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SPEAKERS

Josh Mangelson, Mina Leach, Brittany Mangelson

Josh Mangelson 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Brittany Mangelson 00:33

Hello, everyone, welcome to another episode of Project Zion Podcast. This is Brittany Mangelson. And I'm going to be your host for today through one of my favorite topics to talk about ... faith transitions. This is going to be an episode in our Fair Trade series. And I am with my friend Mynach Nolde leech, and I am so excited to hear her talk about her faith transition. She is a seeker up in the Boise area, who's been traveling with Community of Christ for gosh, maybe a year or so we'll get those details in just a second. But yes, I'm very, very excited. And I think that Mina story is pretty unique. And her story at this point, she has not officially joined Community of Christ, which really is one reason why I wanted to have her on to show that a faith transition story does not have to end in membership, but that there's still value in that middle space. And so we're gonna talk all about that middle space, and hopes for the future and all of the things. And yeah, I'm really excited. So Mina, thank you for saying yes to being on to share your story.

Mina Leach 01:40

Yay, thank you for asking me, I'm really kind of excited about this. People who know me know I, I love to tell stories, I love to tell my story. And so this is kind of a unique space, you and I were just talking about the fact that this is a hard story to tell to people that you know and love, especially people who are still in Mormon spaces, because I know there's something a little scary about that for us, maybe for them. So this feels like a nice forum to do that in. So I appreciate you asking me.

Brittany Mangelson 02:13

I'm excited. This is gonna be good. So with these stories of faith transition, we usually start at the beginning, whatever the beginning looks like for you. So I'm wondering what faith and religion looked like as you were growing up, what role did church play in your life? And then what were the core beliefs that formed and shaped you as you were a child and growing up into adolescence, etc?

Mina Leach 02:40

Sure. So it might be helpful to note that for me, this question really only goes up until about age seven and a half. So we're talking very early, and we'll hit why it's such a small piece. I was born in the covenants to mom and dad who were married in the temple. Pioneer stock, I'm a direct descendant of Isaac Morley on one side and early convert European immigrant people on the other side, pretty solid LDS background. My dad served a two year mission. My mom was really into things like seminary and Institute and she was in the LDS sorority that I don't know if that still exists, but existed in Southern California, at least in the late 60s, early 70s. And they were really solid. When I was 18 months old, we moved to Western Massachusetts so that my dad could attend the University of Massachusetts for graduate school. So this is significant, largely because this was a pretty small, even for the area, kind of liberal. And when I say liberal, back then LDS people weren't described as nuanced. They were described as liberal and it didn't necessarily have to do with their politics, although there was definitely overlap there. Anyway, it was a small congregation, the word I grew up in was actually known in our stake for being extra liberal we had within it. We had the University of Massachusetts we had Amherst College, which is Ivy League, we had Smith College, which is Ivy League, we had Hampshire College, and we had Mount Holyoke College. So it's like, we had a lot of academic people, people coming in for a few years for grad school and leaving, so it was sort of a different upbringing, in Mormonism in general. And then in that liberal thing. So my dad was in the bishopric for a while when I was little, and we went to some youth stake events where the youth were putting on little skits and plays, and they were putting on a skit or play of that contained our bishopric and my mom was pointing out to me, the kid who was playing my dad, and he was totally dressed like a hippie with really long hair and because my dad's still had a beard and everything, so even my family, even my ward within the As areas we've got this liberal area liberal ward. So this is kind of my upbringing. But that being said, we were very active, we did all the things. My parents were often in youth leadership kind of positions, things like that. If I'm looking at my faith, I think it's like any little LDS kid, if this is my reality, right, like, this is just how I understand my world. When I was little prayer was a big thing to me. So I was wishing on stars, which to me, I sort of equated those again, we're talking under seven, right, so have some, some compassion here for my, my little "kid-ness." But one of the things before I started praying nightly and wishing on a star for a baby sibling, I really wanted to meet Heavenly Father and in Jesus. And I was pretty sure that could happen, because I was pretty sure that I was like Heavenly Father's favorite, or one of them like this, again, I'm very little, so have some grace. But this is how just solid and matter of fact, my world was about this. Another big thing that I do want to mention, because it has popped up, I had a book when I was a little girl by Carolyn Pearson, many of you may know, there was a musical called My Turn on Earth. I've never seen the musical. But I had a kids picture book of it. And the basic story here is it's this metaphor for this earthly existence, based on this little girl coming to earth, and she's, within the book anyway, she's always a little girl. So when she grows up and gets married, she's kind of in dress up clothes, but, and she's on a treasure hunt, to bring back to Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother, this treasure. And she gets notes about this all along the way. And as she's getting ready to go back to heaven, she's realizing, Oh, I don't know if I found the treasure. So I need to gather these things. She gathers bread and water and sunlight and a rose. These are all the things that she sort of feels like if I'm hungry, if I'm thirsty, if I'm cold, if I'm sad, is what I need. So these are my gifts. She's heading back to heaven. And she meets a couple of friends and a couple of strangers who are in need of these things. And she just really freely gives them and she gets to heaven and realizes I just gave away all my treasure. I don't have my treasure. And she's very sad. This book, now as an adult, I read this to my grandkids and I cry every time. But they tell her no, that was the treasure. You did it. The treasure is

love. That's what you're looking for. And this was huge for me as a kid. With my understanding of the first and second great commandments. My understanding of what we're here to do, was really impacted by this Carolyn Pearson book that, you know, we're here to learn how to love and that has been core for a long time, and it's becoming more and more core yet again, causes a lot of frustration for me when I'm watching some of the things that church does and says but that was a big one. So that was I feel like to me kind of sums up my early church experience.

Brittany Mangelson 08:05

I love that you brought in Carolyn Pearson, I was able to interview her for Project Zion for her book on polygamy and books, the stories, the poems, the hymns, the neat songs that she's written. To me, that's still the best part of my childhood. When I think of the song, "I'll Walk With You." I mean, that to me is the gospel, right like beginning, middle and end. It's right there. So I really love it when ex-Mormons can hold on to those beautiful nostalgic nuggets that's like, Oh, if only this were exactly how everything was, maybe it could have worked right? Sadly, Carolyn Pearson is not the Prophet. So the Mormon Church...

Mina Leach 08:47

It's really, really unfortunate, really unfortunate.

Brittany Mangelson 08:52

So what about young women, young adults, like the LDS church has a pretty tight structure for teenagers and young adults? And did you find yourself wrapped up in that structure or not? Was that when you started questioning or...

Mina Leach 09:08

So I actually need to back up just slightly because youth was highly influenced by this event in my life. I feel like I had a 40 year faith transition in some ways, and it kind of stopped for a while. But boy, I had a really big year here between seventh and eighth like a really big year. And in fact, even backing that up a little bit. So I was an only child till I was six and a half. My little brother was born when I was six and a half. In my memories. I have two sets of childhoods, right? Like I have this same faith, same household, one child, two parents. And then so my brother was born in July. My dad moved out of our house I think in early January of the next year. I was about seven, maybe it was late December, but I feel like it was after Christmas. So my parents were splitting up. So that happened when I was seven, sometime that Fall right before I was going to be baptized in January, when I was turning eight. My dad lets me know that he is asking to be excommunicated from the church. There was no resignation option back then I think there were some lawsuits in the mid 80s that had that become available. But back then you had to ask to be excommunicated. So you went to, I think it was still called church court back then, like in front of the High Council, they did the whole thing. And you were excommunicated. And my dad did this. Because he really didn't believe in God anymore. He certainly didn't believe the church was true. And my baptism was coming up. And there wasn't going to be a graceful way for him to say, I can't do this. And so I'm facing this, like a few months before my baptism, this realization that my dad who again and then me and my mom and dad, until just recently doesn't believe in God. And that's kind of heavy on a seven year old. I'm not blaming my dad at all for that, by the way, he and I've talked about this, over the whole course of my life tons. This is a huge topic for us. But that was a big thing. For me, it had a really big impact. It really made my baptism be very, frankly, traumatic, because I was enough of a thinker as

