

443: Love Like Jesus with Ben Schilaty



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Jody Moore

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Welcome to episode 443, Love Like Jesus with Ben Schilaty. Over 25 years ago when one of my siblings came out as gay while attending Brigham Young University I searched the internet for answers, examples or even forums to openly and respectfully discuss this topic and I found nothing. Thankfully, today that's changing a bit. And one individual who has contributed significantly in this space is my guest on today's podcast, Ben Schilaty.

Whether you're LGBTQ and wanting to hear from other church members about their experience or you want to learn more to be a better ally. Today's episode is just for you.

Welcome to *Better Than Happy*. I'm Jody Moore and I'll be your coach today. Ben Schilaty is someone I have known via the internet, we are internet friends, for a while. We actually did meet in person last year at Charlie Bird's book signing I think it was. But at any rate, I was so delighted when it finally worked out to get him onto the podcast because I have actually been following and learning from him for a very long time and I just have so much respect for this man.

I appreciate so much the insight that I've gained around the topic of LGBTQ individuals and the doctrine of our church. I think that he is just a great example, not the example. And I think you'll hear in this conversation, he's not claiming to know the right way for anybody to live their life, whether they're LGBTQ or heterosexual or in the church or not a member of the church. This is not about creating a model for how to live your life. And, Ben is the first to say that, and I think you'll hear that in this conversation.

But what we did want to do is have some real discussions about this topic. And I think you're going to find that I asked Ben some of the tough questions that I know come up every time we discuss this topic. That I haven't always been good at remembering to ask in the past. So I tried to really get him to address some of the more challenging to answer topics. And I loved so much what he had to say. As I went to name the episode I thought, what do I call this exactly? How do I describe exactly what the point is and what the message is that came through?

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And I was putting some groceries away in the fridge and I looked on the fridge and there's a picture on there that my eight year old daughter drew recently. It has a sunset and some birds and it says, 'love like Jesus'. And I thought that's it. That's what we're all trying to do. It's challenging to do and I feel after this conversation with Ben Schilaty, I felt a little bit more equipped with some tools to help me love like Jesus and I think you will find the same. So without further ado here is my conversation with Ben Schilaty.

Jody: Ben Schilaty, thank you so much for coming on. I have internet known you for a long time actually. And I love listening to you and Charlie Bird's podcast and the topic of helping LGBTQ individuals, especially those who are members of the LDS faith or some other kind of conservative group is near and dear to my heart. And it requires so much courage, the work that you're doing in the world.

Ben: Thank you, that's so kind.

Jody: So let's just start with kind of an introduction about who you are and why you're doing the work that you're doing.

Ben: Great. Well, I turn 40 in February.

Jody: Happy birthday almost. No, it's not your birthday.

Ben: I'm coming up on officially being middle aged, which I'm excited about. And the first half or so of my life has been great. I was raised in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, still an active participant in that, it's very important to me. I came out as gay when I was 23 for the first time to two of my best friends at Brigham Young University where I was attending fulltime. Came out to my parents a few months later, everyone was super loving and kind.

I came out publicly when I was 30 on my blog. I was, at the time I was living in Arizona doing my PhD work there in Tucson. And then I just started

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talking more about my experience as being a gay member of the church. And I started a little support community there and just made the best of friends. And I kind of have this dual ministry as a gay Latter Day Saint. I talk a lot with LGBTQ Latter Day Saints one-on-one and I do a lot of public advocacy as well.

So a lot of education and just helping people understand what it's like. So I'm with people one-on-one in the trenches and then I try and do broad re-education. I'm a social worker, so I work full-time as a therapist now. I was a Spanish teacher for a really long time. So I can also teach you Spanish if you have any questions about that.

Jody: We do, my teenagers are in Spanish right now. They're constantly asking questions. I'll send them your way.

Ben: Please do, yeah. And because of my time in Arizona, I love Saguaro cacti. I love cacti more than most people, and that's one of the other things I'm known for. So you know, two things about me. You know that I'm gay. I'm a member of the church. And the third thing if you know anything, I love cacti.

Jody: I love it. Okay, so take me back a little bit to when you first came out. And I know it sounds overall you had a pretty positive experience, you were well received and everything. Have you always been active in the church? And if so, how have you done that? It seems challenging.

