

## 396: Supporting your LGBTQ+ Friends While Keeping Your Faith



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Jody Moore

[Better Than Happy](#) with Jody Moore

## 396: Supporting your LGBTQ+ Friends While Keeping Your Faith

I'm Jody Moore and this is *Better Than Happy*, episode 396, Supporting your LGBTQ+ Friends While Keeping Your Faith.

Did you know that you can live a life that's even better than happy? My name is Jody Moore. I'm a master-certified life coach and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. And if you're willing to go with me I can show you how. Let's go.

Hey everybody, in Be Bold occasionally I bring in a guest who is an expert in a particular area or topic and I co-teach a workshop with that guest. And recently we had the privilege of having TJ Thomas come and teach a workshop on this topic of being a member of a conservative Christian faith. TJ happens to be LDS like myself but this will be really relevant to any Christian religion I would say or just conservative value system in general.

And he did such an amazing job, the members loved it so much they kept writing in to my team and I saying, "I really want to share that workshop with my friends and family." And normally we don't release member protected content outside the membership but the demand was so high, the content was so powerful. I know there's such a huge need for it that we decided, let's put it on the podcast, let's let anyone who wants to hear this information have it because TJ did such an amazing job.

TJ is a licensed therapist who specializes in sexuality and spirituality. He's also a speaker and he identifies as a member of the LDS church and as an LGBTQ+ individual. So he has not only the professional experience but the personal experience as well. And I can't wait for you to hear this powerful workshop. Now, before we dive into it there's so many things coming up that I want to tell you about because I know there are things that are going to be relevant to different populations of you all that listen to this podcast.

So I'll just say this is not good marketing. You're not supposed to give lots of options. You're just supposed to give one call to action but I'm just ignoring all that because I know that again there are a lot of different groups that listen to this podcast and you're not going to want to miss out

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on these things. So let me begin by talking to my fellow Life Coach School coaches. If you are a certified coach I have an advanced certification program that is designed to give you additional tools and feedback on your coaching and also to give you experience coaching.

I give you 10 clients to coach every week for four months because in order to get better coaching, in order to build your confidence and your competency as a coach you need to coach more. So there's a lot more details to that program that I'll just let you go and check out yourself at [jodymoore.com/coach](http://jodymoore.com/coach). But we will be opening the doors to this program the first week of March and it sells out in minutes. So you're going to want to head over to that web page right now and check it out and decide if it's going to be for you and grab a seat because it's coming right up and that is a lot of fun.

The second thing I'm really excited to tell everyone about is a Relief Society activity that we created that is really good if I do say so myself. The Relief Society activity is everything that you need to gather the sisters in your ward or whatever group of people you want to do this activity with and it's called How to Feel Better. So it gives the guidance and tools and practical application to help people understand how to feel better. And I'll just say that I created this because I get asked to speak to different populations within the church, especially Relief Societies all the time.

And I try to say yes as much as I can, if it's close to my home and it fits in my schedule. But the truth is a lot of you live really far from me and my schedule doesn't always allow for it. So we created this activity to really get the word out to everyone. It's got really detailed facilitator notes. So a facilitator can just follow along step-by-step. It doesn't matter if you don't know the content or the model or you don't have to be a coach or anything like that. I walk you through exactly what to do and there are videos that go with it.

So all you have to do is press play and I'm going to teach and then you're going to stop it and you and the sisters in your ward are going to do a little

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activity on the worksheets that we give you. And then you'll press play again and it will just walk you through it step by step. And the price for this Relief Society activity is free. So all you have to do to get it is go to [jodymoore.com/activity](http://jodymoore.com/activity). And I hope that you will take advantage of this. I hope you will help me spread the word about how to help everyone feel better.

And the final thing I want to tell you about is Wellness Week. Wellness Week is a five day coaching intensive where you'll spend 90 minutes a day with me on Zoom. You can come live or we'll send you the replays each day as well but it's an opportunity for you to really experience coaching. You can get coached yourself or you can listen to coaching. And if you're thinking, I don't know if coaching's really for me, I don't know if it would help me or I think that it would but I am too shy to be coached in a group. It will help you see the power of just listening to coaching even.

And it's pretty life changing, I've got to say. I know this because people who come to these five day coaching intensives tell me how it changes the entire trajectory of their lives. And it's only \$19. And I'm also going to be opening the doors to Be Bold during that workshop. So you will learn all about Be Bold. If you want to come and work with me we'll have some special opportunities for you. If you don't, that's fine. Come to Wellness Week because this may be the last time we teach it in this way. Head to [jodymoore.com/intensive](http://jodymoore.com/intensive).

That was a lot. Let's take it away. This is again, a replay of the workshop. Special thanks to TJ Thomas for allowing us to put this on the podcast. I hope that it's helpful, please share it with your friends if so, take care.

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Jody: Hey there everybody, how are we doing today? This is a topic that I'm very excited to be able to dive into today because it's such a prevalent challenge, hi, TJ, for so many people. So today we're going to be talking about how to support your LGBTQ+ family member and keep your faith.

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And I'll just say, TJ, I'll introduce you briefly but then you say whatever I get wrong. You just correct me or fill in the gaps. TJ is a therapist who specializes in sexuality and spirituality, also a speaker.

And he also identifies as LDS and LGBTQ+. So I love that TJ, you bring both the professional perspective and personal experience. So I'm going to let you go ahead and lead. I don't want to take up your time talking. And I'm just going to be here and ask all the tough questions and try not to talk too much but I'll have thoughts I'm sure.

TJ: Absolutely. Well, thank you so much. I am super happy to be here with everyone today. So as Jody said, I'm a therapist. That's what I do for my work. And I do primarily work with the LGBTQ and LDS cross space. Not only because that's my personal experience but also as I was looking for my own therapist for this I was realizing that I couldn't really find what I was looking for. I could find a lot of people who were kind of on one side or the other. A lot of people who would want to really encourage me to stay in the church at all costs and a lot of people would encourage me to abandon the church.

