

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Jody Moore

I'm Jody Moore and this is *Better Than Happy* episode 274: Transformations of Faith with Thomas McConkie.

Welcome to *Better Than Happy*. I'm your host, Jody Moore. I'm a mother to four children. I'm a huge Taylor Swift fan, and I'm a Master Certified Life Coach. I'm here to teach you how to manage your brain and manage your emotions so that you can create a life that's even better than happy. Are you ready? Let's go.

Hey there everyone, welcome to the podcast. Thanks for joining me today. I am excited to share with you this conversation I had with Thomas McConkie recently.

Thomas McConkie is a descendant of the Bruce R. McConkie line as well as a grandson of Joseph B. Wirthlin. And for those of you that aren't members of my church, those are just prominent leaders in our church. He also has a really interesting story and went on his own journey of spirituality, which included him leaving the church for a pretty long time. You can hear all about that in episode 221 which was the first time he came on the podcast here. And people loved hearing his perspective. It was so helpful to so many people. So you might want to check that out.

But today he's here to talk to us about a course that he created that is meant to guide in our development, especially around our spirituality. And I want to say that this is a course that I have been going through myself. I haven't gotten through the whole thing yet, I'm only about halfway through. But I'm finding it to be really powerful to hear Thomas's knowledge first of all of Mormon Doctrine and the scriptures combined with things that he's learned through the world of meditation, and practices, and stillness.

And the course includes some guided meditations, some discussions that he has around certain topics. And I just can't say enough good things about it. So Thomas is here to answer my questions. As I went through the

course I had certain things that I jotted down as just sort of things I wanted to explore and talk through with him.

So you're going to hear some of my ideas and thoughts about our own spiritual development, as well as Thomas's. And I hope that you will just use it as a starting point to explore your own spiritual development. That's really the goal here. It's not, I know both for Thomas or myself to tell you what you should believe, but rather to encourage you to go on a journey of discovering it yourself. So in this episode, Thomas will tell you how to get your hands on this course if you want to go through it with me. Alright, here we go my conversation with Thomas McConkie.

Like I said, you were on the podcast before, episode 221 where you tell your whole story. So we won't spend time on that. But short introduction, tell people who you are.

Thomas McConkie: Who am I? I'm still figuring that out as I jump...

Jody Moore: That is quite a question, right?

Thomas McConkie: I'm a guy who feels really engaged in what I believe is a really good cause. I moved back to Salt Lake City where I was born and raised, after many years away. And I have been really touched by how the gospel, a life in the gospel feels like it continues to deepen and evolve for me. And it was – for those of you – well, maybe you haven't heard episode 221 or know nothing about me. But mine was kind of a circuitous path. It took me all around the world and through different faith traditions.

And I'm really struck, coming back to Salt Lake now, I feel just so given to my tradition and my community, and just the opportunities we have to be alive and what it means to grow as a human being. And I see people around me, I think in an emotional state that was akin to where I was when I first left the place. In other words, I look around me and I see people

asking really deep questions about – it's as if they're saying, "I know there's something here but I don't quite know how to access it. I don't know how to really live into it for myself in a way that feels true and authentic."

So that's been a burning question for me the last 10 years, working at that.

Jody Moore: So you created this course, Transformations of Faith that we're going to talk a little bit about today. And I'm excited to talk to you about it. I've been able to go through I'd say about half of it at this point.

Thomas McConkie: That's a lot, because it's a big course, but I'm impressed. I wasn't expecting that level of preparation.

Jody Moore: Yes, it's been great. Yeah, and I've been just jotting notes knowing I was going to get to talk to you.

Thomas McConkie: Well, cool, yeah.

Jody Moore: I'm kind of curious about this, and I want to explore that.

Thomas McConkie: Cool. Wonderful.

Jody Moore: And so I thought we could have a discussion. But first maybe if you wouldn't mind just – I was curious about what it is that prompted you to create this course and who you created it for. It sounds like it's really for an LDS population.

