

Intro Music : [00:00:16](#) [Inaudible].

Josh Mangelson: [00:00:17](#) Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Intro Music : [00:00:32](#) [Inaudible]

Brittany : [00:00:33](#) Hello Project Zion listeners, Brittany Mangelson here and I just wanted to give you all a brief introduction before the main introduction of this episode. Recently I sat down with Brian Whitney to talk about his faith transition into Community of Christ and we just had a lot of things to talk about and we didn't necessarily plan for this to be a two parter, but the editors decided to make it a two parter and so there wasn't a real clean cut place to end the first portion of the conversation. So we just did our best, but know that part two is coming in just a couple of days. So enjoy this episode as Brian shares his early life and into his adulthood, about the time when he really meets and starts working with Community of Christ through the historic sites. So with that, here's the episode.

Brittany : [00:01:24](#) Hello everyone and welcome to another episode of the Project Zion podcast. This is Brittany and I will be your host for today's episode and we are going to be bringing you another episode in our Fair Trade series, which is all about faith transitions. So today I'm going to be talking to Brian Whitney. Brian lives in Brigham City, Utah and he is an editor for Kofford books and he was recently confirmed a member of Community of Christ. So Brian, I'm really excited to have you on the podcast today.

Brian : [00:01:54](#) I'm glad to be here. Thank you.

Brittany : [00:01:56](#) And Brian, you are also a podcaster, is that correct?

Brian : [00:02:00](#) Well, I, I've made my rounds in the past. I currently host the Kofford podcast. That's my only regular one, but I've been on several different kind of Mormon themed podcasts throughout the past

Brittany : [00:02:13](#) For sure. So you are a seasoned podcaster, so it's going to be a fun conversation. I'm excited. So Brian we have you on today, like I said, to talk about your faith story, your story of faith, your transition into community of Christ. But before we get to that, we're going to back it up a little bit and I just want to know,

what did face look like for you growing up, or what did religion look like for you growing up?

Brian : [00:02:45](#) So my family's primarily Presbyterian. So let me get into a little bit of genealogy because that's, that's like such a Mormon thing to do. Right. My father's side of the family isn't as of a story. They were mostly Protestant farmers from the Midwest who moved to Washington State during the dust bowl era. But my mother's side of the family actually goes back to the origins of Seattle as a city. And a little bit farther back from that, even to the Yukon gold rush. My great, great grandfather on my mother's side was a Presbyterian minister during the Yukon gold rush up in Canada. He had a church that was just on the northern border of Washington state, a town called Bellingham, Washington. And then his son started the campus bookstore at the university that's in Bellingham. And then his son was my grandfather.

Brian : [00:03:43](#) And then on my maternal mother's side of the family was a Mennonite that my great, great grandfather was a Mennonite who was a lumberjack. And he came out during I think early 19 hundreds to Seattle and he cleared the forest. He was one of the crew members that cleared the forest at Seattle was built on. So there's, there's actually kind of an ongoing story in the family about there's a famous expression, I you probably heard of the term skid row as a, as it applies to poverty. Well, that comes from specifically from the street that they would skid these big tree trunks down in Seattle. Yesler Avenue is what it's called. And they would, after they would cut the big evergreen tree down and these were huge trees. They were large enough for like 15 men grown men to stand on the trunks after they would cut them down and then they would just skip them down the Yesler Avenue to the waterfront. The first three blocks of Seattle are all just pilings. Uthat was just built on top of all of those. The, the rubbish and debris and the, and the tree trunks. And so he was poor and,uprobably had a little shanty that was there on Yesler avenue. So my family literally comes from skid row.

Brittany : [00:05:09](#) Thank you for that. I did not realize that history. It reminds me of little shop of horrors and, and that song. But yeah, I didn't know the history and I did not know that you had Mennonite heritage. That's really close. I mean, you said your grandpa was a Mennonite?

Brian : [00:05:24](#) Great Great grandfather. Yes. And then it was Presbyterian on the other side. So most of my family would've identified as Presbyterian. I attended a Presbyterian church as a little kid and

then when I was about 11, well, let me back up. So my mother and father were divorced when I was two. And so as a single mom and I was the only child, we lived in a low income subsidized housing in a town called Everett Washington, which is about a half hour north of Seattle. And we would go to a lot of church food banks and, you know, receive public assistance, lived in subsidized housing. I was actually an ethnic minority, believe it or not in the , to put it frankly, the ghetto that we lived in. Uwe were very poor and some neighbors who happen to be latter day saints,uwhen I was about 11, recommended to my mom to start meeting with the Latter-day Saint missionaries and,uyou know, told her that that church was really,ugood at giving support,usocial support,ufood, things like that.

Brian : [00:06:46](#) So we did, we started meeting with missionaries and before long my mother was converted to the Latter-day Saint Church and I was baptized along with her. It was 11 at the time.

Brian : [00:07:00](#) So, that was, that was kind of our entry into that. I, you know, to be honest with you, I don't know that my mom ever really understood the differences between Presbyterianism and Mormonism. She's, she was a simple minded person. She's a developmentally disabled and I think for her, she just saw a church that was offering help more than really digging into the theology or the doctrines or the beliefs. I mean, you know, certainly they had another, another set of scriptures to read, but that was probably about as deep as she thought about it. I do remember that my grandfather who was, you know, who was a devout Presbyterian, I remember he actually attended our baptism into the LDS church and he was, he was supportive. He was very friendly and I knew that the LDS church was good at at offering assistance and help to those who needed it. So so he, yeah, he was supportive of it.

Brittany : [00:08:00](#) Yeah. I was just going to ask how your extended family was, but it's good that they were able to have support that they were able to give support, that it wasn't, you know, it didn't become an issue.

Brian : [00:08:11](#) Most didn't mind. Most of my family now I would say is probably more on the religious or spiritual, but not religious side. Most of them are not church attenders, regular church attenders. They would consider themselves to be Christians and you know, believe in God, believe in Christ and probably pray once in a while, but they're not affiliated with any organized religion. My grandmother was the only one who really had a difficult time with Mormonism and that was mostly based on the the kinds of things that she'd heard about polygamy and

about you know, she thought that we had to give over all of our possessions to the church and you know, she was thinking about like the old kind of communal system that Mormons used run. And so she had a lot of stereotypes that she was basing it on. But otherwise, yeah, they were, my family is the type of family that you don't really discuss religion that much and you don't really discuss politics. You just kind of tried to be a good person and live your life the way that you feel best.

Brittany : [00:09:15](#) I see. So Brian, how was it for you? You said you were 11, right when you joined the LDS church? So that probably means an ordination and everything was just right around the corner. So what was it like I guess joining a new church that had a new culture to it, that had a new just social structure already built in? I mean, what was that transition like for you?

Brian : [00:09:45](#) It was interesting in that, so being a very poor kid with a single mom it was interesting going to a church that was so focused on families and seeing all of these moms and dads with their kids at church. And I think I, you know, was a little bit jealous when I saw all of these big families at church. Now this is, you know, again, this is Everett Washington, so it's a little bit different than like Utah where I live now. But I do remember feeling a bit like an outsider because I was a very poor single kid with a single mom. But, you know, nonetheless I mean, they're always very nice. And you know, I learned some of the stories in primary about the knee fights and things like that. I recall that I recall being ordained as a deacon when I was 12 and serving the sacrament communion in in our congregation.

Brian : [00:10:38](#) And then I remember doing temple proxy Baptisms which is typical when you're about 12 for a Latter-day Saint kid. That was about it. And then when I was, by the time I was 14, my aunt decided to move us out closer to her, which so ever Washington is about a half hour north of Seattle and she moved us out to the Kitsap peninsula which is about an hour west of Seattle as the crow flies. You have to take a ferry boat to get there or drive down through Tacoma, Washington and then up through the peninsula to a smaller town called Port Orchard, Washington. And so that's really where I spent my teen years from 14 up until I was an adult. And when we moved to Port Orchard, my mom just kind of dropped out of church. No real reasons given.

