always. And because of His grace, there will be a restoration of those relationships with people who have died. But until that point there is still loss. And so there's still grieving to be done and it changes in its rawness and severity perhaps, but there will surely always be an element of that grief and that that testifies to the strength of love that there was in the first place.

Sophie: Absolutely

Michael: If there wasn't any love, it wouldn't hurt.

Sophie: That's why it matters so much because it meant so much. We gave our everything and sacrificed much and loved much. And so the wounds feel deep because of that.

Michael: What do you feel is the importance of naming these kind of things as grief? Is it important to give them that label? And I guess also, if it is important to name them such, how can we be helping each other grieve well in these situations?

Sophie: Great question. I think it's so important to be able to name what is happening to you. I think for one, it helps you to frame things in the right way to understand. It gives a level of understanding of what is happening because otherwise we can just be so bowled over by the strength of emotion. If you have some kind of framework to understand, 'Oh, actually what I'm feeling is actually I am very angry and I'm very sad, but it's because it's grief at the bottom of that, there is loss'. And so I think sometimes we can feel quite afraid of our emotions and I understand that because sometimes they are so powerful, it feels unsettling. And there were times last summer when the strength of emotion I was feeling, it felt almost suffocating. I don't know what to do with this. It feels frightening.

But to be able to acknowledge, just to be able to acknowledge these emotions, and be like, 'I feel very angry' or 'I feel very sad', that lies underneath the anger. And just to be able to not try and think, 'Oh, Christians shouldn't be angry' or something like that. That's the kind of thing you hear at times. It's just to kind of sit in that and go, 'Actually no, this is exactly how I'm feeling right now'. And sometimes anger is the exact right response to the kind of severance of relationships we've experienced. It is right to be angry at separation, at loss, at death, at division. It is right to be angry and we don't need to fear that. And to also understand sometimes what's behind these emotions. And it's anger because there was deep love and then deep loss. So I think it helps to be able to frame it.

And I was also thinking, there's a C.S. Lewis quote, in which he talks about the need to speak out things when we praise them and that when we praise something, it feels incomplete until we've spoken it. Yeah, he says, "I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment. It is its appointed consummation. So it's not just out of compliments that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are. The delight is incomplete until it's expressed." And I wonder if the same is possibly true for grief, that it's not just enough to feel it, but actually to complete it, you have to express it. Allow the emotions to come out and take its place.

Michael: Yeah, oh wow. I think that's very true. The way that you worked out a lot of that struggle was through making art. In fact, you said to me, creating art stopped me feeling like I would implode or explode from the weight of it. Before we get into some specific pieces of art that you made, could you just tell us a little bit more about the process of that? Did you approach it with a particular aim in mind, a particular audience, or was it just, I've got to get something out here?

Sophie: I think in the first days, weeks, months of experiencing these kind of emotions of grief and loss, it was just a matter of 'I have to externalise this emotion somehow'. In therapy, there's talk of the ability to externalise emotion rather than keeping it bottled up. Because if we keep it in and bottled up or try and suppress it, it will generally pop out in other ways, whether that is in unhelpful, angry outbursts or even chronic illness. The body contains inflammation when we hold onto really intense emotions. And so I wanted to just try. I felt like I was going to implode, so I just approached it with 'I don't know what to do and I feel like I'm going to just scream into a pillow'. (And I did that too, to be fair.) But I just grabbed loads of paint and took canvases outside and I felt like they were almost just angry prayers. I felt like my brush strokes were prayers. I felt so almost just consumed by just sadness and anger and disbelief. I couldn't even articulate it. You can't intellectualise grief when you're in it. It's just a complete tsunami. So I just had to start making marks and see what happened. And some of that came out in kind of humorous stuff, my usual dark humour. And then some of it came out in a lot more abstract expressionist pieces, which were just a representation of the depth of emotion I felt. And I think it was after some months of doing that, maybe I was able to start to think a little bit about it and maybe think about how to communicate the depth of grief and emotion to maybe help others feel not alone in their emotion, but in the moment it was just all about expressing just because I needed to do something or just completely lose my mind.

