

## 414: The Importance of Social Connection with Andy Proctor



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Jody Moore

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I'm Jody Moore and this is *Better Than Happy*, episode 414, The Importance of Social Connection with Andy Proctor.

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.

Hello everybody. Welcome to *Better Than Happy*, another episode coming at you. I want to make sure that you're registered for The Art of Happiness if you're not already because it's coming up in just a couple of weeks. And it's where things really get real. I don't know if I've told you this story before but years ago when I was getting ready to publish my book, *Better Than Happy*, the publisher that I was working with knew of my work and he was a fan of what he'd seen but he'd really only ever heard the podcast and he'd seen me on social and he'd heard what people had said.

And shortly after I ran one of these little mini coaching workshops which is what The Art of Happiness is, it's \$19. And he and some of his family members participated in it and they had their minds blown. They basically were like, "Okay, the stuff you talk about on the podcast, we like it obviously or we wouldn't be publishing your book. But that is next level mind blowing." And so that is why I continue to offer these on occasions, because I want you to have that experience. I want you to see the difference of these tools in real life.

And so that's why I've created The Art of Happiness. It's \$19. We're trying it a little bit different this time. We're just doing three days, one hour a day because I know you're busy. I know summer especially is busy. But just come and even if you only come to one live and then you listen to the other two on replay or something like that or you listen to all three on replay. Come and see the difference when we put it into real life application. So head to [jodymoore.com/trial](http://jodymoore.com/trial) if you want to check that out.

Andy Proctor is someone who I met earlier this year through just another organization that we both are a part of and I didn't know about him before.

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And I was delighted to meet him. I'm always delighted to meet somebody who's working doing similar work to what I'm doing although in a much different way. And so I was excited to have him as a guest on the podcast to share what he's learning. I'm going to go ahead and read his bio here.

It says, Andy Proctor is a psychology PhD student studying how friendship and social connection impacts health and a certified positive psychology practitioner. His podcast, *More Happy Life* has been featured in The New York Times, ABC News and Fox News. He's a regular contributor to Psychology Today and co-chair of the Utah Positive Psychology Association. He is on the TEDxBYU board and the research team for Eventbrite's Social Connection Project.

His work on team wellbeing has been featured in USA Today, Teen Vogue and The Hill. Pretty impressive, Andy Proctor. I had a really good talking with him about this subject. I hope that you love it too. Let's take it away.

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Jody: Okay, Mr. Andy Proctor, nice to meet you. Are you in Utah?

Andy: I am, yeah, Vineyard, Utah.

Jody: Vineyard, where's that?

Andy: It's right next to Utah Lake. So just to the east of Utah Lake, just between Utah Lake and Orem.

Jody: Okay. Are you guys having any flooding?

Andy: Yeah. We are not. I know one of my buddies has a house right on Hobble Creek, literally on the creek and he's had some issues.

Jody: Kind of nervous for Utah this summer.

Andy: Yeah, I know, there's a lot of water which is great. I don't feel guilty about watering my grass like last year.

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Jody: That's nice. Okay, well, let's do a more formal introduction. Why don't you, if you wouldn't mind, tell my listeners a little bit about you and specifically what you're studying right now that relates so well to what we do here at *Better Than Happy*.

Andy: Yeah. So I have kind of informally studied positive psychology for, I don't know, maybe since 2014, so it's 2023.

Jody: A long time.

Andy: Yeah, it's been a while. So yeah, and then just recently two years ago I started a PhD studying one of the aspects of positive psychology that I'm super passionate about, which is social relationships, the R of the PERMA Model in positive psychology is relationships. And so I study how social connection, friendship or the lack of it, like loneliness, social isolation can have an impact on your health, so yeah, it's kind of nerdy but really interesting.

Jody: Okay, now tell us the story if you wouldn't mind about how you sort of became interested in this. You sent me a few notes but I need to hear the real story.