Brian : [00:11:35](#) It wasn't because she felt unwelcomed or because she just said read with any of the doctrines or theology. It wasn't anything like that. It was just kind of, it was almost like she got the help that she needed from the church and now her sister was helping her. So she didn't need the church's assistance as much

anymore. So she just stopped. And so me as a, you know, as a 14 year old kid, I wasn't going to complain. They didn't have to put on a suit and tie every Sunday. I was fine with being able to hang out at home, but I did have a lot of friends from different faith backgrounds throughout high school. And I guess I was always a pretty religious kid. I always felt like I believed in God and I believed in Jesus and so they would invite me to their services with their families and I would go.

Brian : [00:12:30](#) So I had a pretty wide variety of experiences in my teenage years of attending a lot of different types of churches, mostly nondenominational churches, evangelical strain. There, seemed to be a ton of those out in the area that I was growing up in and even a couple of mega churches and things like that. But so when I was, by the time that I was probably 16 I probably would have identified as a born again Christian and I went to evangelical churches. I remember doing an altar call and the sinner's prayer and confession and and then I actually attended with a group of friends from high school, a Pentecostal youth group on Wednesday nights rather than going to like LDS mutual. So that was interesting cause it was a very charismatic,uPentecostal type thing, right?

Brian : [00:13:29](#) You know, where people were speaking in tongues. Of course they're mostly teenagers speaking in tongues and doing the whole holy laughter and being slain in the spirit and spiritual drunkenness and like all of this really kind of extreme behavior that was associated with feeling the spirit. And it was, that was a very interesting experience. It wasn't like a snake handling church, all right. This wasn't, this wasn't like a southern Pentecostal church, this was, this was definitely a northern one, but still all of the charismatic expression of how do you know that you've been saved? You know, because the Holy Spirit has moved upon you in such to where you are speaking the language of angels. That's like how you kind of like figure out that you've been saved, which is, which was really interesting. I of course attended the youth group, not out of religious curiosity, but because that's where all the cute girls were.

Brittany : [00:14:27](#) Naturally! I'm curious though, that's very, very different from, I mean, I can't overstate how different that would be from a typical LDS experience. Very different. So how was that? How was that as far as any sort of testimony or any understanding of who God is or, you know, how did that impact your spiritual development, I guess?

Brian : [00:14:58](#) Yeah. I, I think if, if it impacted me, I think it taught me that,uGod was accessible through various traditions and, you

know, I was actually, I never spoke in tongues. I'm not saying there isn't any legitimacy behind it. I just, I just never got to that point. And I kind of felt like if I did that, it would've been faking it. So I never tried. But then, I mean, in addition to that, I also had another friend who was Catholic and she and I would go attend mass together. We would go over, we'd take the ferry boat over to Seattle sometimes and we would, we would go attend mass, uat, at a beautiful cathedral out there. And the whole, the beauty of the cathedral environment was, uwas breathtaking and spiritually very moving.

Brian : [00:15:42](#) So yeah, I had the high church experience. I had the very charismatic evangelical experience, and then I was attending a church that wasn't quite as charismatic as the parent Pentecostals, but was just a, I would call it kind of a blue collar, sort of nondenominational. But they were very much, the pastor was very much into this as the m times, so he was he was definitely preaching like I'm losing the term for it. It's been so long, but being carried up into the sky during the end times that all of the Christians would be saved by being carried up into the sky. The rapture, that's the term. He was, he was very much preaching the rapture. I remember I was at t I was dating a girl in high school who ironically was LDS. And I remember telling the pastor that I thought I was going to marry her. I think I was probably 19 or 20 at the time. And I remember him telling me quite frankly, don't bother Jesus is going to be coming back by next April.

Brittany : [00:16:53](#) Wow!

Brian : [00:16:56](#) Like he was that specific, right? Yeah. Right, right. And this was like 1999 or something. It was pretty crazy. Yeah, he was very, like, he was very adamant about it, which I mean, you know, I don't want to jump too far ahead, but when I did later on when I started doing a lot of historical study until like the second grade awakening, it's a very similar attitude that you see of. Yeah. Jesus is coming now. Like he's, his bags are packed, he's on his plane and he's going to be here in like arriving imminently. So yeah, that was interesting. And but still like, and then so the girl I was dating, her parents her dad especially was like, well, if you're going to date our daughter then you need to come to church with us. So he started taking me to LDS services and he would me up on Sunday mornings and I would go to the LDS church through sacrament meeting and through the kind of the, the men's priesthood.

Brian : [00:17:59](#) Cause at this point I was over 18, and then after that I would go to the nondenominational church. And and, and so that pastor,

once he caught wind of me attending LDS service before his, then he decided to do a whole lecture series on how wrong the Mormons were. How theologically wrong the Mormons were. So yeah, it was a really interesting, upbringing visiting these different churches. But again, I mean, if I can take anything out of it, I guess, you know, at the time I was probably like, I can, I guess I could kind of understand a little bit of how Joseph Smith felt as a teenage boy saying, you know, the tumultuous contestation of all of these different creeds. Like, which one of these is right or whatever. But I think by the time that I grew into adulthood, I think what I began to realize is that number one, faith traditions sort of evolve on their own trajectory. And number two, they're all sincere, right? Like people of any faith group are, are really sincere about what they're doing and that their prayers are very sincere. Their feeling of the spirit is very sincere. And so that's something that when I did, eventually spoiler alert, get back active into the LDS church, that was something that always kind of hung there in the background for me and made it very difficult for me to accept this whole idea of there only being one exclusively true church.

Brittany : [00:19:40](#) That makes a lot of sense because I think with exposure to other religions, other cultures, other ways to view God, spiritual practices, etc, it would be hard to kind of funnel truth into one specific box. And I've mentioned before that I didn't necessarily have a large exposure to other faiths. I grew up in Provo, Utah, just about a mile south of BYU. So a lot of that stuff, I mean was, was just very foreign to me.

Brittany : [00:20:10](#) Right. You kind of feel like that's the whole world, right? Like, yeah, you think of, you know, everybody debates about like the flood myth and like if the flood was global or if it was localized or whatever, you know, or if it was just based on other, you know, myths. But I always get this idea that if there was some sort of a flood, it probably wasn't global and they probably thought it was like world seemed to be filled.

Brittany : [00:20:35](#) Yeah. That's a good way to look at it.

Brian : [00:20:37](#) Right. And so, I mean I kind of think that that's how it is when you are, when you grow up in a predominantly like one tradition area, you know, is that you kind of feel like this is what the whole world is. Right? You don't really think that there is, or if you think that there's others, you know, there's other traditions out there, but you think that they're probably a lot smaller than yours.

- Brittany : [00:20:58](#) No, I think that that exposure is good and healthy. So, and interesting. What a story!
- Brian : [00:21:06](#) Yeah. But you know, and I always, I always really loved like when I would go and visit. So when by the time I turned into an adult, I decided to go ahead and move over to Seattle itself, the city. Partly because, so the, the kids that I was hanging out with at this Pentecostal youth group, they were in a punk rock band. So like at this time in the mid nineties, there was this music scene that was starting to grow of Christian punk rock and heavy metal music, which I mean, it sounds weird, right? It sounds kind of like an oxymoron, but it, but it really happened and it got pretty big. And so my friends were in this pop punk band that got pretty popular for a while called Mx Px.
- Brian : [00:22:02](#) And they, like, they ended up like touring with like, No Doubt, which was a pretty big mainstream band. And they, and they got like a Pepsi commercial and like, you know, they ended up doing pretty well. They made a career out of music. But I mean, at the time they were just, you know, a bunch of high school punkers and there was this coffee house that was next to our high school, like within walking distance of our high school called New Song Coffee House. And it was owned by a hippie Christian couple. And it was an outreach ministry and it was super cool because they were totally nonjudgmental. Their whole point was to provide a safe place for kids to come hang out after school instead of like them going out and getting in trouble because these are mostly latchkey kids. And so they weren't there to preach at people, although they definitely had like Bible tracks out.
- Brian : [00:22:56](#) If anybody was wanting to know more, there is information available, but they had like arcade machines and pool tables and they served coffee and they had cheap grilled cheese sandwiches and snacks and then they would bring in live bands on the weekends. They had a little stage that was like a foot off the floor and they asked me if I would be willing to help out in booking bands for the weekends. And so I said, sure. And so I ended up hooking up with this whole kind of weird but kind of awesome Christian punk rock music scene and and these punkers were like serious punkers, like they were not like, you would think of like Christian punkers as being kind of like kinda just, just kind of wimpy punk. But no, these guys were brutal. And you know, they were, it was very interesting. I mean, although ironically one of the, one of the bands that I got to know the best was called 90 Pound Wuss