Michael: So this is going to be a slightly strange one for a podcast, but we're going to talk about some of the works that you've created and [links to the images](#) will be in the show notes. So it might be worth listening to this part of the conversation with pictures in hand. Listeners don't do it while you're driving. The first piece I wanted to talk about is probably literally the darkest in that it is mostly black, well with blues and greys, but there is a lot of black, and you've called it 'The Cold Face of Love'. There is a dash of red almost glowing from part of the picture. Could you do a better description of it than I've just done and tell us a little bit about what's behind that one?

Sophie: Yeah, absolutely. It is kind of like a glowing red. It is almost like a glowing ember in the blackness of charred remains. So yes, I painted that one. That was after actually a specific grief involving death of a loved one as well. So I was both feeling the grief of my situation and then there was also the death of a lovely family friend. And so I painted that one because a friend had once said to me during pastoral work, I was going to visit somebody. And it was again to do with a tragic death and I felt the heavy weight of it, but I was determined I needed to be there to support these people. And I had messaged my friend who was separate from this saying, 'I'm feeling quite heavy and apprehensive about this - I am going to be giving out a lot today and it's going to be really painful. This is a big day'. And she said, 'But that is the cold face of love. You are right there in the fire with these people'. And she was just like, 'And that is true love to be able to be in this burning place with them'. And so that kind of came to mind as I was dealing with the grief of the death of a loved one and my own sense of loss. So yeah, it was very much almost, I was like, how can I draw something which looks like charcoal almost like, but it has still some burning elements in it that represents the kind of idea of this grief and brokenness, but also this glowing ember that's showing that this is why it hurts so much. This is true love.

Michael: And you've somehow, I don't know, I'm not a painter, but somehow you have captured the glowing ember. I mean it's a still picture and yet it feels like it's glowing. This is something that's come up in the podcast a number of times and people might have come to the podcast going, surely this is just going to be a depressing podcast - it's about grief! But what keeps coming out is hope, and that's the beauty of the gospel. The danger is that sometimes Christians almost deny the darkness and deny the struggle of life and go, 'No, but everything's awesome, right?' Whereas actually it's not. But that doesn't mean we need to then be morose and say everything's dark because actually there's hope and there is

light in the darkness, and that is the gospel. Jesus coming into the world. The incarnation is a light coming into the world. That's how John describes it, and the darkness has not overcome it, which is just so brilliant. And that pictures it. Right now there is a lot of darkness. One day there won't be, the night will be gone, but right now there is darkness, but there is hope and the darkness will not overcome it.

Sophie: Amen.

Michael: I think you've described that.

Sophie: I think that's why as Christians we don't need to fear the big emotions of grief because we don't have to rush ourselves through the process. We don't have to quantify and clarify everything when we're saying, 'I'm so sad, I'm so grieving, but I do trust God. Don't worry'. Sometimes we feel the need to just kind of throw that in there like we're being a bad Christian. We don't need to. It's okay just to sit. Some of the Psalms are just majority darkness in them, and there might be a bit of hope at the end or one of them doesn't. And so it's okay. But I think it's also all right to excavate into the depth of feeling because we don't have to repress it because we know as Christians that ultimately, ultimately, ultimately when we get through there is that hope, there is that resurrection life. So we don't have to worry that going into the darkness means we're going to go into an abyss that will never end. We can keep digging. And so we don't need to fear that place of darkness and grief because that is not the end. It feels like it, but we know that we just keep going into that and trusting that it isn't the end. So I think we of all people should be willing to really face our grief and our sorrows and totally just be like, 'No, I've got to face this. This is exactly what's happening now'.

Michael: And it is that that's why we need a Saviour and we need a Redeemer. Job cries out, "I know that my redeemer lives" in all of the devastation around him, but "I know my redeemer lives". And actually diving in a sense, diving into that grief and that struggle and the darkness leads us to say, 'I need a Saviour and there is a Saviour' and clinging onto him even more tightly.