Andy: Okay. Yeah, so it's kind of funny. So I studied psychology for my undergrad at BYU. And I remember hearing about Martin Seligman in my social psychology book. I was working at Qualtrics actually and I was a setter for sales guys. And they were like, "Hey, can you do the academics?" And I was like yeah, and I remember coming across Sonja Lyubomirsky and thinking, oh my gosh, how cool is it to study happiness. That's amazing. But then after that I didn't really dive into it until I was, actually I was a distributor for an MLM in the stigmatized position.

But we were doing it all online, my wife and I because we knew about digital marketing and we didn't want to ruin our friendships. And so we decided to just try the digital route. And the supplement that we were selling, the slogan for the company of the supplement was the science of happiness. And I remember thinking, is it really just like vitamins?

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Jody: Do you just take a pill?

Andy: Yeah, just take a pill and you can be happier. The science of happiness, we deliver happiness. And I was like, I mean that's a really good marketing slogan but there was definitely some, I guess there were 20 or 30 studies on this specific formulation that were independent studies, which was cool. But that was what kind of drove me into this study of what actually is the science of happiness, is it more than just a pill?

And then it was interesting because it was right after that that my wife who I was running this business with and everything. And here's an amazing entrepreneur and it's just this phenomenal powerful woman had an episode of what's called psychosis which is super scary. If you've never heard of it, if you've never studied that or if you're not a psychiatrist or a psychologist, it's scary. If you've ever seen the movie *The Beautiful Mind* with John Nash. That was kind of what happened to my wife but instead of government spies and conspiracy theories it was all spirituality and the beliefs that we really hold dear.

And so it was really traumatizing for us just because we were so, so, so passionate about our church and religion that kind of threw us off our loop. And positive psychology really helped us to kind of get that grounding back. Because I dove into the theories and I read the books and I was watching the TED Talks and going to the conferences and stuff like that. But then it was like, "Okay, wait, does this actually work?" Just in a time where both of us were just like, "Oh my gosh, what should we do? Who are we now? And how do we rebuild our life in a way that is good, the good life if religion may not be a part of that?"

And so just to kind of back up a little bit, the doctor told us because the delusions were kind of spiritual in nature and extremely religious and stuff. He said, "It might be good to just kind of avoid spiritual topics and involvement for a while just to kind of get back on your feet." And so for somebody who, and I think most of your listeners or a lot of your listeners are familiar with the LDS kind of life and background. And we were on a scale from one to ten we were 11 in terms of orthodoxy.

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Jody: Okay. And typically, sorry to interrupt you but typically we think when we're struggling we turn to our religion and our spiritual practices. And so I can imagine how unsettling that would be to think, wait, we're supposed to avoid it. That's possibly contributing to the problem.

Andy: Yeah, exactly, how do you not ask for a blessing? Or how do you in this time of crisis, what do you do, if not God? And so that's where I dove a little even further into okay, what is the meaning of life without God, if that's the case? Can you find meaning in life without it? And how do I keep my emotions positive? How to stay engaged in a positive way in things that are meaningful in both my life and her life and as a married couple. How do you rebuild? How do we keep our relationship strong when most of them are in the church? So it was tricky.

And I'm so thankful that we were exposed to positive psychology principles before this all happened. I feel like it was, even though at the time I was like, "Wait, does God exist?" I was like, "Well, how could he not?" It was just interesting how there was orchestration of let me give you kind of a lifesaver while you're in this period of not knowing that can kind of keep you afloat from a wellbeing standpoint. Even if you don't even know if I exist or if you believe in me anymore. So it was really interesting. That's kind of how I got into it. I don't know if that kind of helps give more background.

Jody: Well, yeah, no, so that took you directly into a deeper dive of positive psychology and not just a deep dive but really applying it in your life and supporting your wife. And then I know you mentioned something about really your fascination with social connection happening after an April Fool's Day prank that you pulled.