Thomas McConkie: Well, both, so yeah, I'll say the Faith Matters Foundation approached me. And they said, "Hey, we love your approach to human development, and mindfulness, and all these different practices you're bringing in. How about doing a full length course on it?" So they invited me to do it. And then I've been working, I've been doing kind of professor trainings at BYU for the last three years. And the Head of the Faculty Center there, she said, "You know, Thomas, I love that you're taking care of," I don't know if she said, "Lost sheep of the fold."

But she's like, "I wonder what it'd be like to do something that's just more like a more general message, not for distressed members of the church, but for just every member of the church, and any human being who is interested in spiritual growth." So it was between the invitation from Faith Matters and a kind of challenge from a friend at BYU. And I thought I'm going to do this thing and see what we come up with.

Jody Moore: That's great. I love it. So like I said I have a bunch of questions here I wanted to ask you, but feel free to – hopefully we'll just go wherever we feel guided in this conversation. The first question I wanted to ask you. Let me give you a little background. So I've been thinking about this word 'spirituality' in general. I recently read Rob Bell, I don't know if you know Rob Bell. He just came out with a book called Everything is Spiritual, that's great.

But I last summer was – I got to be a leader up at our Stake's Girls' Camp. So we had testimony meeting as we do at girls' camp and I happened to be with the 12 and 13-year-old girls, very young. And that testimony meeting, as you can imagine is really more I feel like an opportunity where the girls got really vulnerable. So they start sharing stories of just emotional experiences they've had in life, like the time when they were really scared or overwhelmed and maybe somebody helped them.

And it's not so much a testimony yet of Christ or even of God, although there is that. And somebody made a comment later, one of the other leaders like, "These girls don't really know yet what a testimony is." But I thought maybe not, but also I think that – and I'd love to hear your thoughts. But sometimes I wonder if the pathway to spirituality isn't vulnerability and that just allowing ourselves to experience emotion, and to be real with one another, and connect with another isn't sometimes what leads us to God, or to whatever testimony we're developing. And I was just curious your thoughts.

Thomas McConkie: Well, you've already expressed I think such a beautiful piece of wisdom there. Certainly in my experience when I feel like I know the answers and I feel like my life's put together and it's on track, whatever that means, it kind of creates this illusion like I'm doing it. And pull myself up by the bootstraps and set my mind to something and get it done. And then when life disappoints me, when it breaks me down, when it shatters me, or when I become vulnerable, all of a sudden I'm open to something, like a mystery that's much bigger than me.

And I realize just how reliant I am upon Spirit, upon God, upon Christ. So I feel very in tune with what you're saying, I feel it resonates for me a lot. We talk about if there is an opposite of vulnerability, it's somewhere in the direction of pride, I don't need any help.

And then the vulnerability, when we break open, like at girls' camp, I mean if girls are in touch with that vulnerability, I wasn't there for that conversation you had with the other leader. But I would maybe take a little exception and say, "Is that not how Christ gets in? Isn't a foot in the door just as good as any other part of us developing our testimony?" It's sacred.

Jody Moore: Yeah. And not that she was necessarily trying to be critical. But we – Christ is the center of our church and the center of the plan of salvation. But I just sometimes worry, or not worry, I just wonder if this just allowing ourselves to be human. And opening up to our humanness even with all of the weakness, and the fear, and the worry, isn't, like you said, the way – I just think there's a strong association for me anyway and in many people I seem to observe between vulnerability.

I was talking to some other coaches this morning too who I'm working with and we were kind of talking about when these people come to us on coaching calls. And they're opening up to us, and they're being vulnerable, and they're sharing personal things that they don't just tell everyone, that it is a sacred experience. And that we have a certain obligation to hold space

for the sacredness of that. I don't know. I think that's kind of a cool thing to think about.

Thomas McConkie: I love it, yeah. No, I'm onboard.

Jody Moore: One of the things you said in this course Transformations of Faith, and we're going to let everybody know at the end where they can go to purchase it if they want to, which I highly recommend. I really enjoyed absorbing it. But I was laughing and loved it when you called Joseph Smith a mystic. And I wanted to know, what does that mean to you? What is a mystic? And why would you describe Joseph Smith as a mystic?