a kid that, oh, my dad doesn't believe their God, well, then how do I know for real that there's God. And I had this expectation, if I'm going to be baptized, I'm supposed to know this right? At the time, the film, still on a film projector, one of the first vision films was pretty new and popular. And we watched it a lot. And it was because first vision story, and I can still remember, in my head, Joseph Smith saying, "I knew what I'd seen you that, you know, I knew it. And I knew that God knew that I knew it. And I couldn't deny it." Right, that would go through my head. So I'm listening to testimonies on Sunday with people saying, I know, I think that's what they mean, I've had this expectation as a little girl that probably Heavenly Father might visit me because he loves me so much, right? And now I'm being faced with what? Maybe there's not God, like, how do I know there's God, right. And so as a person who wants to do things the right way, in some ways, and follow the rules, I really was feeling a little bit like a fraud myself, just getting baptized, and there was all kinds of pain. And I'm not going to spend a lot of time on that event. But this sort of kicked me into what my youth would become, which was, this real struggle of the Mormon narrative of my life it's the one that I know. It's the one that feels comfortable. It's the one I hope is true, because my vision of Heavenly Father was very good and loving, I'm assuming because my relationship with my dad was pretty loving. And he took care of me and loved me. And so huge part of me that didn't want all of that to not be true. But I've got this doubt now at a young age that I don't quite know what to do with and it caused a lot of internal stress and conflict. I remember as a teenager, sometimes bearing my testimony, and I was bizarrely specific about things I had a testimony of. I had a testimony of tithing. I had a testimony, priesthood blessings, trying to think what else but they were really specific, because I don't know if I had a testimony of God, I didn't know that part. And so I couldn't talk about that very much. I was a little bit of a sometimes behaviorally rebellious teenager, as many teenagers aren't, I wasn't wild and crazy and getting into all kinds of trouble, but, but I'd have that conflict too. I'd be like, is this the life I'm heading into? Am I going to fully come back to Mormonism? Not like I wasn't because I was very active. I did all the things young women medallion camp back then how to medallion and I did that. Seminary graduate, I went to all the activities, ward level and stake level youth leadership. When I was a senior in high school, I was on the Stake Youth Advisory Committee. And I spent the whole year being a little obnoxious, feminist voice saying, hey, if girls can't wear tank tops at Youth Conference, then neither should boys be able to wear tank tops or those gross mesh tank tops. So we're like kind of trendy at the time, but no one wants that. It took me a year but at least that year I don't know in the future, at least that your boys weren't allowed to a wear tank tops or be do like a shirts and skins basketball thing. They weren't allowed. And that was my advocacy. Right? So I did all the things. I went to BYU that's where I went and and I knew the church very well. My mom was good at that. My mom also she was a great teacher of the gospel. She had a huge testimony of the prophets, modern day prophets. She was very obedient but also ,you've got to remember, my mom still has this nuanced liberal kind of view of accepting everyone and loving everyone, I know that it becomes so offensive now. But when my mom first heard it and was saying in the 80s, "Hate the sin, love the sinner," she was using that as an excuse to love people that she wasn't supposed to love. For her, that was her saying, hey, this isn't about lifestyle or behaviors or whatever, we love people. And that's genuinely what she meant by that. So that was a weird flip for me when people started, understandably, highlighting that as a real poor phrase, but my mom meant it very differently. That was how she could love everybody. And she did. And that was my upbringing. So I have that piece in there, too. So that was kind of my youth.

Brittany Mangelson 15:52

So with having a dad who has openly talked about not believing in God, but then also being raised in the church with a more liberal mother, and then obviously still having the influence of your dad is on the outskirts. That could be tough.

Mina Leach 16:21

Yes, that caused lots of pain. So add in sort of my mom didn't think she was very bitter about the divorce. She was kind of bitter about the divorce. And this happens a lot. But she was one of those moms that pulled me into that peerspace with her too early. And so I did get a lot of messaging from her. She was less "Hate the sin love the sinner" about my dad than she was the general population. So I definitely was getting messaging from her that my dad was behaving immorally. And that did cause a lot of conflict. I had a stepmom, my dad and stepmom who've been together, I guess, probably since I was seven, but I didn't meet her till sometime, I think when I was eight is when they moved in together. And but this is still my stepmom. So this is an over 40-year relationship. This was not some fleeting thing. And in fact, I'm working on trying to build my relationship to look like theirs. But at the time, I got that messaging. So a lot of this messaging I was worried about, I was worried about sealing and temple stuff and how all that works. And what would happen to my dad, I don't think I was thinking outer darkness for him. But definitely was thinking not celestial kingdom, not sealed to me, very much this concept of sad heaven, which when I saw that described that way just a few years ago, I'm like, yeah, that heaven. Isn't that crazy and weird, but don't most of us Mormons, at some point, have this concept of I'm going to be sad, because here's all the people I'm going to be missing. My dad's parents were super sad, super TBM [True Believing Mormons] type people. I mean, they ran the family history library in San Diego for like 1015 years. And that was after their retirement, they were really solid. My grandpa, my dad's dad had been a bishop for I think like 10 years back in the 60s before they thankfully started shortening those terms, all while his kids were really young. And they had so much sadness about my dad leaving and so much gratitude for my mother for keeping them in the loop. And there really was a lot of messaging around how sad this was how there's this gap. And so this is when I was an adult, but this kind of sums it up once I was an adult and was married. And then they started also being so grateful to Larry for taking me to the temple. And somehow we're preserving this thread of their descendancy. Because Mina is still full in. At one point, my grandpa and I can't even remember my grandpa would send out like these "I'm the patriarch of the family" letters, it was on his heart to do that, really in a very sweet and loving way. And I can't even remember the subject of this letter. But it was sent out to all of his children. My dad wasn't the only one who'd left the church. I think he was the only one who technically wasn't a member. And who hadn't just sort of gone inactive. A couple of his brothers went inactive and that's probably really condescending because I am sure there was more intention there with them and their Faith Journeys, which I just frankly don't know about with my uncles. But my dad was the one I think, who probably to my grandparents would have seemed like he was taking a stand. I don't believe in this. I don't think it's true, right? He was the one who was more direct about it. Anyway, this letter went out to everyone and me. I think I was the only one out of all of their 30 ish grandkids who got this letter. And, of course, my dad didn't get the letter. So it's like I had filled in that gap. Yeah, it was a little weird. It was a little weird. And I understand why they do it. But that does kind of sum up. We're so sad that we've lost Cliff. But thankfully, Mina and her kids, they're on track, at least,

Brittany Mangelson 20:18

Such a weird, a weird pressure to put on you. And then as you're deconstructing your own faith, that track is probably playing in the back of your mind. That is a lot. So yeah, just continue the story. So how did you continue to sort and sift and make things work and as you were going into young adulthood, I don't know if you went to one of the church schools like BYU, or BYU Idaho or anything, but on your story,