Andy: Yeah. So I had in my strong orthodoxy, I had launched all these blogs. I had a blog for returned missionaries to kind of help them transition after their mission back to real life, find their purpose after being in this incredibly amazing experience where you know exactly what your purpose is. So I had another blog that I partnered with somebody on that was for just kind of general LDS audiences but it was called LDS Missionaries. And it had a huge following on Facebook and so we had this blog.

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And April Fool's, you've probably seen these posts before but people always post these kind of onion style posts.

Jody: Satire kind of?

Andy: Yeah, satire. And the title of this one was, I think it was like, church announces that unmarried returned missionaries can go on a second mission or something like that. I can't remember exactly what the title was but it just went viral. There was 600,000 views before the end of the day and my partner on the LDS missionary site, he was super nervous. He was like, "Oh no, the church is going to shut us down." And it was like, "We should probably take this down."

So we ended up taking it down but it was crazy to see the reaction of people to this post because I think there were a lot of them who hoped that the joke was real.

Jody: So a lot of, you're saying a lot of returned missionaries who hoped that the church was saying, you can go out and serve another mission if you're not married yet and you want to serve again. Which is, when I read that in what you wrote to me I was like, "What? Why would they want to serve another mission?" I mean there is a lot of positive from being on a mission but connect the dots for us about what you decided that might mean.

Andy: It surprised me too. I mean I was one of those who had a really hard time transitioning back to real life or whatever from the mission because I felt so aligned and it felt like I really belong to something bigger than myself. You're this part of God's army. And you're out there doing something that you really believe in. And it's not like missions are easy. It's one of the hardest things I've ever done.

But it was the purpose was there and the belonging was there and I think there's a lot of people, especially returned missionaries, recently returned missionaries or those who can remember that feeling who haven't found it again. And you haven't really found that sense of belonging. Even in their ward, even if they're still a part of the church and they have a calling or

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whatever in the nurse or whatever it is. They don't necessarily have that sense of identity that they used to have and belonging.

Anyway so, that was just something that made me think, in the research that I do, probably one in two people, not just in the church, everywhere are experiencing loneliness whether that's moderate or severe levels of loneliness. And there's different types of loneliness but yeah, there's a lot of people who are lonely right now, not just in the church who really want to feel like they belong to something.

Jody: Do you think that having that on a mission where you have a companion that you're with all the time, and then other missionaries that you're around and ward members etc. But you also have a shared purpose like you talked about being part of that shared vision. Does that deepen social connection in your study in your experience to have sort of that shared goal or what is it about the mission situation that maybe I don't mean to assume if this is wrong, but it is creating that deeper level of connection that we all are craving?

Andy: I think you're onto something with that. I have never done research on that specifically. I have models and theories that I'd like to test.

Jody: That's what we do around here, models and theories, we just never roll them out.

Andy: Right, yeah, exactly. You got the model, yeah, my model or theory, part of that model would be of specifically adult friendship, which is difficult, is a shared purpose, a shared goal. Think about it, the mission I think is a great example that you have the shared purpose, the shared goal, you're out there trying, you know exactly what your purpose is and so does everybody else. And you have that in common, I mean think about when you became fast friends with somebody.

A couple examples from my life. I went to the BYU Jerusalem Center, it's this travel abroad thing, you were there for three and a half, four months, all on the same thing. You all had the same goal. You're all doing the same kind of study abroad together. And you get super close. You're all living in



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close contact. You learn everything about each other because you're on these eight hour bus rides to Egypt and it's hot and everybody's gross and you can't stop but you have to go the bathroom anyways and you figure it out.

And it's just you get close because yes, I think you have that shared goal. I've done certification programs, 18 month or six month programs or whatever. And you're in it with a cohort of other people and you become close to those people because you're all trying to become certified in whatever that is. I don't know. You've done coaching certification programs before, you've done these programs where did you make any real close friends that you still have now out of those programs?