And so what I try to do with my clients and what I try to find with myself is that there's no one size fits all answer for everyone. And so there's a lot of nuance in these areas. But I realized that there is a lot that we can do to better love and support LGBTQ+ people in general in the world but especially as members of any conservative religious community including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. So that's kind of what I want to talk about today is what we can do to kind of find the balance with these two things that I know can be tricky for a lot of people.

First of all I just want to thank everyone who submitted their responses to the questionnaire that we sent out. It helped me figure out where we could focus and what you guys really wanted to hear about today. Of course I won't be able to address all of it, that's not going to be possible. But I have a lot of resources that are outside of this little webinar today that if you're interested in more my business website is [tjcounseling.com](http://tjcounseling.com). Instagram is

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@tjcounseling. I have a lot of resource lists and free videos and podcasts and book recommendations and a lot of stuff if you're looking to dive in more of that kind of thing.

Jody: Yeah, I want to second what you said about thanking everyone for sending in their responses. We got a lot of responses and it's really helpful.

TJ: Yeah. It really made a big difference because I speak on this a lot. I've done a lot of firesides and podcasts and different settings. So it was really great to hear what you guys want from me today. I'm going to try to answer as much of it as I can. One of the things I found to be very interesting was that there seems to be a pretty big split which I just want to highlight really quickly that there were a lot of people that were in the camp feeling, well, I feel like I can't stand up for the Gospel or I want to protect my kids.

And there were a lot of people in the camp on the other side, which was I feel like I can't stand up for my LGBTQ loved ones while I'm at church and I want to protect my LGBTQ kids. So I just want to point that out because I'm sure you guys being in this program with each other, there's a lot that you have in common but this is one area where there's a pretty big range of experiences. And I think just highlighting that to remember that while we all have questions and concerns there's people on both sides of this issue that are struggling in both directions.

I think it's helpful for us to kind of come to this middle center place, be able to find more compassion and understanding for both sides' experiences.

Jody: And so you're not alone wherever you fall on that continuum, right?

TJ: Yes, absolutely fair concerns on both sides. So we're going to try to address both today. So a few disclaimers before I really dive in. Obviously I can't answer all the questions. That's a big one. Another one is that we can't change other people's models as we all know very well. We can only change our own model. And there were a lot of questions about so and so in my life thinks this or how do I change this viewpoint of someone else?

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We know we can't do that. My hope today is that I can just share as much information as possible because when we know better we do better.

So that we can work on our own models and how we see all of this affecting our own lives, our own families, our own circles. So I have three basic sections today before we get into – at the end we'll do a question and answer but I'm going to present to you guys three basic sections. The first one is general education about the basics of the LGBTQ+ reality. Some of the science stuff, some of the real life things that are just important to know as a foundation.

Then we'll move on to education and sharing some experiences of what it's like to be an LGBTQ+ person especially in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints or really in a lot of the world in general. There's a lot of crossover obviously. And the third area that we'll talk about is providing you guys with real concrete ideas of how you can show more love and support because I genuinely feel like everyone wants to do that but people just don't really know how. So I'm not going to just say, "Just love everyone." Because I think we all know that.

So I'm going to try to give you guys real specific steps and actions that you can take at the end.

Jody: I love it. And I'll keep an eye on the Q&A box. So if you have questions while TJ is speaking, he'll take some at the end. But if there's one that's really relevant to what you're talking about I'll share it.

TJ: Yes. And please send in your Q&As. I try to set aside as much time as I could at the end so we'll be able to dive into a lot of those hopefully. So one of the first things I would like to do is just dispel some of the myths about LGBTQ+ people or reality. So there are a few of these that we're going to just debunk some of these myths. The first one that I think is the most important is that it's a choice. It's not, never has been and that's something that both science and the church agrees on, that the church's official position is that it is not a choice and that they do recognize that.



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That's a good place to start because it helps remove some of the justification that we can sometimes feel but it's different than when you disagree with someone else is just who they are. First is that it's not a choice.

The second one that was in a lot of the questionnaire responses was concerns about it being popular. I won't speak in absolutes. I will say the vast, vast, vast majority of the time in both my personal and professional experience, this is not the case. In fact, far more often than not someone coming out as LGBTQ+ leads to more ostracization and more exclusion, not more popularity.

I have seen in a very few instances where someone has wondered if they might be LGBTQ+ and maybe they've got friends who are in the queer community at their school. So they try that hat on so to speak. But in the very few instances where I've seen that's the case they very quickly realize that that's not their real identity and they move past it very quickly. But it happens such a small percentage of the time that I don't even like to have that on my radar when someone is coming out or when someone's sharing their experience because it's almost never the case.

Jody: And I'll just interject that for me I put it in the C line, in the model that we use here. And just like anything else, let's say my daughter tells me that she's anxious. In my C line I put my daughter says she's anxious. So it doesn't really matter if she really is anxious or she's just saying it to get attention. None of that matters in the end. Just like if my child says, "I'm gay, I'm queer, I'm whatever", that goes in the C line. And I treat it as though it's true. It is true for them. And so I know that question came up, is it a C or a T? I don't know how you would answer it but I always just make it a C.

TJ: Yeah. That was one of the questions that is in this myth section, so thank you.

Jody: Okay, sorry.



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TJ: No, that was perfect. You're the expert on the model far more than I am so I love that answer. Yeah, there was a question of whether I'm LGBTQ is a thought or a circumstance. We have thoughts obviously surrounding what any identity means to us, how we express it in the world, all those things. But yes, being LGBTQ+ is a circumstance. Thinking that you're not or trying to change your thought work around being LGBTQ+ will not change that you are.

And I can promise you almost every LGBTQ+ person especially in the church has tried for years to change it and to think differently and to do whatever they could because it's a really hard thing. And a lot of us have tried to change it for a very long time unsuccessfully.

Jody: If I'm going to put homosexual in the T line then I also need to put heterosexual is also just a thought. So anyway, we could spend all day on that but we'll move on.

TJ: That's a really good analogy. And I do say that pretty often is that if you're trying to understand a queer experience the only way to understand it is through a straight experience is by trying to apply how it feels to be straight to how it would feel to be gay. Or how it feels to be cisgendered to how it would feel to be transgender.