Sophie: I think sometimes we just do ourselves a disservice by getting too uncomfortable and pulling away from difficult emotions. I feel like too many of us as Christians are just too afraid of those emotions. And then we end up in this kind of weird, emotionally-stunted kind of wasteland where we're too afraid to actually feel the feelings. We feel at some level we shouldn't, we should be feeling better about this or we should be *this*. And so we end up in this strange place where actually all this emotion's inside, but we're just kind of keeping a lid on it and almost pretending to ourselves. And I think that does us a great disservice because in the end it *will* come out.

Michael: Yeah, absolutely. Let's talk about a piece that's called 'When Will These Wings Become Cages', which I'm fascinated to know what's behind the title, let alone the piece of art. But to describe it, it is a swirl of colour with Bible references all over the place. I don't mean this in an offensive way, it reminds me of a school exercise book that's been doodled on throughout the year and just things piled on. There's squares in there, which is a classic doodling thing, isn't it? And circles, and it looks like some sort of road or river. There is so much going on there full of Bible and yet feeling incredibly chaotic. Okay, tell us what that is about.

Sophie: Sure. There's a lot of symbolism going on in this one, but yeah, you're right. There's a swell of colour and it feels like both life, death and confusion and a road coming through, you're right. And then what I did was I wrote all over the piece. I wrote the names of the books of the Bible, and then I just kept, because this is digitally done, I kept just piling them on top of each other. So it's kind of almost crowding out the picture. And the idea of that is, again, it's to do with church hurt and grief, and the fact

that when we are given the words of life from God, the Bible, when we understand it, when the Holy Spirit opens our hearts, it feels like we're given wings. We're suddenly seeing the world as we're supposed to for the first time. And we feel free.

There's that wonderful sense of when you start reading a Bible passage and it opens up something about life, and you're just like, 'Yes, of course'. But then many of us will have found who have been in churches for a long time, that those same words of freedom can be wielded by others to cage us. They're wielded to keep us silent. They're wielded to stop us from speaking out about bad practice that we see or from being a particular type of person, 'too much', 'too whatever'. So the same words of life suddenly are put around us to keep us confined. So often, I've been mulling on this, churches rather than unity around the gospel, which we absolutely want a lot of the time, they want uniformity. They want people to all act and be and look and respond in the same way, because it's easier that way. People are more controllable that way. It's less messy, but sadly, we're humans and we don't work like that. And also wonderfully we're humans and don't work like that. We're diverse and have diverse reactions. So yeah, this one's just about how the words of freedom and life and love from the Bible can be used and weaponised to cage us. And that is the most painful thing if you've experienced church hurt because these words that you've heard and that meant so much and are true, you feel a kind of aversion to them because you've heard them used to silence you, and it feels very painful. So that's what I found a lot. And it is the same with certain Bible songs and things that I've sung in previous places of worship. I no longer can sing them currently because it's just too painful and it brings back.

Michael: We had the exact same experience coming out, and you know that the words are true and that they're good, but they've been used in such a way that you, it's so hard to hear them, and it's so confusing going, 'I kind of know that's true, but is it because they've been used in this way or by this person?' And it's so confusing.

Sophie: I think that's at the heart of church hurt and spiritual abuse. That's why it's so damaging, because it confuses our sense of relationship with God. It becomes mixed up and entangled somehow. And so you have to start untangling what is just sinful human responses and what is truth in the sense of what God's saying to me. And it is very confusing. And when you're feeling vulnerable and in the midst of grief, it feels almost impossible to do. I found continuing to go to church, to a new church even, difficult, it felt like re-traumatising every time I went, but I knew that I needed to keep putting in and for my kids' sake to keep that consistency. I know these words are true, but I've got to try and disentangle them from the weights.