Brian : [00:24:02](#) But yeah, I mean, there it was, it was kind of fun. So a lot of these bands ended up, you know, kind of playing a lot of gigs in Seattle and, and down in the state capital of Olympia. And so I would just hang out with them and I'd go to these other shows with them and got to know them. And there was a record label that started in Oregon and California called Tooth and Nail Records, and it was owned by a Christian dude named Brandon oval. And and he was kind of on the cutting edge of music. He was, he was signing a lot of these kind of punk rock and hardcore thrash metal bands and and so he moved his headquarter office up to Seattle in like 1995 96 around there. And I graduated high school at 94.

Brian : [00:24:49](#) And so I ended up going out to work for him at Tooth and Nail Records for like a year. And you know, it was just like, I mean it was the kind of job that I was like in the mail room cause this was pre internet days, right? So we were like literally mail order catalog on all the stuff and or like people could buy the music like Christian bookstores, which was really weird cause it was just like total thrash metal. Like you're going into these nice grandma and grandpa Christian bookstores and there's like these crazy bands like The Crucified and Disciple and stuff like that. It was great. But it was, that's what took me over to Seattle though, was hanging out with these like crazy Christian punk rock kids. And I ended up moving into this house that was, we called it the Hiawatha house and we had like four punk rock bands living in the house and it was like a three bedroom house with like one bathroom.

Brian : [00:25:45](#) Right? And it was in this Seattle University district like probably, I don't know, like three blocks from the University of Washington campus. And and it was a super crazy time, cause he has Christian punk rock kids. They didn't act all that Christian. Most of them had grown up in Christian homes and a lot of them were like preacher's kids. So they had that kind of preacher kid syndrome, right, of like rebellion rebelling against the hole. So a lot of them were like, I wouldn't call them anti-christian, I would say they were still believers, but they were definitely antagonistic towards organized religion, right? And that was like, I mean that was the punk rock ethos, right? It was that organized religion has screwed everything up and our relationship is directly with Christ, right? And we don't need a church. Of course that also means we were partying like crazy, right?

Brian : [00:26:39](#) Like, I mean it was just like drinking every night and just super insane stuff. And we would have like house concerts at our, at our house and like, you know, glass would be breaking and

stuff. We'd be catching on fire. He was just really bad. We ended up getting kicked out by them or in pretty quickly. But yeah, I mean, I remember nights where we would have like touring bands coming through and just like crashing out on our floor. And I ended up taking a job outside of the record label because the record label was just basically paying in like concert tickets and t-shirts. And I needed to make money. So I ended up taking a job at a hotel, like a Marriott Hotel in Seattle, and I'd have to wake up super early to go work their reception desk or whatever. And I remember like, just stepping over passed out punk rock bodies, uI like go catch the bus to, to go to work and stuff. But yeah, it was so, yeah, I mean that was just another crazy. Part of my life was this whole, uChristian punk rock scene. Ubut it was cool at the same time. Right? Like I really, it's, it's part of me and I still listen to like really heavy music to this day and stuff. Not necessarily Christian stuff, but, uI still haven't really grown out of that phase.

- Brittany : [00:27:56](#) Like you said another, to use your word crazy part of your story where God, Jesus was at the center of it.
- Brian : [00:28:05](#) Right? Right. Somewhat. Yeah. I mean it was, you know, definitely. And it was such a tense relationship with religion during that time. Right? Like, I mean, these were kids who were really trying to like figure out who they were and what their relationship to faith was and know. I mean, we had a lot of friends that were like University of Washington students and they would get into like philosophy programs and stuff. And so then it would come over with all this existentialists stuff and we would just go out, we would go out to the local like university pubs and just get like pitchers of beer and just talk about God all night and you know, and like existentialism and Atheism and you know, it was just like super weird, deep drunken conversations with a bunch of like early 20 year olds. Yeah.
- Brittany : [00:28:56](#) I just have the cheesiest grin on my face right now.
- Brian : [00:29:01](#) Yeah. Yeah. That was my life. But we were also getting into a lot of trouble too, or doing a lot of stuff that we shouldn't have been doing really. I mean, we were lucky. I would say most of us are really lucky that we made it out of that and became responsible adults and not like incarcerated, you know? But so what came out of that is my story of my return to the LDS church.
- Brittany : [00:29:23](#) Yeah. Let's hear it.

Brian : [00:29:25](#) Like how do you bridge that? Right. I will say, I will say that alcohol is once again involved.

Brittany : [00:29:34](#) Alcohol, a little Jesus, you know.

Brian : [00:29:34](#) Hey. Right, right. A little Mormonism. Yeah. So I was, I was at one of the rock shows that my friends were playing. And my friend who was playing bass for one of the bands was dating this girl. Her name was Amanda and Amanda's older sister Katrina, so they were a Mormon family. And Amanda's older sister, Katrina was single and a had recently moved out to Washington state from California and they decided to drag their sister out to try to, you know, have a little bit of social interaction and engagement. So they drug her out to this screamo punk rock show, which was totally not her thing. But she and I connected there and just started chatting. And we ended up at the same after after show party, I guess you can say, which was just back at our house.

Brian : [00:30:32](#) And, you know, by this time, everybody except her, we're pretty tanked and any related. And you know, I noticed that she hadn't been drinking anything and I made, I made some sort of a comment. And she said, well, I'm, I'm a Mormon. So I don't drink. And I slurred out. So am I, and she's like, I obviously I can smell it on your breath. But that's so, you know, we took a, a enough of a liking to each other to exchange phone numbers and we began dating after that, and it was probably about two months into us dating, which every time we'd go out dating, I would pick a place where there was drinks being served, right? Like it was just, that was just life. And eventually she kinda got fed up with it and said, okay, listen, if we're going to keep dating, I'm going to need you to like go back to church and like live the standards that the church teaches.

Brian : [00:31:27](#) And like, you know, if you really want to make this work, let's just, let's actually make this work. Right. And not, you know, keep wondering how it, where it's going to go. So I did, I gave up everything. And my roommate at the time was like, you're crazy dude. And ended up going back to the Mormon Church and attending with her. And it was like one of those student wards, you know, as university student words. And the bishop was actually of that Ward congregation was actually a super cool guy, very down to earth, very non judgey. And it was a pretty diverse crowd of, of students that attended. A lot of them were into, you know, pretty heavy music like me. And it was, it was not what you would expect out in like typical Utah type BYU experience.

Brian : [00:32:23](#) Um a lot of us would end up like going to the same concerts together from that congregation or a lot of them were really into the Episcopalian services, like the the liturgy of the hours that they would do at the Cathedral comp line in particular on Sunday evenings was just absolutely gorgeous. So a lot of us would end up going to those types of same things. And I felt like I fit right in with that crowd. So yeah, that's, that was my re-entry into the latter day saint tradition. We dated for about a year and then we decided to get married. And we got married in the Seattle LDS temple and that was back in 1998. That marriage lasted 10 years and then ended in divorce. But during that time I actually ended up serving in leadership roles in our, the congregation that we were in.