Mina Leach 20:45

I will keep telling my story. So I did. I went to BYU, largely because I have a lot of anxiety and social anxiety. And I felt like I kind of knew what to expect from BYU. It's a really lame reason to go to a school. But there you are. And my freshman year at BYU was just sort of a struggle. I grew up back east in a small I mean, there were like, 198 people in my graduating class. So it's not the smallest, but it's not huge. I'm going to the school with the time I think the undergrad was 30,000. My hometown I grew up in was 30,000 people, lots of weirdness in the dorms and by weirdness I just mean, dating stuff and ritual stuff and and by ritual, I'm thinking like candle passing to announce engagements. We had several of those my freshman year, like largely because the missionary was still 19 largely the boys were all getting ready to go on missions, except a couple of return missionary boys who I don't know why would come home from a mission want to go live in the freshman dorms back when it was all 18 year olds. But there you go. And of course, so these are the guys sent into leadership and I'm living the BYU life. And it's okay, other than just regular. I miss my family, I want to go home kind of things. And I'm having a hard time making friends because I've got social anxiety kind of thing. Not that anyone called it social anxiety in 1991. But that's what it was. But then I'd come home, I'd still party a little bit with my friends. I'd feel super guilty. And I'd think I'll go back to school and live my real life, I guess. So sophomore year was better. It was fun. I was in an apartment. And that is when I met Larry. So and the only reason I met Larry was because my roommate was family home evening group leader. There was a mom and a dad. They were calling them like moms and dads in the calling like she was a mom. And Larry was called to be the dad. Because other Yeah, I know. It's a great story. I will say this. So I went to BYU saying I'm not going to get married. I'm going to get my degree. I'm going to go to graduate school afterwards, because I had this plan to be a therapist or counselor or whatever it was called back then. Yeah, I'm not going to get married. I was very like adamant about this. I was telling people this in my home ward. I am not going to BYU to get married. I'm not doing that. And I stuck by that. And I actually found out later that my roommates a little bit warned Larry about me when we started dating, you know, she wants to go to grad school. She's like really career focused. They're letting him know. So that was me. I felt like a less typical BYU co-ed that way. And Larry, he also never quite felt like he fit in. And in fact, the first day he showed up at our apartment, he doesn't remember seeing me but I remember seeing him. I thought he was super cute. He kind of looked a little surfer-y. He had on one of those Mexican Baja kind of jackets like the woven things and he's wearing puca beads because he always wore puca beads and his hair is kind of blonde back then and, and a little long for BYU. I mean, it technically fit the standard. And he looked kind of young. He had a real baby face back then. And I was so horrible, but like my, I'm not like I was some awesome woman person like I but I'm thinking this slacker. He didn't go on a mission. Because he looked like he was probably like 20 or something. And the truth was, he was a returned missionary. But that's what I was thinking, but I didn't really care. So I met Larry. We became really good friends. He hung out at our apartment a lot. He's a musician. So he would bring his guitar and he'd sing stuff he'd written. We'd sing CCR and things like that. We'd all have fun together. And eventually, yeah, we started being attracted to each other and started dating and all of that. And were getting pretty serious. I was feeling like a serious issue relationship, I guess. And April

came and he went home to California and I went home to Massachusetts and we were, it was 1993, so we were writing letters, three times a week. We have so many letters from each other. We were calling on the phone, which was expensive back then, because of long distance, right? Larry sold some of his surfboards that he wasn't using anymore to pay for phone bills. It was, um,

Brittany Mangelson 25:21

Okay, that's adorable.

Mina Leach 25:23

Yeah, well, the totally adorable thing is that he didn't go to his senior prom to buy one of these surfboards, he bought a surfboard instead of going to prom. So he's like, I'm kind of taking you to my prom. Looking back yet, Larry and I were super cute. I mean, we'd like each other a lot. I mean, that's part and we still do. We liked each other a lot. But let's back up for just a second. And remember, I'm 19 years old right now. He's 22, about to turn 23 in August, but he comes out to visit me he stays and he comes out to visit me for a week in Massachusetts. And just like best week of my life, best week of his life. It was a miserable summer for both of us. While he's in Massachusetts, we're on a drive one night talking. And he says to me, so are we looking at marriage here? Are we? I'm 19. I'm like, marriage. This is super fun. We're dating, right? He's like, Yeah, but you know, because as elders are told, as they leave their mission, their next job on the checklist is to get married. And I was like, but I didn't want to be in that space. I had this concept, partially because of the wording to have my patriarchal blessing that I wasn't going to get married for a long time, my patriarchal blessing that I got in the late 80s, as a female, talks a ton about my career. So there you go. I know. Weird. So I have this idea that I just wasn't gonna get married for a long time. So I just wasn't in that spot. And he said to me, Well, you know, the thing is, that's next, that's where I'm wanting to head is looking for someone to marry. And if we can keep dating, but if it doesn't look like we're heading on the marriage track, we probably ought to break up now instead of later. And that took me a while. I didn't like it. I kind of joke with Larry now how he manipulated me into marrying him by threatening to break up with me. And we laugh about it, right. Like we learned I've had these conversations and not throwing him under the bus with this. But I had to start thinking about it. And I really liked this guy. I really believed I loved this guy very much. And I did love him, although I look back now, and I'm like, I only liked him that much, and I married him when I was 19. That was stupid. But it wasn't stupid. I was to a point where I could not imagine breaking up with him. I could not imagine being happy moving on in life without Larry, we just liked each other. We're a good fit. And I stand by that. It does only increased over the years. So. So by the end of that trip, and by the time we were back at BYU, we weren't officially engaged, I guess. But we knew we were getting married. That was the plan. We were getting married. And of course, the second that you become engaged, all your bishops want you to get married as soon as possible. Because there's no way we want you to accidentally have sex, and we're afraid that's going to happen. So even though I'd always wanted a Spring wedding, June 2 was my preferred wedding date as a little kid. I don't know why I had one. But I did. And I was really thinking, yeah, let's get married in June, like, let's do that. But you know, you are getting all the pressure from everyone. Oh, no, get married Christmas break. We really don't want people accidentally having sex. So we did. We got married at Christmas break, the only day that the LA Temple was open during the break was on a Tuesday, December 28. So yay, I have a nice Christmas anniversary, which kind of sucks. But actually, it's easy to take time off. So that's sometimes nice to now that kids are old and you can actually do fun things. But we get married. And I'm three weeks shy of 19. And I am realizing and this had been that whole Fall, but I knew, Okay, I'm

doing this. I am committing I am jumping in to Mormonism with both feet. I can't be in this spot anymore of I'm just not sure about this. I have to decide there is God. The LDS church is true. I'm going to make these covenants. And I'm going to raise my kids in this and that was a big moment for me of having to jump in with both feet. And with deciding that I was going to accept all this. We also very quickly got pregnant right away, as I guess good Mormon kids do and decided to move down to Southern California to be near Larry's family for several types of reasons. And here began my discovery that West Coast Mormonism is maybe a little bit different to East Coast Mormonism. And it's a lot more conservative. And it's a lot more traditional. And it's, I mean, it's not that you don't have your nuanced people everywhere, you do. But like, as a whole, just going to church experience was so different. In less than a year of getting married and deciding Yes, and jumping in with both feet. We're now in this super conservative traditional culture. And the way my brain works, sadly, like I don't like this part of me, but it does happen, is that I started to shift. I became weirdly politically conservative. As my kids started getting older, like I started really emphasizing modesty in terms of covered shoulders to my kids, which is really weird, because I was also still in this headspace of calling body parts by their real names and trying to not have body shaming. And yet we have to cover our four year olds shoulders, because it's just ridiculous. And it's a really weird place to be sitting in. But I was I was diving in with both feet. So this was a shift. And sometimes that was easy to maintain. And sometimes that wasn't. You had asked if Larry and I were always on different paths with beliefs. And for the majority of our raising our kids, we really largely weren't because I was just diving into this traditional role. I did get my bachelor's degree when my second kid was like five months old when I went up and I walked at BYU, but I put off graduate school. And that was tough. It was tough emotionally. Weirdly. At the same time, Larry was also giving up on his dream of going into music. And instead he did go to graduate school, which I was a little bit jealous of. And we had conversations back then about that. It was hard part of my heart wanted to be a stay at home mom, because I'd been taught that was the thing to do. And a huge part of my heart also started to lose myself, right? Like that's the thing that happens. When you have to even say I'm putting on hold probably for decades here, the path I'd wanted to go on. What I wanted to do for me. And, you lose your sense of self almost intentionally I feel like I was taught this is how to be a good mother in Zion. It is to put this stuff aside and to focus on your kids and to support your husband. And to support him in his callings. Larry and I both had pretty heavy leadership callings. Throughout most of our time as adults in the LDS church, I mean, I was young women's President, at least twice. I was in seven or nine young women's presidencies was often the first counselor I was in there a lot. I was also primary President and for like a three year stint when we lived in the mountains in Southern California. Yeah, and Larry was in an elders quorum presidencies elders quorum president or mission leader, you know, eventually, more recently, he was put in as stake assistant executive secretary. So he was kind of the executive secretary to the counselors in the state presidency. So he was always there. And that was actually while I was in grad school for a lot of that part. But my point being like, we always had these heavy callings, always this idea of this is how we're supposed to be weird resentments would build up when Larry is just not a guy who naturally wants to call the family for family home evening. And that should have been okay if I wanted to call them but I'm being taught in Relief Society that your righteous priesthood holding husband should be the one calling them and so I'm thinking there's something wrong with my husband. And I get really pissed when I start thinking about how much resentment occasionally the church would build of me looking at my husband thinking you're not doing your job, and it's just so unfair. I mean, it's like the flip side of the patriarchy, right. It's the patriarchy isn't good for anybody. These gender roles that are stuck and prescribed and, and worthiness is based around how well you live out these gender roles, right? Like, it sucks. And so for