Jody: Yeah, absolutely. And sometimes I wonder if it isn't, we have a shared kind of goal that we're working towards but it's also the struggle. It's like you talk about, being in Jerusalem and the struggle of being dirty and not having a restroom. And trying to pursue a certification that's challenging, I feel causes us to have to let down our guard a little bit and get real with this is hard, I need help, I need support, encouraging one another.

Seeing each other not just in our Sunday best when we're polite but when we're really in the thick of trying to figure something out I feel like is what has connected me to the people I'm connected with, like you said, from courses, from college, from even just having roommates back in the day when it was like, how are we going to pay this bill, none of us have any money. It's a struggle, if you can get through that and respect each other and you see who's there for you and who's not and who's honest and who's struggling. And that's where I feel my deepest connections have come.

Andy: Yeah, it's a forced self-disclosure. You have to, because for intimacy to happen you have to have that self-disclosure. And so there I think are certain situations and environments that kind of force that and those are some of them. My PhD cohort right now there's five of us. And it's so hard. And like you said, it's a struggle and you struggle together and you send

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each other memes about how it sucks and whatever. But you also celebrate each other and the milestone moments as well, which is really cool.

And I think something that I'm really wanting to find out and figure out is how do you prolong those, the ones that you really got close to during those moments, during those travel studies, those programs and certifications, whatever those shared goals were? How do you keep those close afterwards? How do you not just let them fade away?

Jody: People move away and somebody changes. Were you kind of, I know you have done research on the importance of this, the importance of connection, what is social disconnection even? What does the research say about the importance of connection as adults?

Andy: It's really important. There's a lot of theories. There's a ton of data behind this. But yeah, social disconnection is like loneliness and social isolation is as bad for you smoking up to 15 cigarettes per day. There's so much media on that. It was actually my advisor, her name's Julianne Holt-Lunstad who did the original meta-analysis that discovered all the different effect sizes of smoking and drinking alcohol and not exercising, air pollution, all this stuff that we all know is bad for our health.

And found that social connection, social integration, the impact of that on health outcomes on basically not dying is larger than the impact of smoking and all these other things which is crazy. So it's really important. Recently we did some research on United States and UK populations. And even though it is really important, everybody still underestimates how important it is for our health. And I don't know if this has changed in the last month, the US Surgeon General just released an official advisory that my advisor actually helped write on the importance of social connection for our health.

And he talks about this whole thing about it being just as deadly as smoking and stuff like that. And so there was a ton of press on it and not everybody saw it I'm sure. But hopefully it helped change that perception. But most of the people really underestimate how important it is, not just

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general populations but even we did a separate study just on healthcare providers, doctors, nurses, people who should know these things. And even they underestimated it.

Jody: Okay. I think obviously the big question in everyone's mind is, well, how do we do that? Because it's so bizarre to me. I remember going through this time right after I graduated from college, I went to Utah State, moved down to Salt Lake and I had a job. I had a roommate who was a girl I didn't know very well and I was so lonely because everybody else I knew, my close friends and everyone was still up in Logan. And just kind of that lost feeling of what am I doing now that I'm done with college and all of that.

But then I remember having this moment where I looked around me and there was people everywhere. And I remember thinking, how can I be so lonely when I'm not alone? I'm never alone. There's always people around me. I think it's so bizarre that that is happening. Like you said, it's happening for so many people and yet the population of the world keeps growing. But I know also again another time I was really lonely was as a mom of young kids. I didn't have time to go out and take classes or connect with anyone. I had things that had to happen all day.

I was exhausted, couldn't keep up on anything and just so lonely. And I'm sure for people that are working full-time, similar feelings, that you're busy, you're stressed, you don't have the energy at the end of the day to go to a social situation. What are some practical strategies for people?

Andy: Yeah, so that's a great question and I totally feel you, we just had a baby almost a year ago now. And he's super cute but it's so hard with kids. And I feel there needs to be research and extra support for new parents with this regard because I think they can get really lonely. So what do we do? Yeah, as adults I think there is a lot of potential.