Ben: Yeah, that's a good question. The reality is that I have always been not only active, but probably maybe too active. Until the pandemic started I hadn't missed church once since I was 18. If I was going on vacation, I would make sure that we would plan things so I could still go to church. And there were a few times when we were traveling and I wouldn't be able to go to a Latter Day Church. So I would always go to a Lucent Church or a Catholic Church. I would find some other church.

So I have been to church every Sunday except for the pandemic for a very long time, so I'm an active believer. And it has been a lifeline to me. My

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faith is super important to me and guides my decisions and I expect it to continue to do so.

Jody: So how do you navigate, and I would imagine it's ongoing and ever evolving, so I don't mean to lock you into an answer, but how do you navigate or think about yourself as a member of the church and a gay man? How do you reconcile the idea that we don't support gay marriage? I have a brother who's gay and I've watched him. He has a testimony at the church as well. And so I've watched him kind of go in and out of activity and wrestle with maybe this just isn't for me and living more of a gay lifestyle.

And then, no, I don't feel good that way and he'll come back to the church. And he's had a hard time as I would imagine is common, finding, do I just decide, I guess, I'm going to be celibate and kind of alone my whole life. I know that's a difficult question. Like I said, I don't mean to pin you down to anything but how do you think about overall, how do you reconcile those two things?

Ben: Yeah, that's an impossible question to answer, but I'm glad we can talk about it.

Jody: I know, sorry. We're just going to get right to the heavy stuff.

Ben: Yeah, of course, no. These are conversations that I love. So when I was in my 20s, there's this normal pattern of progression that LGBTQ folks go through. And it's not the same for everyone, but there's this normal pattern of, we notice that we're attracted to the same sex. And we're like, "Okay, this isn't real. This isn't happening." We live in denial. Then we get to a place of this is real, but I can fix it. That's when we pray to change. We go to therapy to change.

And then when those things don't work, we think, okay, well, this is happening, but life will be normal. I'll still be able to marry a woman, things will be normal. And then we try that and when that doesn't work, we go to the place of, well, life isn't going to be normal, but I can still move forward in a value driven way. And then there's this phase that's called the pride stage where suddenly there's a huge pendulum swing from this isn't real, this isn't

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happening to this is all that matters in my life. I am gay and that's the only thing that matters.

And then once you go through the pride stage, someone's orientation just becomes part of their identity. One of the many things that makes them who they are. So I've gone through all those phases. And sometimes I go back and forth. And so in my 20s, I was in this place of I can fix this, life is going to be normal. And I tried really hard to marry a woman. I went on 27 blind dates with women in my 20s. I think I went out with 100 unique women. I spent thousands of dollars and many hundreds of hours trying to get married and was very unsuccessful.

But I had to look at the fruit of those experiences. I met some great people, but life just wasn't working. It wasn't what I wanted to do. I didn't even feel like I could be married to a woman. Then when I was 30, I fell in love with my best friend, who was also a gay member of the church. And I thought, well, I want to be married to this person forever. This is who I want to spend eternity with. And that led to me getting really mad at the church and saying, "You're keeping me from being with someone that I love."

And that didn't end up working out and I was active in the church during that whole period. But now as I approach 40, I try not to have any expectations for the future. I just try and connect with God and figure out, where does he want me to be now? And then move forward in a value based direction. And so what it looks like for me, so you said, how do you reconcile all this? I would say I don't. I allow myself to live in the tension. There are these two things that are true. I am gay. I tried to change that and I couldn't.

And there's also my faith that matters to me, and I tried to not believe it. When I was in love with my best friend, I wanted it all to be fake and made up and I also couldn't do that. And so I have these two truths in my life. I am gay and I believe in the restoring Gospel of Jesus Christ. And so then there's this tension that exists and I just have to live in that tension. And sometimes it makes me mad and sometimes it's really painful. But life can

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be tough and hard and painful and things can be confusing and not make sense but it doesn't mean it's not good.

And so the way I reconcile that, I just try and live in the tension and I try and just take the next step and see what the next right step is for me buying the Book of Mormon. God didn't tell Nephi all the things that were going to happen when they left Jerusalem. But little by little he knew what he was supposed to do and he ended up building a boat and they sailed to the new world. And so I just trust that God will lead me little by little and allow myself to get mad, feel hurt, but still move forward with the tension.

Jody: That is so beautiful. And I think that is one of the skills that is useful for all of us in our lives, that no matter what our situation, there will be times when there is that tension. I love what you said that both of those things are true for you. And both of them are good parts of you.