parenting, when it came to how to raise our kids was largely on track with each other. But so my ability to choose belief in God was very, very dependent on how much other stress there was in my life. So when there wasn't much stress, I could choose it. I could be genuinely feeling there like really in this space. Yeah, this is all true. Like I believe this. When there was major stress, which there was on an off, Larry has some chronic health problems that he developed on his mission. There was a time that I was caregiving my mother while she died with cancer. We have a kid with special needs, like there have been times where life's gotten really heavy, and in those moments, it was a choice. I have to choose to believe this because in my heart of hearts, I really don't think there is God. So I really have to choose testimony. And I believed it was something, I could use my agency to choose this. That just got taxing over time. And as my kids got older and started going to youth programs, I still sat in a somewhat nuanced place. It's not like I would ever have described myself exactly as a TBM. I mean, highly active into leadership, all of that, but I couldn't fully let go of what I was raised with. So as the kids got older, I started to be intentionally doing multiple times weekly, what in my mind referred to as damage control. So my kids would come home from Sunday school with some teacher saying really hurtful things towards LGBTQ community or things like that. Or I'd have daughters coming home from young women lessons, so focused on motherhood that they're feeling kind of discounted as a human, or coming home from youth conferences, also frustrated at the disparity in modesty standards between boys and girls. And I felt like I was constantly having to reteach and try to teach them this more nuanced kind of way. Coming home from bishops interviews and trying to like do damage control there that felt like it became a big part of my life. And it should have been a much bigger flag telling me what the hell are you doing here? Like, this isn't how it shouldn't be right? But I was feeling good about myself as a mom that I'm trying to fix some of this problematic stuff. And so it was a little tricky. I remember one time sometime in the height of all this, my son coming home, he must have been like 12 or 13. He was young, but it was in youth Sunday school. He came home one day he goes, What is this with Leach family speaking our minds? And I'm like, Well, I don't know, I guess we have some convictions about some things, again, that largely were revolving around loving people, right. And just, this was increasing to with my desires to feel more congruent. Because for a long time, even though I was choosing this and did all the shifts, I didn't quite feel like I was authentic to what I really believed in my heart. I was asking, Larry, last night, we were on the same page. We didn't feel like we were on different pages. And he said, No, we were on the same page. He said, but I always you know, and I didn't hide from Larry and I weird thing with God, belief in God, I never hid that from him. But I don't know. I talked about it every time. But he knew that probably people paying attention, in my wards would have known that because I did start being a little more open about that struggle, but always ending with I'm choosing this, right. So it's like, they'll accept that story if your struggles end in but I'm choosing to believe, right? So the in fact, they find that really validating and you can totally choose this, to have doubts, right? So But Larry said, an interesting thing is that I always thought that I had a stronger belief in God, but that you had a stronger love for Jesus. And I will say that I think that one good thing that Mormonism served for me, sticking around as an adult, was that it gave me time to occasionally really study the New Testament, to study the parts of the Book of Mormon, that talk about Jesus. And I really did develop a very strong love for Jesus, a very strong connection to his moral ethic. And it's not quite the Mormon Jesus. It's this Jesus that I believe I read about in the New Testament, this is my understanding of the sermon on the mount that I really connect to and find value in and want to be and this is kind of back to that Carolyn Pearson. This is all about love you guys, this is all about loving people. Jesus said that the most important thing was to love God and that you do that by loving people. That that's the same commandment when he says like unto I really believe he's saying, this is the same commandment. They're not separate. You don't love God,

and then love people if there's room to love people, but like loving people is how you love God. And this is what I more than anything was trying to teach my kids growing up as well. And I do think I mean, they're just good kids also, but I've got some really kind hearted children and so I didn't totally mess all that up.

Brittany Mangelson 39:32

Absolutely not. You did not mess it up. And that's really interesting that Larry was able to piece out that you may have had a deeper understanding and appreciation for Jesus where he had a testimony of Jesus that you see in the New Testament and he had one of God because usually, even though Mormonism is the Godhead, those two being separated, usually they're pretty conflated, and there's when the one domino falls, both of them fall or it's really hard to be drawn to one aspect of the Divine over the other. But it sounds like you were able to find more comfort and what I would call the social gospels or liberation theology of what does the story of Jesus say to the outcast, I might be putting words in your mouth, but just based on what you've shared about reading, teaching your kids how to love everyone going back to that Carolyn Pearson book, it also reminded me of the primary song The Jesus says love everyone, treat them kindly to when your heart is filled with love, others will love you. Just like that basic, you know, I resonate with this a lot. Also, I just want to put a little note and then say that my anniversary is December 19, for very similar reasons. So

Mina Leach 40:51

I'm sure I'm guessing a lot of us have these weird, random. That's the day the temple was open. The holiday shutdown kind of dates. Yeah, it's crazy.

Brittany Mangelson 41:02

And it's like, just semester, so you don't have to like sign a new contract. You're a young college student. Yeah. I thought that was funny, too. So this is all very, very relatable. Let's dive in a little bit deeper about when you really did start examining the Mormon framework that you were really trying to make it work. You really were trying to make it work.

Mina Leach 41:22

I worked my ass off for a lot of years, really, to make it work. And so yeah, I don't feel like I just kind of gave up. I really did. I worked super hard. Yes, at some point, still, there's only apparently, so many decades that even I can do that. Not that I'm so awesome. Just that I'm so afraid. So I went back to graduate school in 2013. And this was following my mother died in November of 2011. So like a year and a half before I went back to grad school, that time when I was caregiving, my mother was a huge time where for the first time, this was all internal, I was thinking, I don't even want to try to have a testimony. I was still going to church and stuff. But I was feeling very bitter about it. Because just the stress was so high. It took a lot of mental and emotional energy for me to make that choice. It really did. And I felt so guilty about the fact that, not that I didn't believe in God, but I didn't want to try to believe in God right now. So like, I felt shame and guilt around that. And I can't even remember, like, I don't even have a memory whether I ever got back to a solid place after my mom was sick. I don't think of my mom's illness as being part of that. But it really might have been a time where I think I was sort of physically and mentally out for longer than I realized if I really think about this story, when I started grad school, and I went, by the way to Northwest Nazarene. So this is a Church of the Nazarene University, they're pretty conservative religiously, also. But just getting back into the study. So I'm going back to