Brian : [00:33:26](#) I served in a bishopric of our congregation in Seattle which was actually a super cool experience because it was a very diverse inner city congregation. We had a lot of we had a lot of gay members lesbian feminists. And then of course there was the intellectuals from Washington, you know, University of Washington. So, you know, you, you definitely had like the progressive angle on it. And I was, I was really shocked that they asked me to serve in the bishop brick because I had really no background in Mormonism. I'd grown up as, as I explained, in such a scattered and diverse way and Mormonism hadn't been a part of my life since I was 14. And before that it was just, you know, very limited engagement. I never served a Mormon mission and never attended a day of seminary in my life, you know, which is, you know, for those unfamiliar, that's High School ages for Latter-day Saints that they go to morning seminary, usually if you're not living in Utah, it's usually before high school hours.

Brian : [00:34:40](#) So I would go out with like my friends, I would go to like coffee houses and like greasy spoon diners and stuff during that time instead of going to seminary. But I never had those experiences. And so, you know, I was a little surprised when they asked me to be in the bishopric. And I asked, I ended up serving in the bishopric for four and a half years before the bishopric was released. And I asked afterwards I asked the Bishop, I served with them, why did you choose me? I was not, I would definitely wasn't the right kind of material for that. And he said he chose me because he knew that the, that the needs of our congregation were very diverse. And he wanted somebody who didn't have that cultural baggage. You know, that Utah kind of limited exposure to things. You wanted somebody who wouldn't be shocked at homosexuality or, you know, people who were struggling with drug addiction and things like that. It was a wonderful experience.

Brian :

[00:35:46](#)

We served we, we didn't do a lot of meetings. We kind of went out into the community and we ended up spending a lot of our evenings out helping homeless mothers get off the streets and into like housing. And the Bishop I served with was very well off financially, but he was a very charitable and generous person. And so he would use, usually use his own money to just like fill up fridges full of food for single mothers and things like that. And you know, we had a lot of people who were struggling with drug addiction, incarceration. We were, we were kind of the congregation that was in charge of the prison outreach. And so we ended up just, you know, we would, we'd go down to the, to the prison quite often, or actually was the jail who was in a prison who was King County jail. But it was really, I think it, I think it was a very unique experience within the LDS tradition. And I think it showed me what it could be if, you know if there was more congregational based decision-making. Right. And, and that was mostly because my bishop just didn't care what the state, what the upper leaders thought about is like they would get on him about not filling out the proper paperwork or going through the proper procedures. And he would just smile and say, well, you can always fire me.

Brian :

[00:37:27](#)

He had guts and but he ended up serving two back to back terms for a total of 12 years. Which is unusual. And, and the reason why was because he was so good at making people feel welcome and bringing people out to church who you would never expect. I mean, we had two transgendered individuals attending our ward. We had this wonderful individual named William Pugmier who just passed away this year, by the way. But he was known as kind of this punk rock queer icon in Seattle. Like if you Google his name, Willa.m Pugmier, he was a horror novelist and he was a punk rock diva and he looked like oh, culture club. What was the name of the singer from Culture Club? Boy, George. Boy George.

Brian :

[00:38:28](#)

And he would, and he was great cause he would come to church with like pink dyed hair and like he would any had like these cutoff Jean jackets. And then on the back of his Jean Jacket, he would paper clip a oversized printed cloth print out of like the cover of an Ensign magazine, which is like the Latter-day Saint church official magazine. Right? And it would be like safety pinned in like total punk rock style of like Joseph Smith's vision of God and stuff. And like, he was just this really eccentric, artsy, awesome guy. Who I, we just loved having him in our congregation. And you know, again, it's just, that's not your typical experience if you're growing up in the latter day saint tradition. Right. So it was, it was, it was really, I feel very

fortunate to be able to have spent quite a bit of time in that congregation.

Brittany : [00:39:25](#) Yeah. It sounds like it was the perfect place for you to transition into. And I think it's interesting, you know, when you talked about seeing what the church, the LDS church, it really, any church can be when more autonomy and decisions are able to be made on a local level. Because, you know, I think that congregations are able to respond to their local culture, their local environment, their local economy, everything better. And it's not surprising that that bishop was, you know, the, he saw some sort of success, if you will, getting people to come to church that were not otherwise going to be there etc. So, yeah, that sounds, that sounds like Mormonism done right. Or Mormonism at it's best, really.

Brian : [00:40:19](#) Right, right. And, and it was possible because he was a bit of a rebellious leader. Yeah. And but, but yeah, it really does show you that I think you need to be able to be, to be flexible to the needs of your immediate community and you know, churches that have the ability to offer that kind of flexibility and don't have such a tried to create such a unified experience, worship experience or even outreach experience I think sometimes can do a lot more, you know, within their community because they have that flexibility. And that's something that I think is a tension within the Latter-day Saint tradition because on the one hand, you know, they are trying to be sensitive at least to the local needs throughout, you know, particularly at an international level. But on the other hand, it's, is, there is such a top down structure, but it's really hard to break away. You know, from the uniformity. In fact, actually that sometimes that Latter-day Saints that we would pride ourselves in is that you could go to any congregation throughout the world and you would get like the same, you know, basically the same Sunday set up in the same readings, in the same I dunno, a Sunday school lessons and things like that. And I don't know, I think I, I think that there's, there's a benefit to that. Sure. But I think that there's, I think that there's a lot of room for local creativity, right?

Brittany : [00:41:55](#) For sure. And I mean, not to veer us off to topic too much, but I think that in decades past there have been, and the, what they would call the correlation department or I mean, maybe it's not, I think maybe the correlation department gets a bad rap sometime, but the church at large has kind of reigned a lot of that in, you know, and I know that we can talk about budgets and just all sorts of different things that, yeah. I have kind of

gone through different phases that were then centralized really in Salt Lake and,

Brian : [00:42:27](#) Right, right. Yeah. Yeah. Well, I do want to wander down that path just a minute longer because you know, since I, since I spent a lot of time studying the history of Mormonism, I can kind of pinpoint a little bit where this mindset comes from. And it really came about during kind of the corporate efficiency model mentality of the early 19 hundreds and the idea of making like this is, this is the kind of stuff that came out of like Ford Motors, right? Like this assembly line. Efficiency is that a mechanical efficiency affected business and affected religion in the early 19 hundreds, because everybody was looking for ways to make everything more efficient, more uniform. And they thought that that was really the way to, to make something progress. Now that is like early 19 hundreds, but then when you start moving into post World War II, because the war is kind of like distracted us right from, from those, from those ideas for a while.

Brian : [00:43:28](#) But when you get past World War II and you see the growth of suburbanization and that's where you see the whole efficiency thing coming right back in. And you can see it with these prefab homes in the suburbs. Right. But it also meant like a lot of prefab churches too. And that whole concept, that whole mentality really permeates beyond just the physical building structure and gets into the whole organizational structure, curriculum structure everything from inside and out. This whole idea of uniformity and efficiency that that you can see growing dramatically from the 1950s and 1960s with the whole suburban sprawl. And, and that's really where, where the LDS churches today is a product of that 1950s, 1960s suburban sprawl and kind of the prefab efficiency models that were very popular at the time. So anyway,

Brittany : [00:44:31](#) Makes a lot of sense.

Brittany : [00:44:33](#) Thanks for taking us down memory. Yeah. Yeah.

Brian : [00:44:36](#) We'll reel it back from, from history for a little bit.

Brittany : [00:44:40](#) No, it's good. It's, yeah, it is. It's interesting because it impacts your experience in church. I mean, it impacts the way that you interact with church and God and faith and spiritual practices and scripture and all the things. Yeah. So I do think it's important.