Thomas McConkie: Well, it's funny to me too because I come from the McConkie family. And Bruce R. McConkie is my grandfather's brother, but it's all the McConkie culture. And I think he wrote in one of his books that mysticism is one of the great evils of our time spiritually. So I kind of laughed at it. Part of me is being a little bit rebellious when I say that. But let's define terms. I don't think I'm on that different a page than an elder McConkie.

And to me a mystic, we're all mystics. To me a mystic is one who seeks to have a direct experience with the Divine. And are we not all that by definition of Latter Day Saints? So I think if we're going to — we need to overhaul and redefine the term. To me mysticism is just that. There are some far out there definitions of mysticism. But I'm just appealing to the simplicity of we don't want to just hear stories about God and about Christ. We want to come into direct relationship with them.

And the path of a mystic is the path of one who seeks that direct contact, that direct experience every moment of every day. That's it to me.

Jody Moore: And that's what I feel like you're trying to help us do through this course, is to guide us to have our own spiritual experience. I'll tell you that for me as a person who I love to consume books, and podcasts, and courses. I love to learn. And I do have useful insight as I'm listening. But to

actually quiet all of that and get still and go internal to access my own wisdom or hear answers from God or what have you, it's a lot more uncomfortable. It's a lot more challenging. And I don't know if that's because I'm not practiced at it.

I mean you gave the example too of Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon having the experience where I'm probably going to mess it up. He makes the comment, "Sidney Rigdon is not used to this." Maybe you can share it better.

Thomas McConkie: Right. Well, I'm glad you bring that story up, I think. I mean we have such a rich tradition, so many stories, so much law. And I think it's really significant, this is a story that maybe some have heard but it's not necessarily emphasized and become follow me.

But the short version is when Joseph and Sidney were receiving a revelation about the degrees of glory, of heaven. People in the room who didn't get the direct revelation, but they felt a presence in the room, they felt the power. They said Sidney Rigdon was slumped over in his chair, limp like a rag and pale. He was just withering away from the intensity of spiritual presence. And Joseph Smith was just beaming and poised. And he made this very simple remark like, "Sidney's not used to it as I am." And I'm really inspired by that. I really believe, my sense is some people — I think a lot of people would agree with this probably.

But I think Joseph Smith had a really special gift. He had a way of just being in communion with God. But for the rest of us, like an athlete we can train, and we can practice, and we can learn how to take on more of divine life in our lives. And I've intended to do that in my life. And I think I've made a little improvement at it. And the little improvement is a huge amount of joy. Just improve a little bit from what we are, is just a profound new way to be human and to grow spiritually. So I think we can all do it.

Jody Moore: Yeah. And I think if I understand correctly that the way we practice that is through shutting off all of the outside sounds and stimulus momentarily. And you give us in this course some guided meditations which I find to be helpful. But is that what you mean by practicing it?

Thomas McConkie: Well, this is where I'm glad you ask because we've got to do a full stop here. There's a presumption in me putting out a course, even if I was hired by Faith Matters, there is a presumption in saying, "Here's how to grow spiritually." I mean I don't know how to grow spiritually. The way we grow spiritually is the way we grow spiritually. And we all have a really unique relationship with God and we have, I believe, intuitions about how we're called to grow.

All I'm doing in the course is saying, "Yo, these practices have been amazing for me. I love them." And as I've gotten the invitation to share them more and more, I think they help a lot of other people too. I don't have any illusion that this is the future for everybody. I just want to cast a net out and say, "If you feel called to this, if you feel called to interior silence, if you feel called to deeper spiritual solitude. And you want to really mine that cave for its hidden treasures then do it. And there are other people doing it with you." It's a little bit something like that.

Jody Moore: Yeah. I like that. And what I like about it too is it not only is something that I feel called to for my own spiritual progression, but even just to access my own creativity, and wisdom, and ideas. I feel sort of ready to progress beyond, this is what I learned from someone else, let me teach it to you. At least add to that, here's what I think, and that requires stillness.

Thomas McConkie: Totally. I mean one of the most influential figures of my life, his name is John Kesler and I mention him in the course. And I share a lot of what he's passed on to me. He's a member of the church that I've always looked up to. And when he took me under his wing and taught me – he used to call it back in the early days, he called it Mormon meditation. And people were like, "Mormon meditation." And after it raised

some eyebrows he's like, "No, let's rename it. I'm not trying to be controversial."