Jody: Somebody's asking, does it say on the church website that it's not a choice?

TJ: So yes, if you go to the church's website under the individuals section, this isn't quite word for word but close. It says something along the lines of, although it is not a choice it is a complex reality for many people, something along those lines. So yeah, on the official website it states that. There are a lot of old explanations from either religious people or old psychology that is no longer accurate, no longer taught that I'll just list off a lot of them and just know that none of these things are true.

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Being LGBTQ+ is not contagious. You can't be turned gay or transgender. It's not because Satan is tempting someone to be that. It's not an addiction. It's not because they were abused or because they had some trauma. It's not because of any particular parenting style and it's not a mental disorder. So just kind of clean sweep all of those are myths and they're not true and not dive into each one too far.

The next one that came up quite a bit in the questionnaire that I want to talk about is the transgender experience. There were a lot of responses that said something along the lines of, I understand the gay experience a little bit and I'm trying to be more open minded to that but I just don't get the transgender thing. And I don't know how I can understand that better. It doesn't line up with science or my beliefs so what do I do? So a very quick brief on the transgender experience.

It actually is really backed up by science. It's easy because of this oversimplification in biology class when we were in school to say male and female is it. But if you ask endocrinologists, if you ask almost any physician who's in this field the markers that determine sex are far more complex than a simple binary. Typically when someone is born you look at the genitals of the baby, you assign sex at birth and you say male or female. But we know that there are external genitals and internal genitals. There are hormones. There are chromosomes.

And every single one of those things has multiple ways in which it can express in a more complicated way than a simple male, female binary. The way that I like to use an analogy for this is that 98% of the atoms in our universe are hydrogen and helium, 98%. But we would never say that matter is binary even though the vast, vast, vast, vast majority are one of two. And it's very similar with gender and sex that even in the scientific community they're recognizing that even if the vast majority of people exhibit many gender markers on a binary it is not a simple binary.

There is diversity of experience in many different ways, that there are 12 chromosomes actually, not just x and y that play into gender and over 30

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genes that govern sex. So it's not quite as simple as we may have thought it was in biology classes.

Jody: That's interesting, yeah.

TJ: The other myths that it's not natural. This is also not true. Homosexual and transgender experiences have been observed in over 1,000 species of animals. So this is something that happens frequently in nature. It's not some human invented thing. And another one is that it's happening now more than ever before that this is a new thing, it's because of whatever you want to blame it on in modern times. But this is actually also not true.

As far back as we have records in almost any major civilization in the world there are stories and histories of transgender or whatever their word for it was at that time and homosexual individuals. And this goes to ancient China, ancient Egypt, ancient Samaria, Polynesian cultures, native American cultures, it's really it's everywhere.

And it wasn't until about the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century that westernized Christianity started suppressing a lot of these identities and made it seem up until we get to today that there were 700 years of suppression that these identities weren't always there to begin with. So a very brief little history.

Jody: That's right. But would you say that it feels more common to people because we're doing a better job at embracing everybody?

TJ: Absolutely, yeah.

Jody: But that it's always been there as commonly as ever?

TJ: We have a lot of records that prove that it's always been there. And it's always been there at fairly high percentages of the overall population. And so what we're seeing now it seems to most historians to be a more balancing out of what's always been there but just has been hidden for so long because people were so afraid to present as who they truly felt they were.

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Jody: Yeah. Love it. Okay.

TJ: Very briefly there were some questions on language and terminology, what you should use. I can't dive into all of it because I will admit the LGBTQIA+ acronym, it can be a lot and it can be a lot to learn. My recommendation would just be, mirror whatever language the person you're speaking to is using. So if they are describing themselves as gay or transgender then feel free to use that same language for them.

I would recommend to avoid using the terms, struggle with same sex attraction or same sex attraction challenge or gender challenge or things like that because it diminishes what may be a very important part of themselves that they love and cherish. You, dismissing it as a struggle or a challenge can feel divisive. So I would avoid using that but other than that mirror the language that the person you're speaking to is using.

Jody: And is it appropriate sometimes, I just ask, "How do you like to describe it?" And they'll say, "I like the word 'gay'." I'm like, "Great."

TJ: Yes, absolutely. Because, yeah, some people do use different words for this. Someone may use the phrase, "Struggle with same sex attraction." Especially if they're very early in discovering this about themselves. And they do feel very ashamed about it. I would still encourage you to not use that struggle because we don't want to reinforce that idea for them. But someone may use the term, "I am same gender attracted." And that may be what they feel is the best way to describe themselves.

And other people may decide that they use the word gay or queer, or whatever else. And you can ask or you can mirror the language.

Jody: Okay, perfect.

TJ: Yeah. So this is the basic section. There's so much more to this that I wish that we could get into. But there's a lot that we know and there's a lot we don't know. There's a lot about the experience that we don't know. We do know a few things though. We know for sure that it's not a choice. We

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know for sure that it is a normal variation within the human expression. And we know for sure that it is not contagious. So if we can keep at least what those things we do know on that can eliminate a lot of the issues that we come up against.

The other thing that we do know unfortunately is that LGBTQ+ people are leaving all religion in record numbers and most of them explicitly state that they wish they didn't have to or wished that they felt they could stay. Which leads me into the next section we're going to talk about today which is the queer experience of someone in church or attending church.

I myself like I said, I'm in a place right now where I feel for the time being at least I can attend church and I can also be openly gay and I had a boyfriend and we would attend church together. And that was working for me. I don't know where I'm going to be even a year from now, five, 10 years especially because it is hard. It's hard to be a LGBTQ+ member of the church. So I'm just going to share with you guys some of the thoughts that I've had along this.

The first one being that there's no real data on this because the church doesn't share it. But the best data we can get to is that around 90-95% and that's actually a pretty well estimate of LGBTQ+ individuals will leave the church in their adult life. Usually these are members who have been born into the church and they're raised in the church but then as an adult once they're not in their parents' home anymore they feel they can't stay anymore. And like I said, a lot of them wish they could.