I was just talking to a woman I'm working with on a project yesterday actually, and we were talking about this, that I remember I used to think when my brother first came out to me. And my parents and our family were all so very loving and accepting, but also just confused. And I'm going to have you speak to this in a minute. How do we as allies support people? But I remember someone saying, "It's not fair that he has to live that way with this." I thought of it as a trial or a challenge.

And then we kind of talked through it as a family, we're like, "But also some people have physical limitations and maybe they have to live in a wheelchair forever and that's not fair either." And it's only been in the last maybe five years that I've realized, wait a second. Maybe this isn't even a handicap. Maybe this is actually a really beautiful, amazing part of my brother or anybody else. Could you speak to that a little bit? Especially in the church we're like, "Well, in the next life you'll be straight and this will all sort itself out, Ben."

Ben: Yeah, that's a great question. So when I was in my late 20s, I came out to some friends and I said, "Well, what do you think made you gay?" And I said, "I think there's something wrong with my brain. I think that

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there's some mental deficit in my brain." I don't think that anymore but I just want to give space to people who feel that way or have felt that way. That's exactly how I used to envision it. I don't view that that way anymore. God is really good at answering my prayers, really good answering my prayers in silly little ways. I pray, God answers those prayers.

I have prayed thousands of prayers that God would make me straight and change my orientation, thousands of prayers that He would help me be in a successful marriage, married in the temple with a woman. And God did not answer those prayers. And so knowing the character of God, I know that if I were supposed to be straight, I would be. And there is definitely something divine and purposeful in having my orientation. Whether that orientation is something that will exist in the next life, or it's just part of this life, that I don't know.

My hunch is that this is just part of who I am and then my orientation will continue into the next life how it is but I don't know. I don't know what heaven's going to be like, if I make it there. And I have a lot of unanswered questions but to me my orientation, I just view it as one of the characteristics that make up who I am. There are all these ingredients that make up who Ben Schilaty is and my orientation is just one of those.

And I think for most people, even though they don't think about their orientation, especially if they're straight, it makes up such an important part of who they are. It's who they're drawn to, who they love, who they marry, who they form a family with. And so to me, it's an integral part of who I am and not just a deficit or a trial. I let people use the language that works for them, but to me, calling it a trial, a temptation, an affliction just doesn't make sense. For me it's a gift. It's a way that it has brought me closer to God and any other part of my life up to this point.

Jody: And again, I just want to say listening to you and Charlie Bird and others share their stories, Ben and Charlie have a podcast together that we'll make sure everybody knows about. But just I so appreciate you guys being open and vulnerable about not just a positive attitude and feeling good about it, but when you're frustrated and upset and stuck. And I love

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that you guys share all of that because that's the reality of it, and I don't know, it just makes it feel so accessible that you include all that.

But for anybody that's gay, it's not that there's something wrong with them. There's just something wrong with the world. I do, I will say, I feel a lot of compassion for people because I see how they are treated at times or I see how 'the world' is not set up correctly or we don't have the right mindset. But it's not the person's sexuality, I don't think that's wrong. I think it's all of us that just, I don't even want to use the word, right and wrong. But anyway it's been really, I think, important for me to see that and understand that. And like you said, everyone is on their own journey and timeline within.

Now, let me speak to one other thing and I want to have you...

Ben: I just have a quick comment on what you just said.

Jody: Okay, please.

Ben: So one thing Charlie says a lot is he said, I don't struggle with same sex attraction. I struggle with other people struggling with my same sex attraction.

Jody: Yeah, amen. And I know this is not the same but sometimes, well in the LGBTQ acronym when we have all different situations in terms of sexuality and gender identification and all kinds of things going on there. And what are your thoughts about, it seems I look at my kids going to school and they're being taught a little bit differently in some ways that I appreciate and some ways that I think we haven't quite got it right yet. But it does seem like there are a handful of, especially youth who are maybe struggling with mental illness or maybe really not fitting in and may be lost.

And then they find maybe a transgendered group or something that embraces them. There are times when it's like, wait a second, and I even have friends who is like, "Listen, my child has decided that she's a boy and if that made her happier, okay, I'll deal with it and I'll work through what's going on in my head. But she's actually worse off now, she seems to be going downhill."

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It seems to me and correct me if I'm wrong and that's the concern is how do I know if this is just my child struggling and trying to find a group to identify with or if this is a legitimate thing that we need to reconcile? And I know you don't know [crosstalk].