Brian :

[00:45:01](#)

And, and, and physical spaces. So important for that too, right? Like, I mean, you, you know, that's, that's why cathedrals are so stunning and why they move us because they provide that, that physical, tangible space that kind of transforms us into a mentality of the divine. Right. And you know, that gets lost when you get into the whole suburbanized chapel building for any spiritual tradition. Right? but when you're looking at just the cheapest way to, to, to build a chapel the most efficiently, which ironically goes all the way back to the colonial period in the puritans, right? Cause they were all about just building these like very efficient and kind of stale worship spaces. That didn't distract you too much because they were like still angry at the Anglicans, like too many glass stain windows. But still, it's like, I mean, and I understand like the argument is no, your focus should be purely on Christ and purely on the, the sermonizing and the preaching that's going on. That's kind of the whole mentality and like the early puritan movement and that's kind of what moves through like early, like evangelical stuff throughout, like the, the, the awakenings, the great awakenings. But I'm still like, I don't know, I personally find tremendous value in those big gothic cathedrals that you're just like, they're just magnificent and how can you not be moved when you walk in them? Right.

Brittany :

[00:46:32](#)

Yeah. Well, and even I, you know, I can go down a rabbit hole on a tangent too, but it reminds me of the, you know, in the eighties, nineties, everything before that, there wasn't necessarily one standard as far as I'm aware, there wasn't a standard set, a blueprint of what a Mormon chapel should look like, what an LDS chapel should look like. And then suddenly there was an is so now any new church that's built pretty much has the exact same floor plan. And I grew up again in Provo and in an older neighborhood. And so our building is really quirky. I mean, it's, I don't know when it was built, probably in the 50s. And, when I went to college and started getting a lot of those how would, how would you describe it? I mean, now it's like a loop, you know, they're, they're all the same.

Brittany :

[00:47:26](#)

Every, I mean they're like one continual and all the classrooms and everything with the chapel. The sanctuary, the gym in the middle. And anyways, so when I went back to my parent's ward for the first time, after several years of being, wait, it was so disorienting and it almost didn't even feel like the same religion because I was so just used to the flow of that physical space that I had been attending for years. So, yeah, it's, it's interesting and it actually makes me want to study just, I don't know, maybe the effects of correlate, uniformity, and architecture and you know, maybe in song and just all the different cultural

quirks I guess. Fascinating. We can obviously talk about this for awhile, but

Brian : [00:48:20](#)

I'd rather talk about that than me.

New Speaker: [00:48:23](#)

I'll have to have you on again. Ubut,ul guess moving the conversation along,uso you were in leadership in Washington. What ended up bringing you to Utah?

Brian : [00:48:39](#)

I got divorced!

Brian : [00:48:39](#)

How's that? That was really, the next step was 2008 my marriage ended. And rather suddenly, ah, well I can't, I shouldn't say suddenly we, we both knew that it was coming to a conclusion. But you know, I wasn't gutsy enough to pull the trigger. She was so anyway, we had a four year old son who's, you know, now 14, 15, just turned 15 at the time and you know, so it was, it was a difficult transition for me. You know, I mean here I am fresh out of serving in the LDS bishopric. You know, I, I w I had been making pretty decent income and then the economy collapsed at the same time in 2008. My income just like, cause I was on commission sales at the time. I was working for Toyota. I was as a car salesman, which was awesome. Didn't, that didn't suck my soul dry.

Brian : [00:49:39](#)

It's horrible. So horrible. But but definitely like six years. And it was, but it was during the time that like the Prius was a new thing, right. And gas was hitting like almost \$5 a gallon. Right. It was like gas was skyrocketing and everybody was wanting a hybrids and as a Seattle, right? So you know, everybody out there in particular one hybrids because there's a lot of environmentalists out there. And so it was really easy to sell cars at that time before the economy crashed. Cause it was just basically like, do you have one? Yes, I'll take it. Right. There wasn't a lot of salesmanship involved and I was making a lot of money by selling those cars because we weren't discounting them at all. Because there was such a high demand for it. So it just like, Yep, that's the price.

Brian : [00:50:22](#)

Okay. You know, not a lot of negotiation. But things changed. Right? So, and also at the same time, the federal government was offering a huge tax credit if you went and got a hybrid. So people were happy to pay the full price because they knew they were going to get like a three, \$4,000 tax credit on it. And and then in addition to that, they were going to, you know, save a lot of gas money and everything, so again, right place, right time. But that all changed dramatically. And the the federal government incentive went away and the economy just tanked

and people stopped buying cars. They just, they just held onto their older cars because they just weren't going to get into a new car when they're when they were financially insecure at this point. Their investments had, you know, sunken down.

Brian : [00:51:09](#) And a lot of these were like Microsoft employees that I was selling to and stuff like that. So they saw their 401k's just like sliding away. So yeah, on top of my marriage collapsing and the economy collapsing it was just, it was a lot. Right. And I decided I just needed a break from everything. So I moved in with family for a little bit. And then one of the coworkers at the Toyota dealership, I was at his roommate had moved out, so he was looking for a new roommate. So I took up a room with him and he was awesome. He was this little Argentinian Jew and named Sammy and he was just a, just a ball of fire. And he was so into soccer and this was a World Cup year and he was just like, he would be up at like five 30 in the morning, just like just shouting at the TV during like World Cup rolling cap in like Spanish.

Brian : [00:52:13](#) Right. It was just, it was just awesome. And anyway, this was also the year that Barack Obama was running a 2008, and he was a huge Obama supporter. And it was really the first time that I felt political, right? Like before this, I had never really, like I had always kind of, I don't know, I guess, I guess I had some political opinions, but I never really dug into the issues. Right? And so for me, this was like, this was my first break into politics and I'm sitting there with Sammy and you know, we'd get a bottle of wine and if cheese and meat spread, tray and we would debate over politics all night and Judaism and Mormonism. And it was great. So that was a pretty fun experience. But I, so I took like an eight month break from religion and from, from Mormonism in particular.

Brian : [00:53:07](#) And during this time you know, I reverted to a lot of my kind of older habits that, you know, I'd, I hadn't been doing for over a decade, you know, like I said, drinking wine, stuff like that. But also during this time, I started looking into religious scholarship for the first time. And, and what introduced me to it was actually a PBS documentary that I was called from Jesus to Christ. The story of the first disciples or something like that, or first the story of the first century Christians or something, but it was put on by the Jesus seminar people, if you're familiar with John Dominic Crossan and things like that, people like that. And it was it was kind of blowing to me to watch this series and as see how the New Testament came together, at least what scholars think about how the New Testament came together and the historical Jesus.

- Brian : [00:54:03](#) It was really the first time that I had been introduced to concepts of the historical Jesus. And you know, it, it kinda shakes your faith a little bit because when you take everything for granted in my entire life, it was just, you know, Jesus is the son of God and is God incarnate and was resurrected and will come again, right? And saves us from our sins. And then you start digging into New Testament scholarship and you start saying, well, wait a second. Like, what evidence do we really have for a lot of this stuff? And who was this Jesus guy and was, you know, was, was he just a social radical who was ended up, you know, getting executed for treason? Or is he the son of God? Like, who is he? Right. I'd never really pose those questions and like I'd always taken the Bible for granted, right?
- Brian : [00:54:59](#) Like, you know, you read it and it's just, it is what it is. It says what it says. It's the voice of God. So you just believe it. And now it's like, oh, these are different authors from different periods who are writing after the fact and putting words into Jesus's mouth. Putting stories out there that are for a very specific purpose. So you start looking at like, what was their motivation, what was their agenda? And it just changes the whole thing. So from that I started looking into the history of Mormonism, which I don't know if you've ever looked into the history of Mormonism, but.
- Brittany : [00:55:38](#) Oh just a wee bit.
- Brian : [00:55:38](#) That's, that's a can of worms!
- Brian : [00:55:45](#) At the same time, utterly fascinating, right? Like, I mean, it is a very American story. And it's, you know, it, there's a lot of very challenging things in its history, but at the same time, there's also like this, like this, I don't know, this very tenacious American spirit about it, right? Like this very kind of frontiersey gutsy kind of kind of thing about it too. So I became both appalled and intrigued by everything that I was learning. Right? Like, you know, I mean, I don't want to go through the, the lists, but it's what most if people are latter-day seekers, it's what most people have already kind of figured out. But you know, you just at the same time, but also like, it made me realize that I kinda dig history, right? Like, it's messy. It's weird. It's crazy. It's challenging.
- Brian : [00:56:44](#) It's never what you think it is, right? Like literally any, any subject, you can pull up any subject. And if you start digging into a, historically you're gonna do a one 80, I don't care if it's politics, religion, you know, biographies of people. Like you're always going to find out that there's a completely different side

of the story. Right? And a, and that's how I felt. And, but I decided at this point then like, you know, if I did go back to school for anything, I think I would probably do history. So that leads me to the next stage, which is Utah.