But I just think sometimes what would we do if 90% of redheads were leaving the church? We would be freaking out. We would be having meeting after meeting of what are we saying, what are we doing, what is causing this to happen? Because those numbers is not, well this one person just couldn't hack it or whatever else we might want to make ourselves feel better by writing it off as, but it's huge, huge numbers. And I feel like Brené Brown has said, "It's hard to hit up close moving."

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I feel if we learn more about people's experiences then we can understand a little bit why this is happening. So I'm just going to share some experiences with you. And I'd like you to just try as best as you can to imagine going through these experiences yourself and see if you can understand why this would be such a hard thing for some of these individuals to go through.

So imagine being a 12 year old attending church already feeling confused about your gender identity and sexual attractions as you're starting puberty. And hearing things that people like you are, Satan's attack against the family or a sign of the last days or a danger to children. Imagine being 14 years old and having your friends at church and school stop talking to you because their parents were worried that you are at best a bad influence or at worst trying to confuse or corrupt their child.

Imagine being a 17 year old crying yourself to sleep at girls' camp in a separate tent because the other girls and their parents were uncomfortable with someone like you sharing a tent with them. Imagine being 19 about to head out on your mission and in the interview your stake president asks you repeatedly, not if, but how often you engage in bestiality because he learned that same gender attraction is a slippery slope to that behavior. Imagine being a 21 year old at BYU and hearing other students caught on video proudly stating that faggots go to hell.

Imagine being 23 working as a youth summer camp counselor for two years only to get fired out of the blue because your bishop thinks that being gay is the same thing as being a pedophile. And he felt prompted that he needed to protect the teams at the camp from you. Imagine being 28 and coming out to your family only to have your parents and siblings tell you that you and the person you love aren't allowed around the grandkids or the nieces and nephews because they don't want to confuse them.

Imagine being in your 30s constantly dodging questions about why you aren't married or dating because you don't feel safe to come out yet. Then sitting in church for the primary program as they sing Families Can be

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Together Forever you leave the room in tears because you don't know if you will ever be allowed to have that. Imagine being the son of an apostle out having a nice lunch with your parents and your same sex partner and taking a selfie just to mark the occasion. To have your dad say, "Please don't post that anywhere. I don't want people to get the wrong idea."

Imagine being a 40 year old who got married and had kids despite his sexual attractions because that's what you're supposed to do. And later has to go through a painful divorce proceeding in which your ex-wife is encouraged to not let you be alone with the kids because it's too dangerous for them to be alone with an LGBTQ person.

Imagine sitting at a funeral for someone who took their own life and hearing the speaker say that, "God knows their heart and will be merciful." Then comparing it back to the negative messages you've heard about how God feels about queer people in relationships. And so deciding that apparently God is more okay with me killing myself than me being queer.

These stories are not exaggerated events or hypotheticals. Every single one of these were stories that I heard first hand from my clients or from my own life. This is the reality that LGBTQ+ people are facing in the church. And this is why I am so passionate about working and talking about this. I hear a lot of people ask me when I bring these things up, "Well, why do we have to talk about it all the time? What's the big deal? We don't talk about being straight and cisgendered at church all the time so why do we need to talk about LGBTQ+ people at church?"

We do talk about being straight and cisgendered at church all the time. If you're a fish swimming in water and hasn't recognized that it's water you may not realize it but every time there is a talk where someone talks about how much temple marriage is the most beautiful thing in their life. And how their spouse is the greatest thing in their life, any time we hear lessons about the planet salvation in general, I'm in a singles ward right now.



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Any time our elders quorum starts with an icebreaker about, “Hey, who’s been on a date this week?” It gets brought up constantly. Any Sunday where a transgender kid is forced to go to young men’s or young women’s and sit with their peers in which they feel they are not that gender and it causes them, a very brief aside.

If you don’t understand the transgender experience and I don’t fully because I’m not. The best way I’ve heard it described is to imagine that you’re car sick but your body is the car. And that every time you’re misgendered or wrong pronouns or things it feels like that nauseous car sick feeling and you can never escape from it. So it comes up a lot and this is the experience that is very hard to avoid when you’re in the church. And this is why it’s important to talk about.

Jody: Thank you for sharing that, yeah.

TJ: I want to read a little analogy that was shared on social media that I felt was really – I really identified with it and I feel it really encapsulates some of this feeling. I feel like both sides of my identity are tugging at me and I’m being torn down the middle. Every morning I wake up and sew myself back together. I know something needs to give eventually but my hands are starting to blister from holding both sides so tightly. I don’t want to let either of them go. I’m not sure if I can let go of either.

At this point for me, God’s plan of happiness almost feels like a house. I’m standing on the front porch but the door is locked. I’ve knocked and when I don’t get a response I start looking through the windows. Inside I see my parents, my younger brother who’s getting married in May, my sister with my nieces and nephews and most of my family and friends. My bishop is there too, so is my best friend, so are most of the positive examples in my life. Everyone is waiting for me to come inside, only the door is locked and I can’t find the key.

So I’m here standing outside in the rain wondering which aspect of my life I can sacrifice and what will ultimately be best for me. Meanwhile other

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friends and family pass by in the street and ask why I haven't tried going to a different house. I'm shaking from the cold. The door is locked. I don't know what to tell them but I know that nowhere else will feel like home. Sometimes I just wish there was someone else here on the porch with me and we could stay together under the umbrella hand in hand, side by side until the storm passes and I don't feel like I'm throwing everything away.

So I hope some of this has given you at least a brief insight into what this experience is like and why this really matters and why this is such an important thing.

Jody: So good. And I know a lot of people on this call, TJ, like you said are coming from a place of wanting to support and love, whether it be a family member, I have a brother who's gay who has left the church, wanting to do a better job. How do we do that?

TJ: You are killing these transitions because that is the next section. Okay, so yeah, the next section I've got is some specific actionable steps that you can take so I'm going to start with what not to say and what to say because I think that's where the easiest stuff is. So first, don't say, "You will be fixed or changed in the next life." First of all, it implies that it's a problem to be fixed. But more importantly than that, LGBTQ+ individuals have suicidal thinking and actions at 500% the rate of straight and cisgendered people, especially teenagers.