Ben: Yeah. No, that's a question a lot of people are asking right now. And every situation is different. Every child is different. And I have raised zero children. So take any parenting advice I give with a grain of salt. I'll just share just a bit of my story and then give some principles I think that could guide a parent in a situation.

So I wrote a chapter in my book called Choosing to Be Straight because in every way I chose to be straight. I was a kid in the 90s and a teen late 90s, early 2000s. And at the time, even in society at large it wasn't okay to be gay. And so every part of me, every part of my upbringing, my family, my church, my culture, my community was telling me to be straight. I wanted to be straight. I wanted to do the right thing. I wanted to fit in. Not only did I want to be straight but I acted straight.

I went on dates with women. I even kissed one of them and I held hands with them and I acted straight and I prayed to be straight. And even after all that, it didn't change my orientation. So I don't think that there is anything we can do to actually change our kids' orientation or gender identity. It just is what it is. But the issue is if you have a kid who's still trying to figure out who they are and there's so many developmental stages. Well, then what do you do? Do you say, "Well, maybe this is a phase. Let's wait and see."

And this is the recommendation I would give, is to believe the kid and just to have conversations with them. So for example, if you talk to a 12 year old and they're like, "I think I might be a boy, or I think that I might be trans." And I would say, "Well, what does that mean to you?" And just talking about their experiences. For someone who was raised a girl, who might want to become a boy, they might just mean they just want to have short hair. Or it might just mean that they want to play with cars instead of Barbies and it might just mean, they just like some boy thing.

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I remember when I was eight or nine years old, I told my mom, “I wish I was a girl.” It wasn’t because I felt like I was a girl. I just wanted to wear pink and not be teased. That was it. And so I think for a lot of kids, it’s just they’re just trying to figure out how they’d fit into the world now, now there’s this new vocabulary, new language that we didn’t have before. But I don’t think in the long run it’s actually going to change anyone’s orientation or gender identity.

So I recommend kind of a wait and see approach. Have a lot of honest conversations with your kids. And be someone that they can come and talk to because they’re going to be talking about this with somebody and it’s best to be talking about it with the parents. So just ask them questions, help them see if they say, “I think I’m a boy”, what does that mean to you? And I would also say that we need to be careful to make sure that the kids are in an environment where they feel loved and trusted.

And so I would say, the statistics show that for centuries and centuries about one to two percent of the population is transgender and that’s it. That’s a small portion, but we all encounter transgender people in our lives. And you can find documents from thousands of years ago that would show that there are trans people and in the cultures all over the world, there are people who today we would identify as trans, forever.

So some of these kids who say they’re trans, I think it’s a real experience. And so we don’t want to say to a kid that actually is trans, “Oh no, I don’t believe it, maybe it’s just a phase.” And so I think there’s a lot of wisdom in just trusting a kid and getting them to talk. I have a good friend who had a kid who was four or five and he said, “I’m not sure I’m a boy. I think I’m a girl boy.” And he said, “Great, you’re trans.” And they were thrilled to have a trans kid. And now this kid is a few years older and he said. “No, I’m just a boy.”

I think for a lot of kids, it’s just they’re trying on labels, they’re trying a new thing. A kid who has one hobby in high school. They might have a completely different hobby in college or later on. And so I always say, “Just let your kids be kids and have honest conversations with them, but trust

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them, trust them. And if they change their mind in the future. You will have had conversations the whole time and that relationship will have been preserved and had been present the whole time.” Once again not a parent though, so.

Jody: Well, I mean that might actually make you more qualified to speak to it in all honesty because with being a parent, it just brings a lot of drama and emotion. And sometimes it’s hard to step back and look at it from a clean place.

Ben: And, Jody, you talked a bit about mental health stuff and I didn’t really address that. When it comes to kids and their mental health, there’s this prevailing theory of suicide right now, which is called the interpersonal theory of suicide. And so the idea is that suicidal ideation stems from two big factors and they’re big words, thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness. So if you feel like you don’t belong or fit in or if you feel like who you are is a burden to those around you, they’d be better off without you.

So what all kids need, whether they’re saying they’re trans or not, is they need to know, we love you, you fit in, you belong here. And not just saying that with our words but showing it with our actions. And also letting them know, you’re not a burden, you’re a gift. I wrote in my journal when I came out to my parents that I didn’t want to tell them because I knew it would be hard for them to deal with. There was this real sense, if I told my parents I was gay, that would make their lives harder, and it hasn’t always been easy.