Michael: Yes. Yeah. Again, very, very similar experience. It made me understand people who deconstruct, who are going through a deconstruction of their faith because of experiences like this. And some people get very twitchy about deconstruction. I think a healthy deconstruction will lead to reconstruction. But like you say, another word for that is disentanglement. You're trying to pick out, 'Okay, what was misused and what is true?' And that just takes time. And for a while it might seem like you're kind of walking away a bit, but what you're trying to do is get back. I think that's what a lot of people are trying to do, just trying to get back to the truth. But it's become so messed up that it's going to take a lot of time. And just having some patience with people who are going through that. And again, as you should with anybody suffering grief, just sit with them, hear them out.

Sophie: Yes. People need such gentleness, they need such gentleness in these moments. And I think people can often be a little twitchy. I often find that I really vibe with a lot of deconstructionists because I find that we're asking the same questions. Now, we might end up at different conclusions ultimately, which is why some people deconstruct the whole way, and some people just unentangle and then find their way by grace. But I appreciate and understand the questions they're asking and why they're asking

them, having seen what they've seen. So yeah, it's just I'd rather people were honest and asked the questions.

Michael: Yeah, absolutely. And Jesus seemed happy with people asking questions as well. You mentioned one of the things of how the words of the Bible are misused to cage us is that they can stop people speaking. And I think that's a particular thing that's used against women in a lot of my experience and your experience too. And one of your pieces is called '[I Am Speaking](#)'. I don't know any more of the story behind it than that, but I presume it's to do with that kind of thing. Is that right?

Sophie: Yeah, yeah. Again, this one kind of sprung out, almost unbidden. I had a lot of emotion built up and I was in that place that most creatives will recognise where you just suddenly have an absolute compulsion, 'Something needs to come out now!' You just get to that place where you're like, 'Oh, it's ready. Something has to come out on page or in other ways'. So I just started playing around adding colour. And yeah, this piece came out and it kind of means a few things really. Some of it, it reminded me of the section in Isaiah, which is about when he's listening for God's voice, and the storm passes and then the still small voice happens, and so the storm is swirling, but God actually comes in this whisper. And so some of that imagery was feeding into this piece, but also just my own sense of wanting to be heard, feeling like there had been very deliberate attempts to silence me. And I felt just very compelled to keep speaking. I felt like that was something I needed to keep doing. The amount of messages I received from people when I share my artwork, sharing with me their own stories of church hurt, loss, and grief made me realise that there is need for people to hold space online for people going through this. And it is important that even though it makes me feel kind of vulnerable, that I'm actually going to share that. I just think it's for people to feel free that you can speak, this is your story, and you don't have to keep quiet. You don't have to share it with anybody either, but it is still your story and people cannot silence or delegitimise something that has happened to you. So you are free to speak it out and you are free to share it in however you want to and to feel free to do so. Yeah, I've talked about this a lot with my therapist as well, just about feeling free to speak out the things that happen. Yes.

Michael: Well, let's have a bit more of your spoken word. You've got something you wanted to share. I don't know any more about it than that.

Sophie: This is a piece I wrote, which is 'Old Fears, New Spaces'. This is about having left one church and trying to join another.

I am a woman
of untold wounds,
I cannot speak
or move too soon,

for fear that
the bleeding
will rush out unbidden,
cause an unwanted scene,
and uncover the hidden

scars and cuts
still pulsating with blood,
hot tears in my eyes

just waiting to flood,
in shameful fecundity,
exposing the absolute state of me.

Talk of God's love
makes my chest heave with sobs,
when I compare the distance,
measure the odds,
of the bride EVER
showing that fulness of grace.

Recalling each time
I was slapped in the face
by people I trusted
to stand by my side
and each time it happened
a part of me died

So now I sit tight
in this new family of strangers
try keep it light
while I'm scanning for dangers.

Withdrawn in solitude
from the slinging of mud
As I look at the one
come by water and blood

Who testifies truth
who is gentle and lowly.
Tenderly bringing
the ones who are slowly
emerging from pain
that was caused by his bride.