And we don't actually have that doctrine, that's actually not something that's ever been taught officially in the church that anything will be changed in that way in the next life. But when you say that or imply that to someone who's already struggling with knowing if they can be accepted or loved in this life, it's really easy to think, well, if things are going to be fixed or changed in the next life then I just want to take that shortcut to get there. I'm done with this life, I'll just get to the next one. And obviously we don't want to put someone in that position.

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So I will say this, all of these don't says are things that people think sound helpful but actually aren't. So we want to just to avoid them. Another one, everyone has trials, you just have to overcome this. Being LGBTQ isn't a trial, it's not like you're struggling with you really want to drink alcohol but you can't. It's not like that because this is about who you are and who you love. It's not something that's harmful.

Anything like, well, remember, the family proclamation says or scripture says or the prophet says they know, I promise they know. They have studied it to death, they know all [crosstalk].

Jody: We don't need to be reminded.

TJ: Yeah, they know all of the things that it says. They are fully aware. I love you but I don't support that lifestyle. Even if you don't support that lifestyle that's you, that's your model. You don't need to project that onto them. That does nothing but drive a wedge between relationships. Stop using the hurtful phrases, some of the ones that we've used before, things like, well, it's a sign of last days, it's Satan's temptations, it's an attack on the family, they've been tricked etc. Obviously those are very hurtful.

And the last one is any sort of statement around, well, you can never be truly happy if you're outside of the church or outside of the gospel. I really don't believe that this is true because if it were that would mean that there are 7.985 billion people on the planet who are not truly happy. And I can't imagine a loving God that would have set up that kind of a system. There are plenty of people who are and can be truly happy outside the church.

And I would go so far as to say that in my mind if our loving heavenly parents had to choose between their child going to church every Sunday but hating themselves and not knowing if they can continue living versus leaving this organized religion and finding a way to truly love themselves and find some other way to connect with divinity and deity. Our loving parents would choose that second option every single time.

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Jody: I'm just going to add, that's exactly how I think about it with my brother is I want him to be happy, as happy as possible. And going to church makes it a lot harder for him to be happy. And so I'm like, "I wouldn't go to church either if it made it a lot harder to be happy." And I saw the testimony of this church and he still has a testimony actually of the church. But I think we have to remember and even with our kids, what if you have teenagers at home and you're trying to help navigate, do I make them go to church or not?

We are all meant to have agency and we can't know what would make someone else happy. It's just not that simple. I feel we grossly oversimplify what are really complex dynamic situations like this. Anyway.

TJ: Absolutely, yeah. Okay, so now some things that you can say that are very much [crosstalk] to say. An easy one is thank you for sharing such an important part of your life with me. It means so much to me that you would trust me enough to share this. Something like that just can – it doesn't say you're supporting or not or whatever. It's just, thank you for trusting me with this because it's a big part of your life.

Another one, I will love you and support you. And I'll say this, be specific when you're telling an LGBTQ person the extent of your love because a lot of us worry, well, you love me now but what if I stop going to church? Or what if I have a same sex partner? Or what if I transition to a different gender? I will love you and support you no matter what your future life or church involvement is. Or you and your future partner will always be welcome in our home and with our family.

Those kinds of statements that give specifics really helps someone feel they see you and that they understand and that your love is not conditional. Or I hope you will keep coming to me as you learn more about yourself. I want to be involved in your life as much as possible. This is a really good one to share, if someone's still figuring out what they identify as or what labels they're going to use or whatever. It opens the door to more future

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conversations and hopefully, that's our goal is to help people feel like they are wanted and involved in our lives as much as they can be.

Jody: I like that.

TJ: Okay, so now some things that you can do, some actionable steps in addition to the things that you can say. The first one is I want to give you permission to grieve the picture that you've lost of what you thought their life would look like, especially if it's your kid. The minute you got that ultrasound telling you the sex of that kid, you had a picture in your head of everything that would happen in their life of them growing up, going to young men's, young women's or going on a mission or getting married and all the stuff was all in your head.

And now that picture is gone and that can be very hard and it's okay to grieve that picture. But it's important to remember while you're grieving that the picture that the real person is still there and that they still want your love. And that the picture that's new and is forming is not necessarily any worse or less happy than that other picture. It's just different and it's okay to grieve the loss of that first one but don't let it get in the way of loving the person who's there with you.

Jody: I love that.

TJ: I'd encourage you if you feel comfortable to speak up at church or at home, etc. If someone says something that you feel is dismissive or ostracizing or whatever of anyone honestly but of LGBTQ+ people in specific. It can be something as simple as you know what, there are people in this room who have LGBTQ+ family members or who maybe are LGBTQ+ themselves. And let's not talk about them as if they're some other group because we want everyone to feel loved and included here.

Saying something like that not only obviously will help the people who are openly LGBTQ in the room but I would be willing to bet that there's a lot of people in that room that you don't know who are either LGBTQ but aren't

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out yet because they don't feel safe or who have LGBTQ+ friends and family. And that has just signaled to them, I might actually be able to be safe here. And that can make such a big difference to someone.

Jody: Yeah, I love that. That's good.

TJ: I'd encourage you to invite the LGBTQ+ people in your life everywhere, to all of your dinners and family gatherings etc. And to show up for them everywhere. And I will say yes, including weddings. Elder Christofferson I believe it was actually recently specifically said that there's no problem with attending an LGBTQ+ wedding as a temple worthy member of the church.

I like to compare it to if you had a neighbor who was Catholic for example, who invited you to their baby's baptism, even though in the LDS church we have doctrine that's different belief than that. We don't believe that that's the correct form of baptism, I bet most of us would show up out of love and support and respect for a very important day in their life and we can do the same thing for an LGBTQ wedding.