Jody Moore: It sounds like an oxymoron.

Thomas McConkie: Yeah, totally. He taught me meditation but very deeply informed by our tradition. And the way he explained it was essentially we are receiving revelation and inspiration constantly. But if we're not quiet enough to tune into the signal through the noise we'll miss it. And God won't punish us for it. God won't hold back blessings from us. It's just a missed opportunity.

Another metaphor, we want to just raise our sails, we're out on the open sea, the wind is blowing, all you have to do is raise your sails and boom, the energy's there, the power's there, the going home is just all there. But we have to raise our sails, or in a meditative sense, a prayerful sense, we have to be available to it. And for me to learn how to really get still and quiet, there's no question, it's grown my capacity to be more receptive to prompting.

Jody Moore: I love that. I love when you – it might have been in one of the discussions you had, The Mystic and the Philosopher series, so there are for each section of this course you have discussions along the way. Is it Adam?

Thomas McConkie: Adam Miller, yeah.

Jody Moore: Adam Miller. And I found those to be really fun and fascinating to listen to.

Thomas McConkie: Cool.

Jody Moore: But I think it was in one of those conversations that you talked about prayer. When we pray we're typically talking to God and we're

maybe giving gratitude or asking for things. But why can't there be parts of prayer where we're just receptive and listening and not talking?

Thomas McConkie: Yeah, totally. It reminds me.

Jody Moore: Oh.

Thomas McConkie: Yeah, totally. I mean it reminds me, my wife and I, we live in a neighborhood where there are little restaurants around, and little storefronts, shops, it's a cute little neighborhood. And my wife is so good, almost from a half mile way she's like, "They're on a date." She can pick out of a crowd of a 1,000 people like, "They've been on a first date." And I look over there; I'm like, "You're right, they're on a first date." But the reason I bring that up. Where am I going with this?

What I'm saying is there's a quality of attention where those people are so present to each other, because it's so new and it's so exciting. And the world is full of possibilities. To me, meditation, we're still praying, we're coming into a relationship with God and we're bringing the energy of a first date, attention is undivided, my cell phone is off. Any word you make, any gesture, any whisper of anything, I'm right here, because it's the most important thing in the world. I love that experience. I love that experience.

Jody Moore: That's me, yeah. That's cool. That's a cool way to think about it. You talked about this concept of the intelligence of the heart. I wrote this down. I loved it when you said, "The mind dissects, and categorizes, and analyzes. And the heart unifies, and embraces, and resonates with." And a lot of the work I do is focused on the mind as being the main driver of our emotions. But lately I've been really kind of playing with this idea that we don't have to go through the mind. It doesn't have to go through these are the thoughts I'm thinking that are creating this situation.

It could be a more intuitive navigating towards what is the experience I'm creating, or what do I want? I just wonder if you could speak a little bit more to that idea of the intelligence of the heart?

Better Than Happy with Jody Moore

Thomas McConkie: Totally. Well, to pick up what you just offered. To me the mind is this incredible instrument. And when it's working at its best, based on correct teachings, and eternal truths, and principles, those ideas, those beliefs can hone our perception. They can actually put us in a state of readiness to feel something or experience something that maybe we wouldn't have been open to had we not had those correct beliefs or principles. You know what I mean?

So the mind, it can condition us to be even more heartful, even more open to the experience of our life. So I look at the mind and the heart as working in tandem. And if the mind is doing it's job, which you really specialize in, I believe it brings us into this vast, let me say this mystical territory where this idea of being one with Christ and one as a body of Christ, it stops feeling like an idea. And I just feel my oneness with God's creation, the wind blows across the planes and it's like my own breath.

And I see somebody on my street corner who's hungry, and it's shattering to me, it's like it's my own son. And we drop into this place that the mind helped prepare for us. And we live from a place of hopefully a lot of deep embracing compassion.