So one study from, I don't know if you've heard of this, it's kind of like a social network app or website called Nextdoor. And they did a study with my advisor actually on just knowing, I think it was six, I can't remember if it

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was five or six of your neighbors in your neighborhood. People who live on the same street or block or whatever, just knowing who they are can improve your health, can improve your mental health and your physical health. People who knew six neighbors were healthier both physically and mentally.

That's kind of interesting, I think maybe the LDS population has an advantage there potentially just because they have that kind of built in almost. So being a part of a church where you do go to church I think that can be helpful. One of the questions in the questionnaire that they use to determine whether you're socially isolated or not is, are you a member of a club or religion that you attend? They also talk about phone calls. How often do you have phone calls with people that you're close with? And I think it's interesting.

Jody: Never.

Andy: Yeah, it's so interesting, how often do we just text somebody and be like, "Hey, are you available? Hey, I've got a question for you. Hey, I was just thinking about you." And those are great too. Those can be helpful. I think those are what I would call a bid for connection. That I think we need to kind of have those bids, constant bids for connection even if we don't necessarily get those connections. Call somebody out of the blue. If you're driving and I know a lot of people maybe use Marco Polo. And that's fine, that can be helpful too while you're driving.

But if you're driving or if you're just doing something, you maybe throw in the earbuds or whatever and just call somebody and don't tell them, don't text them and say, "Hey, do you have a second?"

Jody: Is it alright if I call you? That's what we do now.

Andy: Just call them.

Jody: Yeah, I like that. I think about this a lot actually because I do know for myself and many of my clients how much it impacts. I see the impact of it on our mental health. I think how, because of technology, which has made

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our world so convenient, it's actually isolating us. I can pull into my garage, I click the button and the garage door opens and I pull in and then I shut it behind me. And so I really don't ever have to talk to any of my neighbors. I have to go out of my way to talk to my neighbors. I'm not going to just run into them because we all, even in the summer when it's warm. We just pull right in the garage.

Or even when I was a student at college over 20 years ago, you would walk around on campus to class and you would bump into people. Well, now I'm pretty sure everybody's walking around with AirPods or headphones. And probably there's a lot of less because that's true, even just in the grocery store or wherever else I am, we're not just interacting. In fact I'm guilty of this myself where I'm tired. I don't want to interact with a stranger because that takes a lot more energy so I put my AirPods in on purpose, put my hair back so everyone can see. Don't talk to me.

And that's okay and everything but you have to think intentionally about if you're lacking connections like that I feel like in your life, you have to put yourself in an uncomfortable situation. You have to go meet people. You have to be open to talking to strangers, many of whom you're not going to develop long lasting friendships with. But you have to open yourself up to connecting with people in the world. And we have just so many ways to escape that nowadays.

Andy: It's so easy.

Jody: I do think it's dangerous for our mental health. I think some of my closest friends I just happened to meet. Most of those relationships, you didn't plan them and execute them. They happened because you were in a place and you both ended up talking about something. And if we eliminate those opportunities we're doing ourselves a huge disservice I think.

Andy: I totally agree with you. And I think it can be really, it takes energy to create energy but when we spend that energy to go do those things that help us connect with people, it's hard to get over that, the bump, the activation energy to get there is rough. It can be tricky especially if you are

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somebody who is experiencing loneliness a lot. It changes the way your brain is even structured, it changes the way you think. Your beliefs start to change about whether the world is a safe place or not.

It's rough and you almost need to reprogram your brain if you are lonely. But yeah, things like go finding a club or a team or an event. So I just did research with, there's a company that some people might have heard of called Eventbrite that you can use the website to schedule events or go to events or buy tickets to a concert or whatever.

And we did research with them recently where we found that going to an in person event, that requires you to actively engage with other people, to be there, to engage with them. Not just being passive and watching what's going on and leaving, but like, "Hi, my name's Andy, what's your name?" And talk to them like, "Tell me more about you." Those types of events, they increased that sense of belonging and feelings of connection. And so it's crazy. I mean it makes sense, it's one of those obvious psychology findings but yeah.