Okay, so now here are a few things that you can do specifically related to some questions that we got in the questionnaire. One was, how can I talk about church teachings or principles especially if the other person doesn't want me to or if they feel like I'm attacking them? Just examine your goal, make sure that if your goal is to force them back to church, not going to work, it's not going to go well. If it's to express God's love for them then it needs to happen in a way that they will feel it, not in the way that you would feel it.

You can still teach principles, for example, if you have an LGBTQ+ child, you can still teach safety with dating. You can still teach saving sex for marriage. You can still teach those principles within a context that doesn't make them feel ostracized or excluded. You can still teach principles and you can still express a lot of love. The family proclamation is one that gets a lot of questions.

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The simplest way for me to address that whenever it gets brought up is that in the third to last paragraph it states, 'other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation'. I lean on that sentence a lot. I think being gay or transgender is definitely an individual circumstance that may necessitate adaptation.

Jody: One thing I want to interject is when it comes to the proclamation and the family proclamation or any scripture, church council. I think it's such a challenge for our leaders to try to talk to a global church and simplify it down and make it always apply. And so when we take those things so literally we're missing the whole point. That document also says the role of the father is to provide for the needs of the family. And so I'm like, "Well, what if the woman is the one providing, does that mean we're going against the proclamation?"

We can really dissect anything and make it into what it's not intended, it's intended to draw us closer together. And so just be careful with taking anything too literally I guess is what I'm saying.

TJ: And it was a document meant to give hope and guidance and not meant to be weaponized against anyone.

Jody: Yes, exactly.

TJ: Another big question they brought up is, how do I talk to my kids about it? This is a very fair question. Kids are smarter than we think. They're more capable than we think. Be direct, be straightforward and age appropriate. If little Johnny comes home from third grade and says that, "So and so in my class has got two dads, what's that about?"

You can just say, "Yeah, you know what, most of the time people have a mommy and a daddy. But some people have two mommies and some people have two daddies. And we love all of them just the same." That's it. You don't have to go into any details.

Jody: That's probably enough at that age.



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TJ: Doesn't have [crosstalk] sexual talk. Yeah, that's all they need for their age. The problem that I see happening and I've experienced this personally is when you try to give, especially too young of children, "Well yeah, it's okay, we love them but Jesus doesn't want them to have two daddies." It's too hard for a young brain to hold those two things at the same time. And all he's going to do is go to that kid in the school and say, "Jesus doesn't like that you have two daddies." And all we've done is we've created a bully.

So keep it simple, keep it direct. You can still teach principles and be super, super loving and open and honest with your kids.

Jody: And one of the things that helps me if I have an area, maybe I'm new to understanding a transgender situation or what have you. And I don't want to teach my kid to be a bully but I think there's a lot of fear.

Sometimes I just relate it to something that I am already at peace with like what would I say if they were like, "Johnny's dad smokes?" And we don't smoke. I wouldn't make this big deal about it like, "Jesus is upset about that." I would just be like, "Some people smoke and we don't smoke and everyone makes their own choices and we just love everyone."

Sometimes relate it to something that you do have a lot of peace around and you'll understand how to translate that I feel like.

TJ: Yeah, that's a very good example. There were also a lot of questions around use of pronouns for transgender people. A lot of people struggle with this. It can be tough to just, even if you want to, to switch it in your brain to use different pronouns is a process. It's switching language. It's a hard thing for your brain to do. And a lot of people, calling back to what we talked about before are concerned, well, what if this is just a phase?

Or what if they're just doing this to be popular? If I use the pronouns they're asking me to, am I not just making this [crosstalk]?

Jody: Reinforcing it.

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TJ: Yeah, in fact the opposite is true. Using pronouns that they have asked for, if they're not already actually transgender it won't make them transgender. But if you refuse to use the pronouns that they've asked for, all you're teaching them is that you don't trust them and you don't believe them. They're going to feel they have to prove to you their identity and what they think and what they believe. And if it were a phase and the phase ended you've taught them that you're not a safe person to come back to.

And they won't feel they can come to you and say, "Actually, I was wrong about that. I thought it might be true but it's not. I'm going to go back to my old name and pronouns." Now, they feel they have to prove it and they can't take it back because they fought so hard to gain their ground.

Whereas on the other hand if you use the names and pronouns that they've asked of you and turns out that it was a phase they'll feel like, yeah, mom and dad love me and support me. And they were willing to go on this journey with me and I can just know that I can go to them and they won't say, "I told you so", or anything like that. It's a principle called psychological reactance, it's really important but especially in this case using the pronouns will not make them more transgender if they're not.

Okay, so the last one is just get comfortable with I don't know. It's not our job to know. That's our heavenly parent's job, is to know and to figure out and to sort it out. Our job is to love and that's it. And anything that we don't know that's freaking us out that we feel is hindering our love we can just leave it to our heavenly parents because they're a lot better at their job than we would be. We can just leave it up to them.

I really have a hard time believing that at the pearly gates anyone will be turned away for having loved too much, supported too much, any of that. That, I just don't think that that's ever going to be the case.

Jody: I agree.

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TJ: I'll finish with, there was one question that was asked that I think really applies to the model which was, how does it not break our hearts when our kids tell us they are LGBTQ+? Your kid being queer is a circumstance. And as we all know that means it's neutral. So if it's breaking your heart it's because your thoughts are making it break your heart. So I collected a few quotes from actual parents of LGBTQ+ people that I'd like to share of how their thought line is changing this for them.

My heart has been broken wide open to love like my heavenly parents. I feel closer to heavenly father, heavenly mother and Jesus Christ than I have in my entire lifetime. What an honor to be part of my child's life. I'm closer to Christ and my heavenly parents now than I ever was before. I consider the opportunity to be the mother of a gay son to be the privilege of my life and I wouldn't trade it for anything. I can't even imagine not knowing and understanding the beautiful and eternal things I have learned because of having a gay daughter.

I have expanded my view of God's love and I love bigger now. And those are all thoughts that are just as available to you as this breaks my heart. So that's the end of my [crosstalk].

Jody: That was amazing.

TJ: Thank you.

Jody: Thank you so much for sharing all of that. We have several people asking how to get a copy of that analogy that you shared.