Jody Moore: Yeah, that's pretty cool. And I think of our emotions as that navigation system that's steering us away from pain towards pleasure. Although I think sharpening that instrument like you're saying and allowing it to guide us in a useful way is sort of my hope with the work I'm doing. But I love this idea that once — and I don't know about you, but I find I can only get to that state in moments. But once we sharpen that instrument and we become living in that place then we can rely on our emotions to steer us. We don't have to go and find all the thoughts and analyze everything.

Thomas McConkie: Totally. I mean I've really enjoyed working in the field of developmental psychology over the last 10 years and the admiral people I've worked with. There's no question they have this kind of intuition that's immediate, just spontaneously in the moment they know how to be. They

know how to comfort somebody. They know how to challenge somebody if somebody's getting out of line. And you can tell it didn't go through their brain. You can tell they didn't think it out, they just knew how to show up spontaneously and serve us.

So yeah, I think what you're saying is there's something going on there.

Jody Moore: I wanted to ask you your thoughts about the principle of fasting. And one reason is because just last Sunday it was a fast Sunday and I was listening to some of this course. And I went through one of the guided meditations and I noticed that being in a fasted state where I was a little bit more hyper aware of my body you might say that it felt like a little bit different experience. So I don't know. This is all just my own liking to imagine what might be going on.

But do you think the purpose of fasting is to allow us possibly to reconnect in our bodies in a way that opens us up to the spirit? I mean it's a principle of sacrifice as well.

Thomas McConkie: Yeah. No, I love what you're saying. For sure I have the same experience when I pray, and meditate, study scriptures, whatever, or when I'm just alive to the sensation of my body in a new way. And therefore I'm more open to different kinds of knowing, different kinds of intelligence for sure. So there's something about fasting, it hones our sensitive instruments.

Jody Moore: Yeah. So the other question I had is just the state of the world right now, a pandemic, and fires, and political regression it feels like in terms of our political – our maturity, if you will. And I was just thinking I have days when I just think this is crazy. And I've noticed myself wanting to hurry and get through this part, and get to whatever is going to be the next thing where we feel some progression or resolution in some areas. And I was thinking what does someone like Thomas McConkie think about all of this? And how do you keep yourself feeling how you want to feel?

Thomas McConkie: Totally. But yeah, I'm glad you bring this up. I live in Salt Lake City currently where we have heavy inversion, we have smoky, hazy days because of all the people here and because of the way the mountains traps the air. All of you listening probably have the experience of being in a really polluted place, it's like you're choking, you can hardly breathe.

And then at the other end of the spectrum you think about the Amazon rainforest that sometimes has been called the lungs of the planet Earth. There's this purification process where those trees that benevolently we can say, they're just taking in all of that carbon dioxide and just churning out oxygen into our world and helping us breathe easier.

That's a really concrete metaphor, but to me, in answer to your question there is something subtle going on that's maybe even more significant than the trees cleaning up the air. And it's that in the human world there are real toxins in the emotional world, on the emotional plane.

When all you see on the news is vitriol, and hatred, and blame, and so on. And when you see people losing their jobs and they can't make rent the next month due to complications from the pandemic. So there's human suffering and despair. We're breathing in that despair every moment. And we're breathing in that animosity, it's in our environment. We don't see it like we see smoke in the valley here but I feel it.

And when our hearts start to open up we get sensitive to it. And when we get sensitive to it we have, I think, an opportunity of, you could say as Christians, as disciples, we can breathe that into our hearts and we can breathe something else out that's pure. We can breathe out hope, and we can breathe out charity, and we can breathe out trust. And that's the environment we live in. We've all had experiences where powerful spiritual people in our lives, they just radiate a kind of peace and you can't help but feel a peace when you're around them.

To me the body of saints, we're meant to do that. So, on the hardest of days I hope that I'm breathing out a little bit more of that blessing that I'm breathing in. And I don't know what else I can do. But it feels so real to me.

Jody Moore: Yeah. That's reminding me of a story I heard, author Elizabeth Gilbert share recently about when everything first started shutting down at the beginning of when the pandemic sort of hit us here in the United States. And she is a mystic.

Thomas McConkie: Gilbert's totally a mystic.