become a marriage and family therapist. I don't know how it's possible to really start leaning into people's stories and hearing about their lives and not come back to this place of compassion, radical compassion for humanity. And I hate to say this, but radical compassion for humanity does not fit in with the Mormon framework. It does not the church, the institution, the ordinances, all of which we kind of conflate with God and Jesus. So love for God, we think is about love for the institution. It takes the priority every time and if you were going to be compassionate towards humans, nothing can take priority over that. Just being in that space. Again, I'm studying, I started to feel like I'm coming more back to myself. I'm allowing myself although in the middle there, like I didn't think of myself as conservative. I also had a nice little libertarian stretch that I felt like was me trying to shift back into socially liberal thinking. And I kind of let my politics go back how I'd been raised and originally what was in my heart. I was more and more sitting back when it came to church. Larry was still serving with the stake presidency during the beginning of this which made it hard because Larry went through a very non Larry kind of, I am going to do all the right things. I am going to be in a white shirt and tie I am going to shave every week. And we are going to go to every stake meeting there that we're required to go to no matter what we've got some weird stories about that. But it is strange because this weird part of me is this version of my husband is showing up that church has been telling me I want forever and yet it's like well, but I don't want to then have to go to every stake meeting. Like I don't want that part of it. You know, so I have this weird tension in there again, totally unfair. So I'm in this sort of spot when the 2015 exclusion policy comes out in a nutshell, in November of 2015, couple of handbook policies, kind of got leaked. I'm not exactly leaked, but kind of. One was saying that homosexual people who were know if it was if they were married or living together or whatever, but if they're actively doing that, they have apostate status, and they need to be excommunicated. And that one was a little bit distressing to me. It was crappy. I didn't agree with it. But I also was like, well, but yeah, that's their doctrine. Like, that's their belief. They're like, that checks out. The problematic one, I think, for a lot of us was the fact that they made this rule now that children of gay or queer, right, if you're in relationship, we're not going to allow your kids to get baptized, they can attend, but they can't get baptized, so they can't get the priesthood. If they're boys, they can't go on Temple trips. They can't do any of these things that all their peers will be doing. They can join the church when they're 18. If they then totally renounce their parents lifestyle, and say, Yes, this is bad. This is evil. I get it. I'm not part of that. Now. I can get baptized. And wow, I mean, I'm not the only person that hit hard. So I'm not going to act like it was something personal, but I did really feel it. Part of me really felt it also, because of the way the Mormon church talks about marriage and legal marriage as part of what makes everything okay. My dad and stepmom didn't get married till I was like, in my mid 30s. They were committed, they were living together. They were partners. That was still my stepmom. But so I'm looking at that. And I'm saying what's different? What's different between a gay couple and what my dad was doing, which the church would also really say was bad. And I can't imagine it was so stressful for me. I mean, I was feeling like a little kid. It was just stressful enough for me that my parents were divorced, and my dad left the church, if I hadn't been allowed to get baptized because of what my dad was doing. Oh, like, I can't even sit in that spot. So I hear this, this came out on a Thursday night. And I am like, sobbing, I am pretty hysterical. I have also, growing up, some pretty tender places in my heart, for some very close family, friends who are lesbian who helped nurture me, take me under their wing when I was a teenager. So that's always been there to... plus, I'm imagining myself as a kid like this, and I don't see Jesus in any of this stuff. And this is the first time I told Larry, as I'm sobbing about this, I said, I don't know how long I can stay. I really don't. I don't know how much longer I can keep doing this. So what Larry said to me was, you believe in the Book of Mormon, right, which at the time I did, and I was like,

yeah, he's like, where else are you gonna go? I don't know. But I can't do this. I just can't. And so that was tough. It was tough. That was the moment and I didn't leave then. A lot of people did. There's a part of me that kind of wishes that I would have. But I needed more confidence, I think in what my relationship was going to look like before I could do that. So it took a few years. But I really started pulling back at that point, I was still in grad school, so I didn't have heavy callings. So it was easier for me to pull back. I started leaving Relief Society a lot, because there were very heated conversations, people who were struggling and women who I love dearly, saying, Well, you know, like, the prophet has spoken. So if this isn't in your heart to agree with, like, you need to reexamine your beliefs. And it was just so hurtful. So my mom is actually buried in the cemetery right next to the church building that we were going to at the time, so I'd hang out with my mom, third hour. So I just started leaving. I didn't feel like I could actually say anything. The Sunday before this policy had come out Larry had been released from serving with the stake presidency and been put into the bishopric. So he's in the bishopric. I'm just like, this is all crap. But what am I going to do? Nothing. I'll just spend third hour with my mom. That's what I'll do. I was really shutting down and really turning a lot of my service energy, my spiritual energy to my work. And I more and more was just saying, Look, this is where I'm doing God's work. It's not at church right now. It's in counseling people. It's in helping families, helping couples helping kiddos and that's what I'm doing. And so I kind of made this shift and still was able to stick in the church. And then in 2017, Larry lost a business and we ended up filing bankruptcy. He was unemployed for at least a full year. We lost our house. So we moved from the small place we'd been in into Boise. I was joking. And putting quotes around that I was joking with Larry, as we were moving, you know, they don't know us there. They don't know that we're always leadership people. And like, we could just go now and then and sort of be the semi active family who just shows up occasionally. He's like, now that's that's not going to work. And there were different reasons for that. But moving into that new ward, there were some lovely people, there was a smaller ward, but I never really put energy into making friends or connections. I pretty quickly was called to be the youth Sunday school teacher and very few youth. So this was a 12 to 18 class. And there were maybe three or four kids and two of them at first were mine. So I'm teaching out of the Come Follow Me manual, and I am just getting to pick all the stuff that's just about Jesus, wherever I can find it and ignore the rest. I can't comment much, I have no idea what that ward thought of me in terms of how Larry and I were perceived. In other words, when we were just so visible, this is the first time I was kind of in the background. At the same time, because of all we were going through, Larry and I started going on these long walks many times a week and talking and I just started to become more and more open about my atheism, about all of that. And, he was becoming more open about stuff going on with him with the church. It wasn't the same brand, as mine. But he was also unsatisfied. And also was, again wanting a break several times. In the last few years before we left, Larry would say, I think if I just took a break, I just need a break. And then I can go back and I tell him you can take a break if you want. But if I take a break with you, I'm never going back. I knew that about myself. I knew the minute I stepped away, I would be free. And so I feel a little bit bad because I think that kept him from taking the break he really wanted. But through all of our conversations, he did finally say, I'm going to take a break. And we didn't have a Sunday for him to take a break before the COVID shutdown happened. So we were forced to take a break. And we started doing home church. And it was pretty amazing because we have my two youngest kids who also were on their way they were going with us, I think to make us happy. And in this course of home church that we discovered, Oh, you don't need to be going to please people. So our home church started looking like Larry and my son doing the sacrament and we'd have some sort of sacrament meeting talk that could kind of be anything we would take turns doing it. People started bringing in podcast episodes that we were