TJ: So yes, it is a lady named Becky Edwards who is part of some of your programs also I know. And she's a coach and she shared it on her Instagram. Yeah, I may be sharing it on my own as well.

Jody: Okay, yeah. We'll check out Instagram. I've got a question here for you. And feel free everybody, we have 15 minutes left so TJ will field questions. There's a couple here and I don't know how much you want to get into doctrine but somebody says, "If gender isn't binary, how do you

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think it fits with the Genesis account of God creating male and female and the proclamation statement, no gender being a premortal attribute and that there was not mismatching of bodies?” Thoughts.

TJ: Sure, yeah. The Adam and Eve thing I think we can get into a lot of slippery slope with the Adam and Eve thing because how do we have different races? There’s so many things that if you boil it down to, well, God only created Adam and Eve. Yeah, but what race do you think Adam and Eve were and how do we get all these other races then? Just because something is in the story of what Adam and Eve were created as, doesn’t mean that everything outside of that isn’t possible.

What if Adam and Eve were both right handed, how do we get left handed people? There’s a lot. So I wouldn’t get too tripped up on that. The family proclamation like I mentioned has a lot that I think is tricky to unpack sometimes. One of the things that I think I like to think about is that when it says gender is eternal, I don’t necessarily think that that’s wrong but I don’t think that it has to mean because you were born with a vagina your female gender is eternal. That there is a complex intersection of masculinity and femininity inside of every single one of us.

And for a lot of those people those traits do not match what is easily observable and that people would assume to be their gender. And that doesn’t have to take away anything from that person’s eternal soul or their premortal existence or their eternal existence or anything else.

Jody: This is me totally making stuff up so everyone can just ignore this. But I just think we are all, all genders and all religions and all races and all sexualities. And I feel in the next life we’re all just going to love each other and be so connected. All of these things we use to disconnect, race, gender, sexuality, religion. We use it to silo ourselves off and we are not that, we are all connected.

And we’ll understand that, I don’t know what that will look like in the next life. But I don’t think it will be more like – you’ll be totally tied to your gender

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or your sexuality. I think it will be the opposite. I think it will be, everyone will love each other.

TJ: I think the other part of that that I just want to add on is that like we said, I don't know is a really important thing to get comfortable with in these spaces. I don't know what the next life is going to look like etc. I don't know what the previous life looked like when it comes to gender and all those things. What I do know is that if in the next life I was wrong and that there really are only two binary genders, period, end of story. I will still feel proud and happy of the fact that I helped people who were struggling in this life to feel loved and accepted and supported.

And that I helped them feel like they could live a full and happy life outside of our current understanding of gender binary. And if God needs to work out something else in the next life, if God has to do something on that side, they're going to take care of it and it's going to be perfect and fine and great. And if I can help someone feel better in this life I don't feel if someone is transgender forcing them to stick in every way with our socially constructed ideas of what masculine or feminine is.

That doesn't necessarily make them happier or closer to God or anything in this life. So I just try to take care of what I can in this life.

Jody: Yeah, that's great. Okay, this question says, "It seems with my friends who come out and say they are gay, they seem to be happy for a while but then they become depressed and do not stay happy for long in or out of the church. So why are they not happy? They seem to just find blame and hate against the world and I know this is generally speaking but this is what I have seen a lot."

TJ: I think it's always important to remember that I know a lot of miserable straight people too. So what I would say with that, there are a lot of pressures that I cannot get into in this entire thing but when you are a queer person in a heteronormative, cis normative society there are a lot of barriers that you don't anticipate experiencing. And when you first come out

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it feels like this huge weight off your shoulders and you're just like, "Finally I can just be myself and I can just be happy. And I cannot have to hide who I am", and all these great things.

When you're closeted you're worried that, well, all these people say they love me, but what if they knew the truth, they wouldn't still love me. And then once you come out and they still do love you for the most part, it feels like the best thing. And then you go through your life and you realize that, wait, there are still people who will hate me just because of my sexuality or my gender identity. Wait, there are still the places that I wish that I could belong, that don't want me there.

There are still all of these issues that are coming up. There are still family members who are rejecting me, there are still all these things. And yeah, unfortunately a lot of times, no matter the person's gender or sexual identity, people turn as we know to unhealthy coping mechanisms to try to deal with those things whether it's drugs or sex or anything else. And that often leads them to cycling through that unhappiness and we see that happening a lot of the time and it's very unfortunate.

But being gay itself has not made them unhappy. Being gay in a world that has constantly and repeatedly told them that that's unacceptable has made them unhappy.

Jody: Good point. These two questions kind of go back, it's about if you have a child, one's saying, "I have a child who I think may be gay, they're only 10. Is it ever appropriate to ask that? And what do we say if so?" And then another one says, "I have a nine year old who seems gender confused, I don't want to overthink it. He's nine, he's just obsessed with all things girl. Do you have any advice for parents of young children?"

TJ: I think the best thing you can do in those cases is just to express your love for other people in that community because your kids will hear that and will recognize that when they figure it out. When they want to come out to you they will have heard those things growing up and know that you're a

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safe person to come to. I don't think you need to push anything because yeah, they are young and a lot of people do know at very young ages.

A lot of other people it takes them till they're much older to figure that out and there's a lot of reasons for that. But if you as the parent are always, even if it's something as simple, yeah, our neighbors down the street, that gay couple down the street, we love them. They're just the best. We love having them around. Something as simple as that can let these kids know that you are a safe person to come to. And that just like you love those neighbors you will love them.

Jody: And I think also it's like you were saying about you answer things in age appropriate ways. A nine year old or a 10 year old and I realize gender attraction isn't just about sex. That's actually the most minor part of it probably. But still attraction in general a nine year old isn't really thinking about in the way that a teenager or a young adult is. And so you keep it age appropriate, makes it a little easier I think. Okay, let's see. We've got a few more. Again, sort of similar but maybe you could speak to this one.

It says, "Mostly I think this whole issue is other people's business but when it's my own kids I kind of feel it's somewhat my business. And that if I just don't say anything or offer any opinions they take that as consent or anything goes mentality." You kind of spoke to this before with you can still say, "These are our dating parameters. And you can still teach law of chastity." It's no different than if you have heterosexual kids, right?