Brittany : [00:57:21](#) So I'm assuming you came to Utah for school?

Brian : [00:57:25](#) Yeah, yeah. It worked in conjunction with school and also because my ex wife, so we had to sell the house in Seattle, that we were living in, which was a really tough thing to do in an economic downturn.

Brian : [00:57:39](#) Took, took, it took almost two years to sell house actually, which was really hard to keep that mortgage up during that time. But anyway, it finally sold at a, at almost, I don't want to say a loss, but like there was such that like equity had just completely drained out of it because of the economy. So it was like a pathetic amount of money that we ended up getting out of it. But it was enough for her to be able to use as a down payment on another house, but not in the Seattle area cause it was just way too expensive of a market. So her family was out in Utah and the Ogden area. So she decided to go ahead and, and move out to Ogden and put and buy a house in Ogden and said, you know, so we need to figure this out.

Brian : [00:58:27](#) We, you can either have your son during summers and then send them back to Utah or, you know, you can consider moving out here and being closer to them at which time. I was like, heck no. All right. And and I had I should introduce Denise at this point because I was already remarried at this point to Denise. I'll back up in a second about how I met Denise. But she, Denise was like, no, I am not moving to Utah. She's also from Washington state. Her whole family was in Washington state. So like, no, you're not dragging me out to Utah of all places. Right. I am not, ain't going out to Utah and and, and, but you know, this, this was actually one of those times where we actually really did legitimately commit it to prayer and and just like sit on it for awhile and both of us just felt no, that's the right move.

Brian : [00:59:24](#) We had to do it. If we're ever going to have an opportunity to own our own home, to go back to school and get education to be close to your son from a previous marriage, then we're just going to have to do it. And so we made the decision to go ahead and move out here. And that was in 2011. Okay. Should I back up and talk about how I, about meeting to niece? Pretty sure I kind of skipped over that. So this was during my religious sabbatical and all of my opening up Pandora's box on religious

scholarship and on Mormon studies and all this stuff. And, you know, I'm reading Richard Bushman and some of the top scholars of, of Mormon studies and everything. But I decided that I kinda missed church like it had been such an important part of my life for so long.

Brian : [01:00:19](#) Right? And I just missed being somewhere on Sunday. I missed the people I missed. Just kind of like, I was feeling just really down in the dumps and, and I felt like there's one thing that, that Mormons typically are, and it's typically pretty happy people. And I wanted that. I wanted just that happiness, right? I wanted to be surrounded by people who were just pleasant and friendly and kind of had a positive outlook on life and not so cynical as I was getting. And so I decided to go back to the congregation that I had been baptized in as a kid way up in Everett Washington on a Sunday. And and I went there during the church service. And the, the funny thing was, is that I, the bishop that I had when I was a kid and I'm blanking on his name now, but when I looked at the church bulletin program that they gave me, it was the same bishop's name, Hudson.

Brian : [01:01:19](#) That's what it was. It was bishop Hudson and, and the church bulletin program said Bishop Hudson on it. And I thought, well that's weird. It turned out to be his nephew that was called, that was serving as the bishop of this at this time of the congregation. But yeah, I was like, okay, that's just creepy. But you know, I mean I had I was just sitting in the back row of the congregation just with my head down and just keeping to myself cause I was just a visitor at this point. And when they were passing the communion tray around, I declined politely. And I, but I felt this really strong impression that just hit me really hard. That said why do you hide in the shadows from me? And, and of course, you know, at the time I took that as a conviction of I need to get myself back at regular church activity.

Brian : [01:02:09](#) You know, we can talk about how I've reinterpreted that sense, but it was, cause that's a big part of my transition to Community of Christ. But anyway, at this time I took it as, okay, you need to go sit down and talk to your local congregations, bitch, bishop, and you need to confess all the sins that you've done over the past eight months and get yourself right and back on the straight path and start attending church regularly and, you know, reading your book of Mormon and being a good stalwart member of the church. So I did for the most part worked my way towards that and, and I decided I wanted to start dating, so I was just dating around. I would meet girls on at this, this is still kind of pre-internet, or like at least pre smartphone apps. So I

was like using like this singles want dad's out of like the local weekly newspaper, right. And stuff like that. And went on a lot of pretty cool dates with like, you know, different girls. I actually dated a Catholic girl a few times and it was, she, she got a little irritated cause I was more interested in mass than I was her. Right. I'm like, let's get it. Let's go to church on Sunday. She's like, why?

Brian :

[01:03:23](#)

Like that just sounds horrible. I'm just, I'm going to, I'm a religious nerd. So what was like, that'd be fun. I really liked mass and she was like, you're weird. I don't like you. But there was a website for Mormon singles that like a dating website at the time. So I got on there and literally the first person that I reached out to was my current wife, Denise. So we met online. We met through a Mormon dating website. She was living in federal way, Washington, which was about 20 minutes south of Seattle. And she had recently come from a divorce and had two kids that were pretty close to my son's age. And she had said in her profile that, you know, she was looking for somebody who had some life experience, who knew what it was like to go through a divorce, who knew what it was like to struggle and struggle with faith and you know, with activity in religion. And she didn't want somebody who was kind of this straight and narrow, you know, what, what we nicknamed Peter Priesthood in Mormonism. And my, my profile had, you know, I had, I had a beard at that time too. So that's one indicator that I'm a little different. Right. and then number number two, I had actually put on a quote from an early 1900's church leader by the name of Jay Golden Kimball who a lot of Mormons will recognize as the cussing apostle.

Brian :

[01:04:55](#)

And the quote was, "I may not always walk the straight and narrow, but I sure as hell tried to cross it as often as possible." So, so she, she admitted to me that that was kind of attractive to her. So when I reached out to her, she was actually gone for the weekend and I was, I was such like a little boy again. Right? Like I was like, is she gonna reach back to me as you're gonna if you're gonna respond to my cause, because all you could do is just send like a flirt. Right. And, and she wasn't sending it back. And I was like, every day checking it like by the hour, like is she gonna send it back and she going to send a flirt back. And finally by like the third day, because she was gone for the weekend, she finally sent a little flirt back and I was like, I felt so accomplished, you know, like, yes, she likes me.

Brian :

[01:05:48](#)

And but we started talking there and then we started talking on Facebook, which, you know, in 2009, Facebook was still pretty new. And both cancelled our, our profiles on the dating site and

just started chatting on Facebook for a couple of weeks before we met in person. And it was just, it's, it's the story of love at first sight, right? Like we just, we just knew from our first night of just taking a long walk together and talking about our experiences as two divorced people with kids and the experiences that we've had in life that we were like, it was just, yeah, it just just seems so natural and just fit. So the first official date that we had was just like, you know, we just took like a, a long walk around the lake, but the, the first time they actually like went out somewhere, we went to like a lesbian punk rock show.

Brian : [01:06:34](#) And that's when I knew she was cool too. Right? Like, cause she was totally down with it, right. And like made out on the steps of like a Methodist church across the street from this club. So it was like such a teenager again, but it was a great feeling. And we ended up getting married pretty quickly after that. And, and, and a lot of it was, I mean, we hear a lot of stories about like these very short Mormon engagements, right. Particularly from like BYU, it's like these two week engagements. Ours was seriously like three or four months. And, but it wasn't because we were rushing into it, you know, because of naivete. It was because school was starting in the fall. And so it was like a very pragmatic decision, right, of like, okay, if we end up procrastinating this and like getting married a year later just because we're trying to be smart about this, that I'm going to have to uproot all of the kids from school and like we register them and that just doesn't sound great.