And I think another huge opportunity, I think most people spend, I think it's 90,000 hours of their life at work or working. And there's other research that shows that it only takes around 200 intentional hours for you to make a new best friend. And so the workshops that are for these companies on these talk about how the number one predictor of whether somebody will stay at work or not or whether they quit is do they have a best friend? That was a Gallup study that was crazy. And the number one predictor of having an effective team is psychological safety.

And so if your team cohesion and connection is better, what does that enhance? It enhances psychological safety. So anyways, I'm passionate about making friends at work because I think both men and women struggle to find and keep friends. Men I think struggle a lot more than women at least in some of the research to keep friends as an adult which is kind of interesting. And also in what I like to call the mesearch, there's research and then there's mesearch.

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Jody: I love it, yeah.

Andy: There's tons of really cool validated studies out there but then there's also like does this ring true to you, I always tell people, "Don't just trust the research, do your own research." So for me as a man, adult man, new parent, PhD student. It's tough. It's tough to keep friends when you're super busy and I think men need to find their tribe. And I think there's a huge potential for this to happen while we are at work, whether you're a man or a woman. And I think they don't have to prioritize this but if they do, I think engagement will go up, less people will quit.

They'll have more people that are loyal to them and people will just be happier and the research shows that their health is going to increase and so it's just so much good can come from having friends at work and workplaces encouraging that friendship and that connection because like you said, we're at work so much. We don't have the energy when we come home to reach out or to make that phone call and do we even have the time? So I just think there's huge potential in the workplace.

Jody: So you mentioned kind of going through, stepping away from your faith a little bit in the name of helping your wife. I know you described, would you say you went through what you would call kind of a faith crisis at some point or I should say, what is it about the social aspect of our religion that can make a faith crisis so challenging for people?

Andy: Yeah, that's a great question. I think if you were to kind of break it down, I think a faith crisis is really a social crisis the majority of it.

Jody: Okay. What do you mean by that?

Andy: Well, so obviously there can definitely be a faith crisis that's just like, okay, I just have a really big beef with I don't know, whatever the topic is or the big question about something like polygamy or something like that. And you just have a hard time with that. And so just from a principles standpoint you're just like, okay, logically I have a hard time putting this together with what I believe. But then when it goes from this place of just logical to then

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well, okay, I don't know if I believe this anymore to then acting on that belief.

And there's then this kind of perplexity because you're like, okay, wait, does that mean that I'm going to be a member of this church anymore? And then you're like, well, if I'm not a member of this church anymore, what does that mean for my relationships? If you come from a family that is super, super religious, which mine is and I love them and they're amazing.

Jody: Are you still active in the church today or what is your stance?

Andy: Yeah. So I am but yeah, we did definitely, my wife and I took a step back. We've never left the church or whatever, but we became less engaged I guess you could say than we were before just yeah, out of kind of figuring it out.

Jody: And I don't mean to put you on the spot, I'm totally comfortable with either way, I just want to give people some kind of some context here.

Andy: Totally. Yeah, and no, I'm an open book too. I love sharing about this because I think there's a lot of people who are in this who don't know where to go and who to talk to. And I've talked about it on other podcasts where I kind of go way into depth about the actual faith crisis. And yeah, for me it was a social crisis. It was if I do this, if I'm not wearing garments or if I'm not showing that I'm wearing garments or whatever, people notice. Or if I don't go to the temple, if I'm not in church, if I'm not, I don't know, if I feel uncomfortable to go to the family, come follow me, hang out, or whatever.

Then it's hard, it impacts your relationships. And I haven't done research on this social crisis concept but I would assume that the majority of us who are going through a faith crisis, if you were to clear away all the other social factors behind it, I think it would be significantly less stressful and traumatic.