TJ: I think where we get tripped up is people are so, parents especially and understandably because they want the best life for their kid and a lot of us were raised in a world where being queer was going to make your life really, really hard and really scary and really bad. And so parents want the best for their kids. It can be a scary thing and make you nervous, whatever, I get it. If your kid's gay they're gay. If your kid is trans they're trans.

No amount of gospel teaching or not talking about it or talking too much about it or any of that is going to change that circumstance. It is what it is.



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So you can just figure out what is your real goal. If in talking about with your gay kid about dating priorities you can talk to them about it in a way that helps them be healthy and happy in that, just as much as your straight kids or with gender identity or any of the other things.

We can talk about it but if we're talking about it in a way because we're hoping that if we talk about it in the right way it will make it go away or it will make it not happen or it'll make it less likely that they are gay or trans. None of that works so stop worrying so much about saying or doing the things that will make your kids more or less likely to be gay or trans. And just start saying the things that are going to make your kid more or less likely to know your unconditional love for them.

Jody: Yeah, that's beautiful. And working on yourself, on understanding people better and in all situations especially the ones that are intersecting in your world, to your point. Even just attending a course like this, I guarantee we've all learned things that changed your perspective and then you're going to change how you show up. This one if you don't mind I'll take a stab at it. She says, "I feel like I am loving and Christlike to the LGBTQ+ community. And my concern is saying the wrong thing, not meaning to offend or judge but out of lack of understanding. As I try to say the right thing I say the wrong thing."

And my thought is, yes, that's a valid concern but I think like you said, honesty and openness is always for me the best policy and to be transparent about, I don't mean to use the wrong pronouns or the wrong whatever. Please correct me if I get it wrong. Just like if someone who is not a member of my faith is talking to me about the church and they use the wrong words. And I don't take that as offensive. But if they said to me, "I don't know how you describe it, you tell me."

Then I would be very understanding that they're not familiar with the language and I think honesty is always our best approach. When we're trying to love people we can admit, I don't know how to say it, I don't know the right way, please teach me.

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TJ: Yeah. And I've never been offended by someone saying the wrong thing when I could tell that they were trying. And you can very easily, a lot of my transgender friends have said the same thing. Yeah, people use the wrong pronouns a lot but I can tell the people who are trying and just slipped up and the people who are refusing. And it's very easy to tell the difference. So no one's, I mean I won't say no one, the vast majority of people won't get mad at you for trying and messing up sometimes.

Jody: Yeah, I love it. This is a good one because we haven't talked about this that much. "I get triggered by comments in Sunday School and sacrament meeting against LGBTQIA+ community. I have a child that identifies that way. I usually get up and leave. Any advice on how I can get to the place where I can stay and speak up?"

TJ: It's hard. Three Sundays ago I left during Sunday School because of something that was said. I feel I've gotten to the place the majority of the time I'm able to talk about it. I think a lot of it is just a lack of awareness. And it's usually just the first time is the hardest. And once that tone has been set usually the people in the ward who know you and who know, they don't even have to know that your child identifies as LGBTQ.

But the first time you say, "Hey, there are people in this room who have LGBTQ+ friends and family. And maybe people in this room who are themselves LGBTQ+. So let's always talk about everyone in a loving and inclusive way so they know that they have a spiritual home here just as much as anyone else."

That kind of a statement doesn't go against any doctrine, doesn't go against any church statement or policy or anything. But that awareness enters the collective of the class and the culture of the ward and it becomes a lot easier in the future for people who may be are thinking of making one of those statements to say, "Wait, actually, maybe this isn't what I say today." The first time is the hardest and I'm sure there's a lot of great coaching thought work that can be done around where the hang ups are for that.

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Jody: Yeah. That's what I was going to say, as a coach I would say, "It may be that being angry is where you need to be right now." It's okay to be angry. At some point you're probably not going to want to stay angry forever and at some point you can contribute positively to this situation by working through it and that's where coaching can come into play. You take a look at what am I thinking that's making me angry. This is a situation where I like to do what I call pre coaching.

Okay, if a statement like that comes up again and you just gave us a great example of something I might want to say. What will I need to be thinking in order to say it in the way I want to, not say it out of defensiveness and anger, what do I need to think? Is it a thought like people just don't understand but I'm here to contribute this or whatever? We can sort of prep you just like TJ has prepped this with some words. We can prep you with some thoughts. But I don't want to imply that everyone should hurry and get there, some anger sometimes called for I think.

Thank you so much. This has been so valuable and I just want to echo what you said that I think all of us probably have a close family member, a friend or somebody who identifies as LGBTQIA. And I think like you said, we all want to love better. And really I have found whether it be this or racism or any other issue that is starting over the last couple of years we've seen really have more of a platform.

I have found that educating myself like you've done for us today here has been the best way to better understand it and change my heart and that's what we're trying to do here. So, so appreciative. Remind us once again, we can go to your Instagram, TJ?

TJ: Yeah. So my Instagram @tjcounseling. I just do a lot of general mental health stuff there. I have a lot of free videos. I have a whole document of books and podcasts and places on my website of LGBTQ+ resources. You can sign up for a free consult call with me or if you or anyone you know is looking for a therapist that works in this area I have opened right now. I just started my private practice, I'm really excited about that.

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Jody: I love it, okay.

TJ: And that's at [tjcounseling.com](http://tjcounseling.com).

Jody: Okay, awesome. Thank you, TJ, thank you everyone for your great questions. Alright, we'll see you later.

TJ: Thank you, guys.

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Hey there, if you enjoy this podcast or even if you just find that it sort of piques your curiosity, or it makes you think, you're going to love the book that I wrote. It's called *Better Than Happy: Connecting with Divinity Through Conscious Thinking*. And it's available now at Amazon in print or kindle version. Or if you want me to read it to you, head over to audible and grab the audio version. And why not grab a copy for your sister, your best friend, or your mom while you're there too. Just saying.