It did put a bit of a burden on them, but what they told me was, “Ben, you are a gift, we love you. You’re always welcome in our home.” And so if a kid is going through mental health struggles, help them see they fit in with you and your life, they fit in with the family and help them know you are a gift and our life is better because you’re in it.

Jody: That’s so good. So there are also, especially older teenagers wanting to, or young adults wanting to take hormones and have surgeries and

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things to actually change their outer gender to match what they feel is their inward gender. I mean again I don't mean to put you on the spot because I know it's very case specific. But I've asked myself before, okay, I consider myself a real ally in that I've sort of shifted some of the socialization. I'm sure I have a lot more to work on, but I've tried to re-educate myself on this topic.

If one of my kids comes to me or if my 16 year old comes to me and says, "I want to change my gender." There are things that are permanent and irreversible. Like you said, we might change our hobby, we might change our mind. What are your thoughts on that topic?

Ben: Yeah. I think that when we have minors and children who are making decisions that cannot be changed back, if a kid wants to use a different name, different pronouns, wear different clothes. That's something that can easily be reversed if they decide that that doesn't fit for them. If any minor is going to be making changes to their body that cannot be changed back. I would be very hesitant to do that. And I would have a lot of conversations with the kid. Me personally, that's something I would want to pray about and also talk to competent medical professionals.

And I've never been in that situation so I don't know what I would do. But I would say that the principle I would want to go off of, is this something that the child might regret in the future? And I would be very hesitant to do something that would not be able to be reversed. There's a lot of research that needs to be done on medical transitioning and things like puberty blockers for kids. Trans medicine needs a lot more research and a lot more funding.

So I would say I would be hesitant, but also I would be open to talking to the kid, open to talking to medical professionals. And then as a family making the decision that we felt was best.

Jody: Yeah, I love that. I agree with that. My thought is, well, once you're a certain age and you're independent, you get to make your own choices and I'd love you no matter what you choose. But until you're that age, it would

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be the same thing if they came to me and said, “I want to get a tattoo”, which is basically permanent as well. I’m like, “Well, once you’re a certain age and you decide that, okay, but right now you’re a minor and that’s a permanent decision. We’re going to wait and then you get to make that choice when you’re a little bit older.”

Ben: It’s such a hard thing because I have a client right now who was assigned male at birth and is very male presenting but identifies as a woman. And they have told me that with me they use they, them pronouns. I wish I didn’t have to go through male puberty because now I can’t undo this male puberty. And so there’s this urgency with some kids and with some parents of, we don’t want them to go through puberty because then there are changes that happen to their body as they mature that also can’t be undone.

It’s this tough thing of no matter what, something is going to happen that can’t be undone. And so we just need to be really careful and they’re tricky situations.

Jody: Any topic that is complicated and individual and case by case specific, it’s dangerous to put absolutes on anything and oversimplify it. So yeah, I thank you for adding that. That’s not what we’re trying to do here, to oversimplify what are very complicated situations.

So how do we do a better job of being an ally, whether this be as a parent? I’ve coached a lot of parents, not a lot, but a handful of parents who say, “I have this kid now who has come out to me as gay. How do I keep going to this church when at least in somebody’s mind, the kid’s mind, their mind, there is a lack of support there for them?” Which I can understand why they’d feel that way, there’s messaging still that’s given that interpreted through the lens of a gay person is hurtful actually.

Ben: I’ll just address the general, how to be an ally question and also what to do if church is painful either for you or for your LGBTQ kiddo. So I think the first step to be an ally is just to listen and learn and really hear other people’s experiences. So I have done my darndest to try and give people

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resources within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints to understand what it's like to be a gay person in this church. I wrote a book called *A Walk in My Shoes*. I've got this podcast, *Questions From the Closet*.

And I try and hear other people's stories and elevate those stories. So I would say, learn. Learn all you can, read books, read blogs, listen to podcasts, but all of that is not nearly as important as talking to the LGBTQ people in your life and hearing their stories. My biggest fear when I wrote my book was that people would look at my story and think, well, Ben's story, he's got it figured out.