listening to of nuanced LDS spaces. I tended to do the Sunday School portion of it because I then the Sunday School teacher before anyway, I started listening to the Beyond the Block podcast, which was helping me specially the year we got into doctrine covenants, which has never been one of my favorites as an LDS person that has kind of changed listening to the Beyond the Block guys. They approach the Scriptures from the vantage point of the marginalized, so very close to my heart to my kids like it was resonated with all of us. And so we did this for all of 2020. And, and in the meantime, in that summer, when we're in shutdown, I got put into the primary presidency to help. They were trying to just do these virtual things, some virtual primary, we were doing like a newsletter that we'd send out that had fun stuff that was helping. So I was kind of part of that. I really shouldn't have accepted that calling and actually spent 20 minutes on the phone trying to convince the bishopric member not to extend the callings. Here's all the reasons you shouldn't because unfortunately, even though I'm like at the time, what this 46 year old woman, if he was going to extend the calling, I really wasn't going to be able to say no. So since I couldn't talk him out of extending the calling to me, I had this calling, which wasn't bad. There were some good things about that. I did develop a little bit of a friendship with the primary president and I really valued her and actually even shared with her a little bit of what was going on with me as I was leaving but when it was looking like yeah, they're coming back. I knew I can't go back to church right now. I can't do this. It took me about a year to decide and I have even mixed feelings about mentioning it but I did make the intentional decision to remove my garments and it took me a long time to be okay with that but it was starting to feel sacrilegious almost to be wearing them like it was starting to feel a little not okay or ethical. They were wanting everyone to come back to live church and I was saying I can't do that. I've talked to the primary president, if I really think I probably need to be released, she's like, Hey, you can if you want to, she's like, I have no problem though with you continuing to serve, if you would like. Don't be released just because you think you're not allowed to serve, then this is where you are and your faith. Not that I was promoting this with kids, I'm respectful, you know, but I knew I needed to be released. I told Larry, we had a new bishop that we didn't know I said, I don't want to just not show up. I want to go in and tell the bishop I'm not coming back. And so he set up an appointment for us to go talk to the bishop. Between the time he set up that appointment and our appointment a week later, the whole Natasha Helfer thing came to light, which was huge for me because she is a marriage and family therapist who was excommunicated for her public professional views around sexuality, sexual orientation, sexual media, masturbation, the nurturing of people through a post Mormon or mixed faith kind of thing. She's getting excommunicated for that. I don't have a public platform, but there is nothing that she teaches that isn't part of my practice. And so to watch that was really distressful and disturbing, and had me for the first time thinking the church doesn't even want me. They might not know they don't want me because I don't have all these public platforms that someone like Natasha Helfer does, just because that's the way she has her business. And she does a ton of good. But that's me. They don't want me either. That was the moment it was in 2021, that I was ready to be done for realsies. Like, officially,

Brittany Mangelson 56:39

It's so interesting, because so many people left the LDS church during the pandemic. And that forced break, I think, really just allowed folks to face all of their issues, all the things that they've been putting off, you know, quote, unquote, dealing with. And I just remember watching you and Larry, in live time, sort this out and figure this out. I think the pandemic provided a space for people to just be honest with themselves and evaluate every little piece that was part of their testimony and say, Is this worth it? And when we can go back to church, are we going to go back and pretend like everything is normal? Or are

we going to follow this shift and do something different. So just knowing that we made contact pretty early on and recognizing that you were almost my first case study of what is going to happen to Mormons who are like trying to hang on. I know, these folks in Boise and just think that it's such a familiar story to so many people now but have really processed what happened to them and how the pandemic shoved them, not necessarily into a faith transition or crisis, but help them recognize, oh, this is real, this is happening. And I can deal with it. Because I'm not faced with having to go to church every week as an obligation.

Mina Leach 58:01

So it gives you space, right? It gives you space and time and the ability to really look at what would life look like without this. And it's always easier to not do something if I have to opt in, rather than I'm opting out. And this felt like a way for me to say, Yeah, I'm not going to opt into this. This is where I found Community of Christ. It was really interesting. So in all my years of kind of fantasizing about actually leaving the church, I'm talking decades of this, not that I was thinking about it all the time. But when I'm in these moments of stress, and I think about what that would be, I had always made the assumption, partially because this was my dad, but partially because of the way the church sets this up. If I leave the church, that's just it. Church isn't part of my life anymore. Worship isn't part of my life, leaving all of this and I'm heading into this space that I don't know quite what it looks like, but I think it'll be okay. And I was fine with that. I really was that wasn't part of what was keeping me is Oh, I really want this church experience. But I always assumed that would be the case. So during this time when we're doing home church, and actually Larry, at this time, we were doing Sunday school, he was in the Sunday School presidency. And so when a teacher couldn't come occasionally, Larry and I would co teach we actually had some pretty popular lessons that were all based on the Beyond the Block guys, but they didn't really know it. So we dive into Doctrine and Covenants. I've been listening to beyond the block guys because they're the only ones who are making this anything tolerable for me. And we hit whatever section it was on common consent. And who do they have as a guest on their podcast, but Brittany Mangelson is coming to talk about Community of Christ and common consent, and the doctrine covenants and how that all looks. And I'm listening to you. I don't know you yet. Of course. And I'm like, This is so cool. This is kind of what this was meant to be. And you quoted some scriptures out of the much more recent Doctrine and Covenants that were just absolutely beautiful. Absolutely felt touching and felt like scripture. And then at the end, you gave a little plug for the Latter-day Seekers community. And you said join us on Facebook. Friend me, I'll friend you. And let me tell you, Brittany, I am not the type of person who friends someone that I don't know. In fact, this has kind of held me back from I think, getting as many friends in the seeker community because I have a hard time like, occasionally I think I finally just like friended Wendy Eaton a couple of weeks ago, she keeps popping up and I think she wouldn't mind right. Like, I'm so afraid I'm just gonna harass people. But anyway, we listen to that on Saturday, because Larry and I were going to be teaching Sunday school was the last time we taught, we're gonna be teaching Sunday school. So this is probably in February or March of 2021. So I found the seeker group, I started filling out the questions so that you know that these aren't people coming in to harass I started that and then I stopped midstream because we had to teach our Sunday school class. So we taught our Sunday school class. And then by the time I got back, I had a message from you. Hey, looking for questions. I'm like, Yeah, I know. I'm doing them, I'm doing them. Um, so I sent that in, and I even friended You, and You accepted my friendship and I lurked for a while because I was kind of nervous about this. I lurked for a little while. I was going on the website, I was trying to find out. This is such a Mormon thing to do. What do you believe? What is this? And I'm reading and people

are asking, What do you believe? And the answers are so hysterical in the Latter-day Seekers group. So I was like, Well, you know, I mean, there really is no big official, I mean, I guess the closest thing might be it, it's always these that now make total sense to me. But as I'm looking over that website, I'm like, Okay, so here are these principles, and those look kind of cool. But seriously, though, what do you believe? What's the doctrine? And it finally started eventually to sink in, oh, there are no belief tests here. If this is principled living, at the same time, because I'm in this space right around conference. So this was right around the time that I am saying, Yeah, we're not going to go back and taking off my garments. In my therapy, I'm dealing with all of this feelings of unworthiness that I've had, since I was tiny, and all of the anxiety and the perfectionism that have all played around and messages that I've gotten from the church, and one of you shared a YouTube video of Carla Long. She's been so instrumental, I don't even think she knows how much I feel like she is sort of my spiritual guide, in some ways. I mean, we have interacted, but not as much as I have gotten from her. So it was around conference time. And so one of you posted a video to a talk that was talking about worthiness. And she's intentionally combating this idea that worth and worthiness are different, that you can do anything that would have God loving you less. It was huge, hugely powerful. Between Carla and conversations I had with my dad and my therapist, I finally started to move away from this idea of worthiness being a problem. So I started telling Larry about the things I'm learning and for a while he doesn't join, because he wanted to let me have that space, Larry can be a little more social than I am. And so if he enters a space with me, it kind of becomes his space. And I was telling him, No, you can do this, but I still wasn't commenting very much yet. I don't think I did until Larry joined the group. But I'm telling him all this stuff about Community of Christ, and about this seeker ministry, and the we're getting more active in the seeker group and it's kind of summer 2021. We start zooming into the Salt Lake congregation services. Wow, the healing that went on there for me watching female priesthood holders administering hearing, I mean, I cried the first time I heard that blurb that gets said at the beginning of communion about all are welcome at the Lord's table or Christ table. I can't remember which it is. But wow. And it's women saying this, I start going on in other spaces, and they're gay men saying this and it's just powerful to me the contrast and I started to see hearing you on the Beyond the Block podcast as the universe saying, Hey, if you want, here's another place. If you want, where you could land, you don't have to leave church behind. First time I'd ever considered that there might be a place where I would feel a bit uncomfortable. And it was really a huge, huge shift for me. And again, because of this principled living, which those enduring principles really align with just my personal ethic, overall, and this idea that maybe I can hold on to Jesus, even if I don't believe there's God, maybe that's okay. Because I can actually even say that to people in these spaces, and no one's freaking out at me. How can you believe in Jesus if you don't believe in God? Value in Jesus if you don't believe he's the son of God, and it's like, well, people all over have these teachers that they follow. And can I not use Christ that way, and really love the relationship I feel like I have with this concept of Christ. So I feel like Community of Christ gave me this ground to be able to have it not be all or nothing. Yeah, so that was my introduction, I guess, into Community of Christ.