His wounds are still weeping
from hands, feet and side.
And his blood covers my blood.
My trauma and pain,
As I beg and I plead
God, please never again.

Don't let them hurt me
and these last fragments
of faith.
I feel so precarious,
so deeply unsafe.

And I take my seat,

receive the bread
and the wine.
See my scars, face my fears.
Whisper,
“maybe this time”

Michael: Thank you. That was beautiful and so honest and I can relate to much of that. And as you're speaking it remind me of another piece that I had wanted to speak to you about, which is, it's a very bold piece. It has PTSD written across it, splashes of blood, yellows, blacks, greens, and the T of the PTSD is a crucifix and it's called 'A Parting Gift', which is a very striking title! You're good at titles.

Sophie: Oh, thank you.

Michael: There is a lot going on. And from your spoken word piece just then I think can understand a lot of it. Maybe that just speaks for itself, but could you tell us a little bit more about [‘A Parting Gift’](#)?

Sophie: Yeah, I think a lot of it speaks for itself when people look at it. It's quite a provocative piece, I feel. It's not comfortable at all. It makes you feel quite deeply uncomfortable to look at it. It feels a little dangerous perhaps. But nevertheless, I think it's true. And I think it's an uncomfortable fact of what a lot of people have experienced within any kind of church hurt, church trauma, church abuse. So it is the idea that so many of us are left with post-traumatic stress disorders. We're left with very strong bodily reactions to hearing certain songs or seeing certain buildings, hearing certain people's names. And it's so difficult because again, it's that entanglement of the spiritual with it that it's not just, 'Oh, that person hurt my feelings'. It was like within the family of God, it's all wrapped up in who I believe God is and yet what has happened.

And so it's just that whole idea of Jesus being entwined in this sense of PTSD and trying to understand, but also the kind of idea that Jesus, more than anybody, also knew what it was to be completely betrayed and left and misunderstood and physically hurt. So it's both those things, both. It is both that sense of discomfort thinking, how can the Bride of Christ, how can the Church, how can we do this to each other? But also, Jesus experienced this too. So of course He understands too. And it's a huge swirl of colour and chaos because that's literally what it feels like. It's very hard to intellectualise anything when you're in it. It's just a massive emotion. So yeah, that's what that piece is about. And that just felt like a parting gift that many of us have that parting gift as we leave churches or worship spaces. It's like what we're left with to mull over.

Michael: Yes, I'm working through John at the moment for camp in the summer, and "He came to that which was His own. His own did not receive Him" and then the abandonment at Gethsemane. And so yeah, Jesus understanding it that there's, again, there's hope that there's one who fully understands it, but not only one who sympathises with us and our struggles and our weaknesses, but actually has gone through it and shows that there's something the other side as well.

Sophie: Yeah. So it is both those things in the picture, it's both the ugliness of trauma being done in Jesus' name, but also the fact that Jesus also had this done to Him. So who knows?

Michael: Yes. The irony of that. Wow. Let's finish on a brighter piece. Let me just find it. You said it came in a lighter space, but it still, you're working through what went wrong? I don't know if it has a title or is the title just the words that's on it, which we should probably describe.

Sophie: Oh, the title is just the words.

Michael: Okay. So it says '[Generous Liberty](#)', but you haven't fitted that onto one line or even two lines. You fitted onto four lines. So Gen/Erous/Libert/Ty. There's bright greens and purple. Green seems to come up in each of your, pretty much all of your pictures, there's a dash of green. Is that coincidence or is there something? I'm intrigued by that.

Sophie: I mean, I think I'm just very drawn to certain colours and I think it's probably, I feel like I go through phases or I think saying eras makes me sound a little pretentious. I'm in my blue era right now like Picasso, but I think sometimes I just go through phases where I'm just really drawn to certain colours, which I don't know. They just seem to speak to me and be the right colour to express this particular emotion. Yeah.

Michael: Okay. Well this is very green with some blue and some purple or pink.

Sophie: Very bright.

Michael: Very bright. Okay. Yeah, explain it please.