And so on the second to last page, I have an invitation. I said, "Please don't give my story to your LGBTQ friends and loved ones. Instead of giving them my story, will you invite them to share theirs?" So the best thing an ally can do is just to listen, listen and learn. And then once you've done that, once you've sat with people and listened, then start sharing what you've learned in just natural and in organic ways.

Like I said, I love cacti and there's this cactus called the Saguaro cactus, so the big, tall ones, with the arms in Arizona. And they grow so slowly. It takes them, a 40 year old cactus is about my height, it's about six foot. And I'm growing about as fast as a cactus. And there'll be years in a cactus' growth where they don't grow at all upwardly, they just grow their root system. And then once the roots are strong enough then they can grow taller.

And so what allies need to do is really grow these roots of understanding. And then once they have listened and learned and understand a lot more then they can share what they're learning. In casual conversations with family and friends, by writing things or sharing comments at church, the best way to be an ally after you've listened and learned is just to talk about LGBTQ people in natural, organic and positive ways.

A really good example of this is Elder Holland's talk from the October 2015 General Conference. He was talking about mothers. The talk was about

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mothers and motherhood, and he mentioned a gay missionary who would come home early from his mission. He had this one line that wasn't super relevant to talk, he said he didn't change and no one expected him to, something like that. And when he said that my phone lit up and all my friends were like, "Can you believe what he just said? This is amazing."

And the talk wasn't about being gay or about whether or not we should expect someone to change their orientation, but it was in there, and it was really meaningful for us. And we were all listening and we heard it. And so I would say, once you've learned, talk about LGBTQ people just natural, organic, in positive ways. I think that's one of the best ways to be an ally. And just really listen to your heart. What are you feeling called and compelled to do?

And some people need support, they need someone to come and talk to them. And so I would say, whatever you feel, after you've done this listening and learning, what do you feel prompted to do and do that thing.

Jody: I always considered myself a pretty good listener, although I'm aware I'm also a talker. I realized in the last few years that I have a lot of room to get better at listening because I listen from a place of wanting to help and give them, even just to encourage them to feel better, to be more confident, which sometimes I think we want that from people. But what I've started doing is just asking more questions like, "That sounds hard", or, "That's great."

Validating whatever they're saying, instead of, especially if somebody's talking about a struggle or a challenge, if they're feeling bad, we want to make people feel better. But what I realized is just going, "That sounds hard. Is there anything I could do that would be useful to you? How could I best support you?" Instead of going, "You know what we should do", or, "Don't forget this." I always think I have the answer and that is not as useful to people as just holding space for whatever they're feeling and maybe asking if there's any way that you can support them but it's not easy to do.

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Ben: Yeah, it's true. And when someone has something that they're going through for a time and it's been hard and it's still hard. It can be difficult for us as observers and people who love them to just be with them in this hard, long thing.

Right now, my mom has advanced Alzheimer's and this has been going on for a long time. And I have so many good friends who are such powerful support, but this has been happening, I've been losing my mom for years now. And there's no fix to this but just people being with me when I'm sad. And I'm just so grateful for those people. And when it comes to being an LGBTQ Latter Day Saints or an LGBTQ Christian, there are hard things we deal with and sometimes we feel hurt.

And so for the faithful believer, sorry, everyone could be faithful in this context, but for someone who's a super believer and really committed, it can be hard for them to hear that this thing that they love is causing someone else pain. And they might just want to negate that pain because it feels more comfortable to them. And so we need to learn to just hold people's pain, especially when their pain is something that we don't experience and something that might even make us feel uncomfortable.

I have so many friends who do that and I know there will be a message shared by the church that will be really hard for me. And I know that for this person it wasn't hard at all and they will still check in on me and say, "Hey, Ben, I know this could have been hard for you. How are you doing? Can we talk about this?" What a gift. What a gift to have people like that in my life.

Jody: That's one of the things I love again about, you and Charlie did a podcast episode after the October Conference where you both just shared. And you had different things that you were bothered by and that didn't bother you or different things that you liked. But as somebody who just feels, I don't know, for some reason, I feel strongly about trying to be a better ally in this area.

I won't name it but there was one talk in particular that one of you had talked about kind of having some hurt feelings around. And hearing it

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through your perspective, I'm like, "Yeah, that didn't even occur to me", as I listened to it as a straight woman. But I can see why that would be hurtful to you. And then not long after that, I walked into [inaudible] and our lesson was on that talk. And I noticed myself, somebody's like, "Yeah, we're talking about this talk today." And I was like, "Oh, I hate that talk."