Brittany Mangelson 1:05:53

And were those the same things that kept you coming back? And then what are any of your hang ups about being involved with another religion?

Mina Leach 1:06:05

Good questions. So part of what keeps me coming back. I mean, it is that space, but also, so Larry, he has been in different space, it appears that he's shifting more and more towards this type of space I'm in but he's been in a different spot. And when we started attending Community of Christ, he still very much reads the Book of Mormon as scripture, whether it's historical or not, he reads it as scripture. Very big fan of the restoration, like the Kirtland era of the Mormon church he loves. Was for quite a while still a fan of Joseph Smith, I think that's a little bit shifting. It's horrible to say, but partly because of my reaction. He's a complex guy, right? There are a lot of beautiful things that he was trying to set up that I love, but there's just some super problematic things. And again, like that, it's less of a problem in Community of Christ, because we're not idolizing him here. We can say, yeah, here's the good stuff he did, and the rest was crap. But in the Mormon church, it's like, he's our hero. And if we talk about the crap, like, somehow that has to discount everything, I can hold on to the good and reject the bad and in essence, not throw the baby out with the bathwater, right, which the Mormon Church tells you, you have to do. It's all true, or it's not. So this was a great space for me to come in as kind of this Christian atheist, and for Larry to come in is this restoration Book of Mormon kind of guy. And we both have space, there's welcome for both of us here. There is no pressure for anything. If it weren't for Larry, I don't know if I'd be quite as keen on any church experience. If that's part of it, I like that there's a space that we can do that together. Part of what holds me back from diving in too deeply, is I feel like it's about me more than it is about Community of Christ. I watched myself for a solid two decades be someone who I was not in order to fit in. And in order to conform, and in order to like have both feet in, and I do not get the message, that Community of Christ would require that of me. But I am still scared that I might say, hey, Community of Christ is my place, I'm going to dive in because they let me dive in the way I am. But then what if I hit a point where I don't want to be there am I going to have another decade of trying to back away like, I can't do that to myself, again, the only way I could imagine myself at some point joining Community of Christ is I become sure enough of myself that I can honor my own heart, and my own agency enough to allow myself to have control of this. So so much of my hesitancy around Community of Christ, having watched myself with the Mormon church, and I can't let myself be into that space again. That's a big part of it. And there aren't many, but I know for priesthood, there are still some behavioral rules. And a very probably arrested part of me still feels a little bit like a 17, 18, 19 year old saying, no one's going to tell me what to do again. Sorry, you're not going to tell me that I have to do this, or I can't do that. I am going to make my own adult choices. And I don't believe I'm reckless. I believe I'm pretty responsible. But if I'm going to go have a drink with my kiddo, because she's performing at a bar, no one's gonna tell me that I can't do that. With other people telling me how to be worthy, basically, because I believe I am a good human overall, I'm not perfect, and I get it wrong sometimes like we all do, but have a good heart. A gin and tonic is not going to change that. So I am in a weird space with that. Larry and I, one of the things that we're doing, we're working hard to reconstruct our life to intentionally build it the way we want it to be. And that involves so many levels of things. It involves what we wear, what we consume, how we spend our time, how we spend our Sundays, how we spend our money, how we charitably give, and part of what we're wanting from a church experience, or whatever part of its community part of is this space to rebuild. There's a Boise congregation here who are fantastic, and we love them. And we felt so welcomed. And we're also in this spot in our transition where we're feeling like, that's maybe not the most productive use of our time. And so we're occasionally wanting to go and meet with the Boise people. And I'm hoping I'm feeling like it's a healthier place to be that Sunday, by Sunday, we're just sort of deciding what we want to do, and what's going to be best for us. But there's so much about Community of Christ that really resonates with

me, and has me thinking, I don't know if we'll ever join, I don't know if we'll ever go all the time. But this may be like our religious church kind of home base.

Brittany Mangelson 1:11:15

So Mina, I love everything you just said. And that was one huge reason why I wanted to have you on because I think that so often, we assume that these stories of transformation have like a prescriptive, beginning, middle and end and that membership. And I want to be clear, that was never the goal of Community of Christ. But I think that some people having a baptism having a seeker officially joining. But that's like the Mormon baggage, if you will, that we carry into this. So in Salt Lake, we have seekers who have been around for years and years and years, and they are very similar to you. And their reasons for not joining are very similar to you. And they are just as much a part of our community and our structure and our culture and our voice as anyone else. And I think that it's so important to do religion and faith on your own terms, especially after you've been told what to believe, and how to fit in and having this pressure to conform your entire life. And like you said, you know, for you can recognize that two solid decades, you were living a different life, a life that deep down, you knew you didn't believe in, and that wasn't with integrity, and anyone with their own integrity would not ask you to compromise that again, right. And so if there's any sort of, I mean, hanging out might be too strong of a word, but stirrings in your soul that says this is the level that I'm comfortable with. And I'm not comfortable going beyond that. And you can be open to change, you can be open to leaving and never coming back and being completely unchurched and having friendships in Community of Christ, you could join one day, and like anything in between is completely fine and acceptable, because you are living a life with integrity. And I think that is the most for me important thing that a person can do, especially again, after leaving a denomination that tells you this is how you have integrity, you do this and this and this, and then that's what integrity is. But taking control of that for yourself, I think is the biggest gift that you can give yourself and you can give your spouse and your kids and your community and to us, those of us on board with community with you those in the Boise congregation and anywhere else that you happen to spend time with. We want people to show up as their whole selves. And if you can't do that, you can't do that without your integrity intact. So yeah, I think that that was really, really important and nothing to be ashamed of, for you or for Community of Christ. And I think that that can also be something that can be a struggle for both seekers and Community of Christ people. I hear seekers all the time, kind of apologizing for that. And it's like, no, no, no. We want you to live with integrity. And I just want to reiterate to what you said for you, this isn't a Community of Christ problem. This is something that you're working on with yourself. So it's not like there's something that Community of Christ needs to be doing differently or whatever. This is just where we all are, with our own integrity intact. And I think that that's beautiful and how we create authentic communities. Chfs kiss to that last response I loved

Mina Leach 1:14:40

you Yeah. And again, like this, to me is the beauty of Community of Christ is that I can sit in that place, and it's okay. And so that is my plug. Community price isn't going to be everybody's home and that's okay. But wow, for me, this gives a great space for being able to lean into that. Just process and ensuring and no rush. I don't have to figure this out. Yeah.