Brian : [01:07:40](#) So let's just go ahead and do it now, cause we've already made the commitment decision that we want to do this, you know, and and so we did and we sort of by choice or to not decided to avoid getting married in the LDS temple this time. And part of the reason is just because we weren't willing to live according to the standards that were required to do that. But the other part of the reasons I don't, I'll let, I'll just leave it there. The other part of the reasons was because we really wanted our family and friends to be able to attend who would not have been able to in an LDS temple. My mother at this time who, I mean, she is still, she has become active in the LDS church. Again, she's been active for like 15 years, but at this time she wasn't a temple attending member of the church.

Brian : [01:08:31](#) Um and so she wouldn't have been able to be there in, and that really hurt me the first time that I was married. My aunt and uncle who were not Mormons at all, wouldn't have been able to be there inside the LDS temple for this marriage. And again, that really hurt me the first time I was married and then Denise's,

several of her siblings and close friends. So anyway, we ended up getting married. And this is kind of a fun, quick story. I called my bishop and said, you know, I think, I think you need to marry us. Uwell, okay. Not Him marry us, but yeah, for him to perform this ceremony, I have to be careful when you say things like him marry us because of the whole polygamy background in Mormonism. Right? You're going to like very, very specific.

Brian :

[01:09:19](#)

But he, but he said, well, you know, you guys are very close to be able to go to the temple, so don't you want to just hold off and be able to go to the temple? And I said, no. And he said, why? And I said, well, you know, let's just say that we're not going to be worthy for awhile. And Oh, okay. Okay. And and so I had it planned out in my mind. We were going to go to this state park that used to be a Catholic seminary in Seattle. And it's this really gorgeous old seminary, and they have behind the seminary building, which has now it as a public building, but behind the seminary building down the hill of ways, they had this grotto, this Catholic grotto that was like this stone arch sanctuary with a little pedestal and things there.

Brian :

[01:10:13](#)

So it was like, it was this really beautiful lot of ferns growing all around it. And this is Washington, so it's very green, very lush. And, and that's where I had it in my mind that we were going to go perform this wedding. And so I told everybody you know, family members, friends who could meet at a certain time, we're just gonna walk over there. We're not even going to go put down chairs or anything. It was just very small group of us of like maybe 20 people. We were just gonna walk in and we were just going to perform the ceremonies and very sweet, very quick. And then we were just going to go have a reception at my cousins house in Tacoma and she's like an amazing chef a baker and it was just going to be really nice. So we're walking into the grounds of this place and into the grotto and up over the hillside comes this golf cart and it's, and it's the park ranger and, and he's like racing towards us and he has this, like, he has this curled up mustache at the end.

Brian :

[01:11:06](#)

So he looks like one of those villains from like Rocky and Bullwinkle and he's just like flying towards us and slams his golf cart. And jumps out. And he's like, what are you doing here? And I'm like, well, we're just going to perform a little wedding ceremony real quick. And he's like, no, you have to rent this space, you know? And he's like, this isn't, this is, I'm like, it's a public park. I didn't, I thought it was fine. It's like, no, this is people rent like people advance the reserved spaces here for like a year, you know? And, and we're like, well how much is it to rent this place? He's like, it's \$800 and we're like, no, we

don't have \$800. And he's like, well, I'm sorry you can't do it. And we're like, we're going to be here for 10 minutes. I was like, does anybody have it booked today?

Brian : [01:11:50](#) And he's like, well no. And I'm like, they just give us 10 minutes. He like, you know, and, and he just would not budge. You wouldn't negotiate with us at all. And you're trying to haggle with this guy with a curled up villain mustache and a, and finally he says, well look, he goes, I can't let you do it here without paying the full day's rate, but I have an apple orchard over on the other side of the field. If you want to use the apple orchard, I'll let you do that for like 200 bucks.

Brian : [01:12:20](#) So my father in law pays him \$200 and we can move the whole Party over to this apple orchard. And we ended up going in the middle of this apple orchard and having the wedding there. So our goal, we're, we just sell, well ours, or excuse me, this month we're celebrating our 10th anniversary and our goal is on our 20th or probably 25th to go back and actually reserve that space and, and have a pedo of the vows. But anyway, so that was our crazy wedding and and crazy times. And then like, literally it was move her and her kids into the apartment that I was renting at the time. And then they started school like the very next week after that, like maybe like three days later they were in school and then we looked for a house to rent and moved just like a couple, like maybe a mile away into a house.

Brian : [01:13:18](#) But it was a different experience switching over to this LDS congregation from the one that I had served in as a church leader because this was not in an inner urban inner city experience. This was your more traditional kind of family type congregation. And this bishop was from Utah and had grown up in Utah and he was a far more, uof a stickler for the rules. Right. Then the bishop I'd worked in, I mean, the Bishop I had worked with literally the Bishop's Handbook of instructions. The rule, the, what I call the dungeon master's guide for bishops was like collecting dust, right? Like he'd never opened it. He just went by whatever his gut told him to do. And, and whereas this bishop now was like, "Well, let's see what the rule book says." You know, about like everything. And he wanted to put me through the repentance process after my marriage. Because we had broken the law of chastity, uprior and I, and I pushed back on him and was like, you do realize that we're like legitimately married now. Right? Like we kind of solved it.

Brian : [01:14:35](#) I don't think we need to revisit it and like it's, you know, it's done, you know? And so he didn't like me very much because I pushed against his authority and, and at this point I had gone

through such a big transition in my own personal faith and my relationship, particularly with Mormonism, that I just was not giving him the kind of authority that he wanted, you know? And I was just like pushing back the whole way through. So okay. Fast forward again a little bit at the Utah move. We come out here to Utah within a year. I'm back at school. I met, we were State University, I'm majoring in history. And then a year after that, Denise decides she wants to return to school as well and take and get into social work. So we're both full time students at Weaver State University in Ogden, Utah.

Brian : [01:15:27](#) And raising four kids at the time living in a condo in Layton, Utah. And and it was crazy. I got to the internship part of my history program and decided to do my internship with the LDS church history department. And opening was there with the Joseph Smith Papers Project. And so I applied for it. And I went down there and interviewed with the guy who sets up their internships and I had like a beard and everything and he was like, okay, we'll take you on, but you're going to have to shave.

Brian : [01:16:12](#) I was like, fine. So I did and ended up, so the first semester that was an unpaid internship, I ended up working on a book that has been published called the first 50 years of the relief society, which is the LDS women's organization. Right. And so we're talking like Emma Smith history and I was just sourcing footnotes in, that's a huge volume. It's like as it's like an 800 page monster volume. And by the way, I think I'm on like page number 716 listed in like the after credits with a little thank you, like towards the bottom of the page. But that was my first experience really like working in scholarship as opposed to just reading scholarship. Right. And like actually like digging up microfilms and old newspaper clippings and you know the actual handwritten journals and documents and things like that. And I came to the last, the cross a lot of really neat things. One of the, one of the funnest things that I came across was a Relief Society minutes ledger from the Parowan Utah stake. And they were talking about the Relief Society. And they were talking about planning a party and event. And in one point they mentioned ask sister, I can't remember the names like Brewster to bring the beer because she makes the best beer, which I thought was like super awesome.

Brian : [01:17:39](#) And I had a good laugh over that with the LDS church historian who was just recently made a emeritus from that elder Steven Snow. So he and I had a good laugh over that and we talked about how the word of wisdom actually did promote drinking beer at the time, you know, and, you know it was really kinda neat to be thatin that environment because these were some

pretty serious scholars that were working in this environment and they weren't they weren't threatened by things that you would dig up in the history. It wasn't like, oh no, no, no, that, that could shake faith. Right? For them, it was just history and you talked about it as history. You had a good laugh over it. It was like, oh, this is zany. This is totally crazy.