And I noticed, and then I was like, "Wait, that's not what I want to do either." And that's not what you guys do. It's so impressive, your ability to hold the space for both and not become bitter and just allow yourself the emotions of it. And you talk through it like you said with whoever you want to talk through it with. And then you are able to move on and you still embrace and love the leaders of the church and the parts of the doctrine that you love and it's really impressive to me.

And again, I don't have that particular thing in my life, but I have other things that I wrestle, just being a working mom for example. And I love what I do and I want to work full-time and I want to be with my kids and be at home and be with them. How do I navigate that? So anyway, I just appreciate what you guys do.

Ben: That's really kind. And I'm at a point right now in my life, and I haven't always been at this point where I can be listening to a talk and I can have one experience and someone else can have a completely different experience and I can honor and trust their experience. And if someone listened to a talk and it was painful for me and they loved it. I don't want to take away the love they have for that talk or that experience. Let it be what it is. And I just trust people to have that experience.

You'd also asked about what if you're a parent and going to church is hard when your kid comes out or your kid is like, "Why are you still going? This place is hard for me and painful for me." This is a tough position to be in. I'll say about a little family that I know. They have a son who came out when he was 16. The whole family kept going to church and the kid wanted to keep going to church. And then one day he was called the "F" slur at church. And he said, "I don't want to go back anymore."

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And so he stopped going to church. His dad stopped going and the mom kept going. And so the kid was supporting the mom going, "Hey, this is important to you, keep going." But Dad really struggled that his wife was still going to church. This place hurt our kid and how can you still be supporting this?" But it resonated with her. She wanted to be part of the community. She's a believer and she kept going. And so I met this dad and he told me that he was just so filled with anger and rage all the time.

And he said, "What do I do with this rage?" He was like, "I'm so mad at the church." And I told him that anger often is a secondary emotion, that it often masks harder things like feeling pain or rejection or hurt. So I mentioned that to him and then the next day he said, "I just could not stop thinking about what you said about anger being a secondary emotion." He said, "I think I've figured out what my anger is masking." I said, "Well, what is it?" And he said, "Betrayal. I feel betrayed by the church."

And I said, "Well, of course you feel that way. Your son was called this awful word at church, how can you not feel betrayed?" And he said, "Ben, that's not it." He said, "I was a very homophobic person. I made fun of gay people. I said awful things and I said those things around my son and I felt that it was okay to do that because of how I was raised in the church." Then he started crying and said, "I hurt my son. And I hurt my son because I felt that it was okay to do that as a member of the church." And he said, "That's why I feel betrayed."

And then we talked about that for a bit and once he knew what that deeper feeling was, he was able to do something with it. And what he realized was, this is a thing that matters to my wife, it matters to me. It was something that mattered to my son and he respects our choices. And so now sometimes he goes to church with his wife. Once he understood where the deep anger was coming from, he could look at it and manage it a little bit better.

And so I would say, whatever feelings you're having about religion or your family, really dig into, find out where those feelings are coming from and then what are you going to do with those feelings? And a lot of times it's

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just forgiveness, forgiving yourself when we didn't know better. Forgiving someone else for not knowing better in the past or even now. And giving people room and space and time to grow.

I'm in a place in my life now where whatever anyone chooses, if it's bringing them joy and happiness, I want them to continue doing that thing and I want to support them in that thing. But it can feel like someone's support of an organization, can be rejection of you as a gay person, it can feel like that. But I know enough now to know that if someone is going to church, that doesn't mean that they reject me. And if someone chooses to leave the church, that doesn't mean that that invalidates my choice of a gay person to continue moving forward in it.

And so I just try and let people be on their journeys and I'm going to start rambling, so I'll just end [crosstalk] there.

Jody: No, I love that. Thank you for sharing that. It's such a beautiful example. And again, it goes back to our brain's tendency to oversimplify what are complicated topics. I had this question asked of me at the Faith Matters Conference I spoke at. And they said that, "How do we continue to participate in a church that we feel is harming people that we love?" I said, "I respect whatever anybody decides." I don't view it as heartbreaking when somebody leaves the church, necessarily. That might be exactly what is best for them at this point in their journey.