Brittany Mangelson 1:15:06

What does your relationship with God look like now? I mean, how has God, and I'm using air quotes too, how has that changed? What are the values that you're bringing forward? How are you navigating this continually with Larry, just keep talking about the now,

Mina Leach 1:15:23

here's how I describe my idea of God. And when Larry and I are having conversations that helps us to call his version of it God and my version of it, the universe, and then we can feel like we're on the same page. But I do have this thought, or feeling or belief that there is something that connects us. As humans, that connects us to the earth. It connects us to knowledge and truth and healing and all kinds of things that I don't necessarily believe is personified. I believe that whatever this energy is, humans have felt throughout history, and they try to name it all kinds of things. They name it, whatever their god is, Mother Nature, or the universe, or fairies, or whatever the things are, there is this common human experience of something that is both infinitely outside of ourselves and very deeply within ourselves at the same time. there is this common human experience, and we have all kinds of names for it. To me, I feel like the LDS framework for that is still describing the same thing. priesthood is harnessing that listening to the Spirit, that's your deep dive inward. Prayer is your vast reach outward, it's all different ways of defining that, with that sort of being my concept of God. And with this love I have of the teacher, Jesus, and his radical care of humans, individuals, and his resistance against authority and against power in church structure. My ideas of Jesus helped me with my ethic. My vision of the universe, I'm still trying to figure out how I want to connect. I was like, you know, I can still pray, I can still do all that, because that is the framework I'm familiar with. I'm a little bit bummed that I really didn't start investigating the feminine divine very much before I was just done with God at all. That's a bummer to me. I don't know how to authentically get back into that space, because I'm just like, all right, girl version, which sounds so dismissive, but I can't get my head there. I just can't. The thing I'm struggling with, I'm not using that as the negative the thing I'm wrestling with maybe? Is it going to look like some dabbling in household witchery? Is it going to look like because I love ritual. That's another thing, frankly, the Mormon church except the temple really failed on. I love ritual, it feeds my soul, I can do the dive in the Holy Ghost kind of dive, I can do that. I'm having a hard time knowing how I want to connect externally. What I want that to sound like if I am trying to put out some kind of intention for my day. I don't know yet what that looks like. And I'm kind of okay with that. But I'm also sort of feeling this pull to, at some point, figure out what's going to feel meaningful to me and real to me, because right now prayer doesn't feel very real to me, I love another great thing about Community of Christ is you can totally participate without being a member. So I love when I get to read the prayer for peace, because in my mind, that's like putting out this intention into the universe as a group. I love that. So it's not like I totally reject prayer. But for me, personally, on my own, I'm not sure what that looks like yet. It's all about connection.

Brittany Mangelson 1:19:11

And I think that that is again, pointing back to integrity, the way that you have found to approach God, the universe. I really like the inward energy and the outward energy. You have found a way to do that with integrity, and I think you're only met and that's what works for you and how you connect with this cosmic force that connects us with each other and the planet. The way that you've been able to reframe spirituality on your own terms with your own integrity intact, I think is really admirable. really admirable.

Mina Leach 1:19:47

I'm getting there. I'm on a path that feels authentic.

Brittany Mangelson 1:19:51

Yeah. And do you feel like you're able to just be more open and honest with Larry about it? It sounds like your communication with this topic because has always been pretty strong. But do you feel like it's gotten easier now that you've both shed the need for certainty and conformity? And are you just able to relax and say, This is what's working for me? This is what's not? And absolutely,

Mina Leach 1:20:14

I mean, we have always been pretty open. We've had a good relationship. And so what I'm about to say does not imply that we previously weren't having good relationship, but our ability to talk about what works for us what doesn't what we're afraid of what we hope for what we're sad about. It's just become so much easier. But Larry's still doing some even church deconstruction, what does he want to do with that we're reconstructing our relationship. We're shedding this idea that Larry's the provider, and I'm the nurturer. And I'm part of who he has to provide for I'm one of his dependents or, he owes me provision. We've both had to address all of this kind of stuff. And we're rebuilding it. And we're not where we want to be eventually, but just see this beautiful path to reconstructing everything. We're wanting to do a vow renewal, we're coming up on 30 years, just to even reclaim the reason that we got married when we had no business getting married when we did you know, we should have moved in together for a while we shouldn't have had kids right off. Not that I don't love Mike. That's not what that's about. I love my kids. But again, it's just we weren't adults yet. We got thrust into this adult world and the maturation didn't have time to catch up. So we're doing it now. We're having a lot of conversations that we probably should have had in our 20s. But that's okay.

Brittany Mangelson 1:21:44

I love it. I just love you, too. This is great. And yes, I really hope to get Larry on the podcast as well. To hear his perspective about all of this. Is there anything else about your beliefs that you want to state? And then do you have any advice for other seekers who are figuring out their deconstruction and reconstruction, their faith transition?

Mina Leach 1:22:05

I think I've covered all of where I am in beliefs right now or in process with that, I feel like I've got three things that I wish I could just like burn on the hearts of every person who's in the middle of this. The first thing is that you are worthy that no matter where you are right now, on this path, it doesn't matter. It doesn't even matter what direction you're headed. Because I've sometimes heard that Mormonism doesn't matter where you are just are you heading the write direction, doesn't matter what direction you're headed, you are worthy, because you are a human, and you have a soul and a body. And that's all there is there. And along with that piece is that there is no rush about this. You don't have to get it figured out this week, or this month or this year. And in fact, maybe our whole life is spent thinking about these things and changing our minds and our ideas because our relationship to people, to the universe, to life, changes. And that's actually really normal and healthy. So that was actually kind of like numbers one and two all sort of tied in together. But the other thing is, when people leave the LDS church, they jump from one set of black and white beliefs to another set of black and white beliefs. In other words, the church has been telling us all along, it's either all true or it's not. So okay, I believe it's not that means none of its true. And so there is no God, there is no divine there is no okay way to

participate in church, people eventually seems like can often lean into some sort of spirituality for themselves. And I'm not saying hey, you should find another church. I'm just saying it doesn't have to be problematic. I have occasionally in talking in ex Mormon spaces, felt a little bit sheepish about the fact that I'm connected with Community of Christ now, like the only legitimate way to be an ex-Mormon is to be unchurched and fully atheist and all of that. And I kind of hate that, that I feel like I have to defend a little bit myself or excuse myself, well, this is okay, because I have all these boundaries around it. That sucks. And I do think it's hard to let go of that black and white thinking around religion. Flip sometimes to the other side. For me, and I know a little bit this, I think, has to do with how early this uncertainty showed up in my life. But it has been such a beautiful thing for me to really lean into a space of I don't know, you don't know. No one knows. And that's okay. It doesn't have to be certain I don't have to know that there is or is not an afterlife. I don't have to know that I am and I'm not saved. What's important. And this is another big thing that I love about Community of Christ. What's important is who's around me today like So, where am I today? What do I need? What does my family need? What do my clients need? How do we help us feel connected? Feel safe and secure. That's what's important. The rest is all ideas. The rest is all ideas. And so they might be fun to play with. But it has been so freeing to just be able to say, I don't know. And that's fine. I don't need to find an answer. And maybe that even allows me to decide and answer is what I think right now.

Brittany Mangelson 1:22:14

I love that. I love when you said I don't know, when you don't know, it was just like, yes. Because that's it, right. And I understand just to use your term, throw the baby out with the bathwater, and just leave organized religion at all. I mean, I still can hear Gordon B Hinckley seared in my brain. It's either all true or it was the biggest fraud in history, right? And that sticks with you. And it takes a lot of work, to find the middle ground and to take the good and leave the bad. And not everyone cares to do that. And also, not everyone has the energy or has the privilege, there's a lot of nuance to this conversation. But the point being that if you want to maintain some sort of theology, some sort of spirituality, some sort of belief in a higher or inner interconnected power, the power is with you. And you can make those decisions and you can learn and you can figure out how you connect best with the Divine and you can figure out your own core values. And it doesn't have to be this high pressure thing that you have to conform to very immediately you can take your time, while knowing that in that middle ground mess, you are always worthy. And that that higher inner power is always with you. And the Holy Ghost doesn't go away at midnight. Like it's, it's, you are worthy. And I think that that is such a beautiful message that comes out of faith transitions, particularly when people find their new moral compass and their grounded center that usually is always a component of it. And I think it's just so so beautiful. But it is tricky, because it's really hard to turn off that black and white thinking of like, okay, then it's all a fraud or I'm the sinner or whatever.

Mina Leach 1:27:33

This makes it sound like I've somehow arrived I'm still combating all the voices. I still am like, it's a fight. It's a fight and it gets tiring sometimes.

Brittany Mangelson 1:27:44

Yeah. But there's hope. There's hope.

Mina Leach 1:27:46

Tons of hope.

Josh Mangelson 1:27:56

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