Sophie: So again, I've done this one and it is quite a lighthearted style. It's a lot lighter than the others. Again, it is kind of, I think borrowing from the kind of David Shrigley style in the way I've divided the words up on the page. I quite like that. I quite like the lightness of it. It doesn't feel too serious, and yet it feels it's got a very bold message. So as I've been mulling over that, I think so much what we need in the church and as Christians to each other is generous liberty. Just those words have just been in my mind for a while. We see so much on the internet, so much polarisation of these kind of issues. And so many of them are just secondary. They just don't matter. And in my own experience, I've been judged or criticised for things that are just a matter of preference. They're really not gospel issues. So I think we just need to be able to understand what is preference, what can we just be generous to each other with and be like, 'Oh, well I'm not raising my kids exactly like that, but that's okay because you have your specific kids with their needs. I'm sure you know what you are doing'. And we're all just kind of in this together as parents, we're all praying like mad and just hoping for the best. In a lot of ways. There's no guaranteed outcomes. You can't just go, 'Well do X, Y, Z and this will happen'. But again, I think people can get very hung up on, 'You have to raise your children this way', or 'Church has to be this way'. 'You have to do these certain things' or 'It has to be this style', or 'You have to look like this to be taken seriously as a Christian', 'You have to look a particular way'. And just so much of it is just nonsense. And we need to just be able to be like, 'No, it doesn't matter'. Isn't that the beauty of the diversity of the church, that we can be united around the things that really matter around the gospel and the centrality of that, but so much of this other stuff, let it go. So yeah, I think so many conflicts could be avoided if we could just be generous and be like, 'Well, I wouldn't choose that. I don't really like that, but in the spirit of Christian liberty, go for it because you've prayed about it and that's the way you are going to be doing that in your household'. And it's not a moral issue or anything like that. It's just a different perspective on a secondary issue.

Michael: So that was a huge thing for me coming out of the particular church network that I did, which yes had so much, I mean, there was so much talk of grace and yet so much uniformity demanded. And I've found myself coming out of that just being so much more open to other people's ways of doing things and going, God probably hasn't made a mistake in letting His church be so diverse and different. And it's not denying truth and like you say, morality that the Bible tells us there are things that are right or wrong. But there are so many things that 'whatever'.

Sophie: Totally, and so much of it is just wrapped up in our kind of Western white way of viewing things. I was talking to a friend who lives in a different part of the world, and she was saying that just none of these questions come up for us because it's just a completely different culture. It doesn't really matter to the people we are living around. And it's a bit weird to come back to the UK and everyone's having a bit of a fuss about something or other. And she was like, no one's talking about that in this part of the world. She was like, I think that's just a Western thing. So it's interesting how much we can get so hung up on our culture and claim it to be biblical when it's actually just preference. And it's important to, again, be generous with each other on that.

Michael: Yeah. Well, thank you so much, Sophie. Where can people find what you do?

Sophie: Well, my website is www.perishandfade.com. That is my Instagram handle as well. [@perishandfade](https://www.instagram.com/perishandfade). That's based on the 1 Peter verse: "I'm talking about our inheritance that will never spoil, perish or fade". And that's my eternal inheritance. But obviously my artwork, it totally will, if you leave it out in the rain, it's gone in a couple of days, a sorry mess. But the things that matter, that's not going anywhere. So @PerishandFade is Instagram. So yeah, you can find me and my artwork there.

Michael: Brilliant. Well, thank you again and well, I'm sure I'll speak to you soon and hope everybody's enjoyed this episode of the podcast. We're going to play out with a song of mine called 'Goodnight to the Old Year'. And I think this particularly fits with what I've been chatting with Sophie about, especially where she said earlier on that because of the hope, we can keep digging and we can keep digging into the darkness, into the struggle, into the grief, because we know that it is not the end. I think she said, we don't need to fear that place of darkness and grief because that is not the end. And that's what this particular song is about. This is called 'Goodnight to the Old Year'.