I think it's heartbreaking when people feel not loved and they don't recognize God's love especially. That's heartbreaking to me. But that said, I always say, "We have to take specific situations and look at them and decide what's really true here." Like you did with that gentleman. Let's look at this specific situation. And so even if somebody calls my kid a derogatory slaying term that hurts their feelings, a part of me is like, "Well, I'm not leaving because I need to be there to defend anybody."

If all of us who think a little bit differently about certain topics, leave the church because the majority doesn't see it, then who's going to help this great organization full of great people that I do feel is Christ's church, who's

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going to be there? The church is all of us. So if I hear something said in a lesson or meeting, which is often well intended, my guess is that word wasn't said by the teacher or over the pulpit. It was probably in passing in the hallway.

But at any rate, if I hear something said that I think is well intended but a little off, I raise my hand and they're like, "Sister Moore, of course, has a comment." But I'm like, "We've got to help participate in evolving our mindset." And like you said, we're going to have normal natural conversations about gay people and otherwise I don't know. I don't mean to make myself, put myself on a pedestal.

I just mean any area you think differently about than an organization and the church is full of so many good people. And I feel the same way, it blesses my life so much that this is a good community. And I'm going to be here to try to help make it better in any way I can.

Ben: Yeah. And I love that. I think that's a beautiful perspective. Wherever you are, bloom where you plant it, make it a better community. I'm reading the Book of Mormon right now which I tend to do from time to time. And I'm in the Isaiah chapters right now. And First Nephi, Chapter 21, Nephi quotes Isaiah and it says in verse one that there are people who have been scattered because of the wickedness of the pastors of God's people. And it's very clear, people have been scattered because he had been treated poorly.

Jody: They're like, numb out.

Ben: Yeah. And then that chapter goes on to talk about how God's love is constant and always there. Even if you're scattered, God's love is there. And then I was just reading this morning in Second Nephi, Chapter 8, which is also an Isaiah chapter and talks about the waste places of Zion. And this is an odd idea to think that in Zion, in the church there are waste places, places that feel barren. And it says that those waste places will be watered and they'll flourish like the garden of Eden.

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And so for anyone who is active in the church, I would say, look for those waste places and let's water them and help them grow. And if there is an LGBTQ person who wants to come participate, how can we make that happen? What can we do to make that happen? And we have so much power to make our communities places of love and kindness. And I just want to see that happen.

When I was living in Tucson, I lived for a year and a half with two retired lesbians and they were retired professionally not for being lesbians. And one of my first nights in the house, I just rented a room from them. They were like, "How can you be part of this big and homophobic church? How can you?" And I shared my testimony. I talked about the Book of Mormon and that didn't really resonate with them. And then I said this.

I said, "I want my congregation to be the most welcoming and kind place it can be. There will always be room for you two on the pew next to me. But if you come and anyone gives you any guff, they will have to deal with me." And they didn't end up ever coming but that really meant a lot to them because I meant it. I meant it. There is a space for you, a literal space for you that I will reserve for you if you ever want to come. And I will protect you from any unkindness.

And we can all do that. And I know so many LGBTQ Latter Day Saints who want to come to church who feel like they can't. And we who are still participating in the church, we can water those waste places and scoot over and make a space for those people, because really I know so many people who want to come and feel like they're not welcome. And we can do a much better job of that and that starts in our families, in our homes, welcoming people there and then welcoming them to our congregations as well.

Jody: Amen. And that's why I wear my Rainbow Jesus pin to church.

Ben: I love that.

Jody: If there's especially a young kid there or whatever, struggling, I just want them. Whether they ever feel like coming and talking to me or not, I

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want them to see somebody here knows that I'm here and welcomes me here.

So anyway, thank you so much for the work that you're doing, Ben. So just to make sure, if anybody didn't catch it, the resources, your book is called *A Walk in my Shoes*. And then your podcast is *Questions From the Closet*. It's all so fun and entertaining. You guys are great. Anywhere else we want to be sending people?

Ben: Yeah, I would say talk to the LGBTQ people in your lives, hear their stories. And I think that's what really matters. I'm part of a group called Gather. We hosted a big conference this September. We'll be hosting another one this coming September. We have this new initiative called Gatherings that will allow people to host gatherings for LGBTQ people and those who love them in their homes.

And we made this nice little curriculum. It's really easy to follow, if people want to do that. So if you want to learn more about that, you can go to gather-conference.com. And let's make space for people who want to gather and strengthen their relationship with Jesus.

Jody: I love it. Thank you so much, Ben Schilaty.

Ben: A pleasure.

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