Jody Moore: Seeks spirituality in a lot of ways, and not a member of the LDS church, but a very spiritual person. And anyway she described having this experience where she was thinking, gosh, everything's shutting down. I'm not going to be able to travel. I'm going to be at home and what's going to happen to our country and things, and feeling this fear overcome her. And then she had this thought, she said, "I have been engaged in spiritual practice for 20 years and now the practice is over. And it's time to really put it to work."

Thomas McConkie: Time for the performance.

Jody Moore: Yes, it's time to even practice. And it really resonated for me because having been raised in the church, I suddenly had these visions of walking into state conference with everybody else and we're all in our nice church clothes. And we're going through all the motions and we're doing all the things. And we all have trials in our life, but I certainly haven't lived through anything as significant as this in terms of global trial. And I had that thought, yeah, I've been practicing long enough and now it's time to take all the things I've learned and all the virtual practices that I have now and use them.

Thomas McConkie: Yeah, I love it, beautiful. And we're all the better for it. And we don't want anyone of us to...

Jody Moore: I have this other experience too that I'll just share which is a few nights ago there were a bunch of women that I'm friends with who had had birthdays. And we kind of decided let's just a small group of us get together in someone's backyard where it's safe and just visit and celebrate for a moment. And we haven't really done that in a long time. And so I found myself wanting to chat with these women and just connecting in that way. But I realized mostly what I did was complain. Mostly I complained about how hard it is to have my kids all in Zoom school.

And I got home and I felt like I had this hangover and I realized because all I did was — I mean we laughed too. But you can complain and laugh at the same time. And I just thought, I think there is a time for venting and everything. But to your point, I want to breathe out something more positive. I don't want to be contributing more of that smog. We all have plenty to complain about. It requires being more conscious, it's harder to do. But I want to bring something positive and lighter to the environment, I guess, next.

Thomas McConkie: Totally. Yeah, I love it, me too, it's a lifelong practice. I have my moments.

Jody Moore: Good, I'm glad I'm not the only one.

Thomas McConkie: All I can do is complain. Yeah.

Jody Moore: Alright, well, first of all, where can people go to get this course? And actually before you tell us that, I do just want to say that one of the things I love is that you've made it very convenient too. So you have a podcast feed that you subscribe to when you get this course. And so I have been listening to it on my walks and anyway it's just great. There is a lot, like you said, there are over six sections, but none of them are real long. So I like the bite size, some of them are five minutes. And it's heavy enough content that I need it bite sized like that, but anyway, I just love it.

Thomas McConkie: Cool. No, that's what it's meant to be. Totally, cool, I'm so happy.

Jody Moore: You've done such a great job. So where can people go to find it?

Thomas McConkie: So the landing page for the course is transformationsoffaith.org, same as the title of course.

Jody Moore: Right. And we'll link to that in the show notes. But anything else you want to tell people about this?

Thomas McConkie: Well yeah, I'd say that this – I've been working on this course with Faith Matters and with my organization Lower Lights, all of 2020. It's resource intensive to put out a 13 hour online course. And the price reflects that, the full price of the course is right on 150 bucks. But we want to get a lot of people on it talking about it and as it launches, so we've reduced the price to \$98.

And on top of that there is financial aid, so anybody who sees the course and they say, "I really want to do this and \$98 is too much money given my expenses." There are financial aid kind of options, so that really the spirit is to share it with everybody. So if you're hearing this and you feel called to mystic and this kind of learning, there is a way for you to do it and we just want to share it with everybody, that's the bottom line.

Jody Moore: Okay great, that's fantastic. Alright, well, I so appreciate you coming on Thomas, and sharing what you have to this course. And I look forward to going through the rest of it here.

Thomas McConkie: Thanks for having me back, Jody, I really appreciate it.

Who is your life coach? If you don't have one I would be so honored to be your coach. I created a virtual coaching program called Be Bold that I want to invite you to join me in. We can address challenges, we can work on goals, and we can do it in so many different ways.

We have group coaching, individual private coaching, and online chats along with hundreds of hours of courses and content that I've created just for you. When you're ready to really take what you're learning on the podcast to the 10x level, then come check out Be Bold at JodyMoore.com/membership.