Jody: I mean I think in my experience, I've coached a lot of people going through questioning their faith or just wrestling with it, whether they would label it all the way to a crisis or not. There are a lot of doctrinal unanswered



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questions around issues like LGBTQ and even patriarchy and things that are unsettling to people. But I agree with what you're saying about that it's such a natural human condition to want to feel accepted by the tribe if you will, and to not create problems or be judged even by people maybe not in your immediate tribe but just people that you associate with.

We have such a fear of rejection and judgment that it complicates that situation I think. It makes it challenging to figure out what is really me. I view it as an evolution of your faith as you question things and come to a different understanding and become comfortable with unanswered questions. I think is actually a really health process. But the social dynamic complicates it and confuses it. So yeah, it's interesting to think about like you mentioned earlier how the social aspect of our religion is such a huge plus and it has been in my life over and over again.

And then also can be a challenge and can be detrimental to that evolution of faith that I think is a healthy process for people that go through it. Yeah, it's just interesting.

Andy: Totally. It is fascinating and there's a book called *The Righteous Mind* by Jonathan Haidt where he talks about evolutionarily speaking we survived not because we were the strongest individual. We've survived because we stuck together in groups. And so we have that fear inside our brains of if I am kicked out of a group, I will die.

Jody: Even though that's not true.

Andy: No, it's not true.

Jody: It feels true, it feels just as valid and the amygdala doesn't differentiate between physical danger and emotional danger. It all just feels like danger. And so I think being aware of that is powerful and that's certainly a lot of the work that I'm doing in coaching is just helping us choose intentionally how we want to think about other people's judgments for example. One of my favorite thoughts I always offer people is, it's okay, I'm not for everyone. Everyone doesn't have to like me and I'm okay with people being wrong about me.

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I give people permission to judge me. It just sets yourself free because they're going to anyway. So in my mind, I totally give people permission to have judgments and opinions about me. I certainly have plenty of judgments of myself so I can understand it. It doesn't get rid of that primitive brain that wants to be accepted by everyone but it manages it so that it doesn't interfere with your best life in the end. Tricky stuff.

Andy: It is, no, it is tricky and I love the model that you talk about a lot on your podcast like the CTFAR. I think if we were to look at that, the thought, for me at least, I guess it would be a fear or a thought that generates fear. But at least within this discussion, this faith crisis for me, it was if I all of a sudden I'm questioning God's existence or the reality of revelation or I think my social infrastructure will crumble. That was the belief, the thought and the fear.

My family, my community, my LDS network for career progress and opportunities, my social status, for me it was a bigger deal than maybe for other people. Because I have an LDS blog and I was making money off of it and background studying at the BYU Jerusalem Center and my family, my parents have a pretty prominent blog and website that's LDS. And their livelihoods were integrated into the church and religion and I highly respect them but it was just if this is not true or if I'm even questioning this, I will be totally abandoned.

My life will end. My social infrastructure will crumble. So that was the thought which brought the feeling of terror, I will die. And so the action that came from that was silence yourself. I have silenced myself. Until recently I really didn't talk about any of this because I was terrified. And it was really weird for me because I was like, okay, I was a big blogger guy and I did tons of this stuff. And I was writing posts that, I don't know if they went viral but they were popular, they were on LDS Living. They were all over the place.

And I was in that world, I was with the LDS influencers and stuff and then I just all of a sudden went silent. I stopped singing and it was because of that, I was terrified that I would lose everything if I said anything. I don't

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know if there are other people who are listening who have experienced that or felt that they have to go silent. But I think finally getting to this place where I feel like I can just be honest, I can be like, yeah, no, this is what happened. And I still have some questions, I'm not through it.

Jody: What made you decide to stay in the church?

Andy: Like I talked about before, the church is a huge source of community. And I know how important that is for my health for one, it's my heritage too. It'll always be who I am. And I do believe in the goodness of the universe and of God. And I really hope that that involves God or Jesus because I really love the beauty of this narrative. And so I think those were the things that kind of helped me keep going and hold on. I don't really have a reason to leave. It's not like, I don't know, it's not like I would gain a bunch of money or something, I guess, other than tiding.