Brian : [01:18:22](#) You should read this. And like, you know, Oh yeah, that Brigham and stuff like that. But it wasn't like, yeah, it wasn't, it was never one of those like nobody ever got defensive about it. Which was really cool. The then they offered to keep me on board as a paid intern. And I worked on a book called the Prophet and The Reformer, which was published by Oxford University press a couple of years ago. And it was a documentary history of the correspondence between Brigham Young and a guy named Thomas Cane and Thomas Cane. Cane County Utah's named after him. He was a politician and a Civil War veteran who really helped the Mormon settle into the Utah territory. He was kind of a fighter for religious liberty and they had correspondence back and forth from 1847 all the way up until Brigham Young death in 1876.

Brian : [01:19:18](#) So a lot of letters back and forth. One of the more sensitive and tender one wa tender ones was when Thomas Cane learned about polygamy and didn't learn it from Brigham Young.E learned it from Congress and felt a little betrayed that he had known Brigham Young at this point for over a decade and didn't know he was a polygamist cause they'd never met in person. They were just correspondents and, and uyou know, so yeah, Thomas was a Presbyterian and unot a very devout Presbyterian, but he did not agree with polygamy at all. And so, yeah, that was a really interesting correspondence because it happened over wintertime. And so Brigham couldn't physically respond to him for like four months because we couldn't get a letter out of Utah. We had to wait for the mountains to fall before we could get Pony Express to carry the letter out east to Washington. Right. And so during this time, it was just like dead air. Thomas is basically like, "Okay, I just learned about polygamy and I do not agree with it. And I think that you're a violin reprehensible person for practicing it. And I can not believe you didn't tell me about this. I thought we were friends." And then dot, dot, dot. For like four months.

Brian : [01:20:31](#) And then Brigham writes him back and it's like, it's like the most sidestepping response, right? It's like, well, it's our political and religious right in the constitution grants us, you know, religious freedom to be able to practice religion in the way that, you know, man are easy, but it was just all like boilerplate, like

politics response. And then Thomas writes back a response to that and it's so tender. He's like, he's, he says, you know, thank you for writing back. I thought that I had lost your friendship, right? Like it was like he just completely sidestepped the fact that Brigham just blew them off with this like Paul political rhetoric. It was just like, no, no, no, no, I was angry at you, but I'm glad that we remained friends. Right. So it was kind of cool. It was cool to see stuff like that.

Brian : [01:21:20](#) I did that until spring of 2014 and in the book was done and off to the editors at Oxford University. And then, I learned while I was there towards the end, from a friend, good friend named Tom Kimball, who at the time was working for signature books. He told me about the internship opportunity with Joseph Smith Historic Site and his, daughter I think had recently done it. It was either his daughter or one of his sons. I know that he's had a lot of kids that have done it, but, she had recently done it. She had a great experience and he said, you ought to do this. You ought to contact them and do it. So I did. I, I contacted, Lach Mackay at the time is, was at the Historic Site, I think he still is, but was at the time just the Director of the Historic Site and not in the Council of 12.

Brian : [01:22:16](#) And he checked with Tom to verify that I was going to be a good fit that I wasn't, you know, gonna go in there and try to preach Utah Mormonism to all the Community of Christ interns. Tom assured him and Lach gave me the offer and I went out there may of 2014 and stayed through middle of August, 2014 just living on the historic site, doing tour guiding. And I did some research on the Nauvoo House. And you know, I, it was really my first introduction to community of Christ. I had known about the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints. There was a chapel in Seattle and I drove by it on my way to our meeting house. So I saw it quite regularly, but I never got it. Like I didn't understand who these people were and like why they were different from the mainstream church. What made them want to start their own branch. I think in a way I kind of saw them as like Jehovah's Witnesses, right? Like I thought that maybe they were even more strict on things. Right? I had no clue.

Brittany : [01:23:38](#) I think that's the perception of a lot of LDS people because when we have tried to explain what church we now belong to, it's kind of that same thing too. Like, wait a second, can you wear pants? Are you polygamist now? There's a lot of misunderstanding.

Brian : [01:23:57](#) There is.

Brian : [01:23:59](#) It seems like the general thinking is that any sort of schism from what they would think is the schism from the mainstream church has to be more fundamentalists. And of course out here in Utah, the big question is, are, is that a polygamous group? Right. Like they don't understand that it's, that it actually began to completely the opposite from that. Ubut so this was my first like real introduction. Uand, and I really grew a real close friendship and relationship with the Community of Christ guides that I worked with. Uand with Lachlan and his wife Christin, and just really had a great summer with them. And, you know, I found myself attending Community of Christ services more often than LDS services, even though I would still like go to the LDS temple and Nauvoo like almost weekly. Uwhich, that was kind of a fun story too, because all the LDS folks, umissionaries started associating me with the Joseph Smith Historic Site owned by community of Christ.

Brian : [01:25:06](#) And so they assumed that I was a Community of Christ member. And and here I was in their temple and I got approached. I got approached once by this, this sweet, well-meaning elder who was like, what are you doing in here? And I was like, I'm attending the temple. And he's like, aren't you down at the Joseph Smith Historic Site? And I said, yes, I am. He goes, well, then how did you get a temple recommend? And, and just for a half a second, I was tempted to say, well, Ebay, but I didn't, I didn't, I was nice. And I just said, well, my bishop, he's just like so confused. Your bishop? And I'm like, Hey, you know, anyway it was fine. I ended up getting really welcomed into the local Community of Christ congregation in Nauvoo, which, you know, was very charming, small group people and participating with them quite a bit on Sundays and worship service.

Brian : [01:26:08](#) They allowed me to offer the prayer for peace, for instance, and it was just a, it was a really nice experience. And I carried that with me. I wasn't at this point looking to make a change, but I was definitely, I think mostly based on sort of the broad ecumenical background that I had had throughout my life. I was definitely open to different churches, right? And wanted to maintain some sort of connection after this with Community of Christ, even as a friendship and support. So I became involved with the historical association, John Whitmer Historical Association and just kept in contact with a lot of people that I had met with Community of Christ as well as scholars that are associated with community of Christ. Over time. And for instance, I ended up I ended up, while I was out there, I ended up driving out to Utah for Sunstone. I was actually in the program speaking on a panel with Mike Quinn, who was an LDS scholar and I picked up Bill Russell on the way at and Bill Russell,

a Community of Christ scholar. And, also I ended up spending like 20 hours in the car with Bill Russell, which if, you know, Bill Russell was like, we're three credit hours.

- Brian : [01:27:33](#) I told, I joke, I joke that I still have like three credit hours at Graceland University from my a car ride with Bill Russell. He was, he was a remarkable man and we had a great time. But yeah, I definitely, I definitely got a historical experience with Bill Russell. At one point, we were driving by oh, I think it was, I think we're in Iowa still and we were driving by the river and he's like, pull over the car. I'm going to baptize you now. Cause like he's like, I can do that. I have the authority to do it.
- Brittany : [01:28:10](#) That sounds like Bill.
- Brian : [01:28:17](#) He was great. He was great. Yeah. I adore him. But you know, so I've spoken at several John Whitmer, conferences and you know, I've, I've reviewed books for their journal and things like that and just sort of just kept in touch with the, with everybody throughout the years.
- Josh Mangelson : [01:28:42](#) Thanks for listening to Project Zion podcast Subscribe to our podcast on apple podcast, stitcher, or whatever podcast streaming service you use. And while you're there, give us a five star rating projects. I am. Project Zion is sponsored by Latter-day Seeker Ministries of Community of Christ. The views and opinions expressed in this episode are of those speaking and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Latter-day Seeker ministries or Community of Christ. The music has been graciously provided by Dave Heinze,
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