But it's not like I would win anything from it. I wouldn't be gaining. I don't know, it's not like there's this huge group of friends who are just like, "If you leave then we'll be friends with you", or something. It's just like I don't have that motive and I feel like the church has been a huge, I respect so much about what it has given me and how it's changed my life, even just church education. I feel like I'm extremely privileged in this situation. But I went to the Jerusalem Center for BYU, how few people get to do that? How many people even get into BYU for one?

Jody: Not me.

Andy: Yeah, I didn't even the first time.

Jody: Good.

Andy: I went to Southern Virginia University my first year, which was the most amazing experience of my life but yeah, then it wasn't until after. I came back from a mission and my mom actually, my stepmother, she fought for me to go. I applied and they're like, "No, you can't get in." And she's like, "There must be something wrong."

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Jody: She's like, "I don't think you understand."

Andy: No, "He has to get in." And she actually got me in. It was like, oh my gosh. Anyways there's so much that I've gotten from just being a part of the institution at all. I don't have any beefs with that and with the church especially. I would feel totally ungrateful if I didn't.

Jody: Yeah. And I'll just say for our listeners, we didn't intend this to be an episode about faith crisis or faith journey but I know people are going to have these questions that are listening. I think the message, I love the message you share about the importance of social connection. I think that our social connections are so important and they complicate our lives, whether it be a faith journey or anything else. I know many, many people who became life coaches and they're families were like, "What are you doing? You're an attorney."

They're like, "No, I'm not an attorney anymore, I'm a life coach." And that can create a whole explosion. And at least I'd love to hear your final thoughts but what I hope people will take away is just understanding that social connection matters to your health tremendously. And you've got to make a conscious effort to make it happen because our lives more and more so lend themselves to social disconnection. And at the same time you have to be in touch with your own internal wisdom and your internal guidance.

And you have to have the courage to not always be approved of by the crowd and the tribe and it's a balance. But that the balance creates a really pretty beautiful situation in the end.

Andy: Like you said, it is complex. And relationships that are not necessarily negative, the ones that are both negative and positive, they call those ambivalent relationships. Those are even really hard for our health too. But there are so many things that we can do to kind of enthruse those relationship with good and relationships are critical for our health, life saving. And connecting to other people not just on social media, we can

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connect on social media. And I think it's a great tool. And that could be a totally different conversation.

But I grew my Instagram to over 18,000 followers but I still feel lonely. It's not just followers or friends, it's that in person actively engaged connection that is intimate, that is real, where we feel that sense of belonging that really is healing.

Jody: Yeah. And I do think we get sometimes a false sense of that connection through social media that is, it can be used for good but it can also create the illusion that you're connecting and when you're really not in the way that your research is proving we really do need. So that's good to keep in mind. I am a fan of especially we went through COVID where we couldn't get together in person and then everybody sort of realized, in some ways this is more convenient. And in all honesty we haven't been to stake conference since, we just watch it on Zoom. So that's so much better.

Andy: I wish we had Zoom on ours, yeah.

Jody: Yeah, we go to church but we watch stake conference on Zoom in all honesty. But anyway, I think that we are now, people are wanting to be in person. I know in my community which is an online community, my coaching membership, I'm starting to do more live events that my clients can come to just because I do feel the power of being together in person all day, like you said, turning and talking to your neighbor and connection that can't happen through the computer so it's good to keep in mind.

I appreciate the work that you're doing, the research you've done. Where can people go to learn more from you, Andy?

Andy: Like I said, I am on Instagram @morehappylyfe. There is a podcast called *More Happy Life*, so you can go check that out. And then the website is thrivingfriendship.com. That's where my workshops and stuff are if people want to check that out or do it for their company or whatever, so yeah.

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Jody: Okay, awesome. Thank you so much for taking the time to come on the show.

Andy: Thank you.

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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.