

Chai Can't Even | Ethan Mitchell

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

church, ministry, ordination, youth, camp, calling, priesthood

SPEAKERS

Ethan Mitchell, Blake Smith

Blake Smith 00:26

Hello and welcome to Chai Can't Even Project Zion Podcast series where we chat with young adults about life, faith, struggles and joys, and why they choose to stay active and Community of Christ. I'm your host, Blake Smith, and today I'm really excited because I'm down at Bluff Springs campgrounds, which is the campgrounds where I grew up. And I am with a young adult who is just absolutely on fire, and his name is Ethan Mitchell, and I'm just really glad to have him here with us. Welcome, Ethan. Thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited. Well, Ethan, we'd like to start off these episodes, because we know that all of our listeners won't know who you are, so we'd like, if you wouldn't mind, to tell us just a little bit about yourself so we can get to know you better.

Ethan Mitchell 01:09

Alright, so who I am now. I'm Ethan Mitchell. I'm 24 years old. I turn 25 next month. This year, I will be starting my fourth year as a high school band director. And it's been going wonderfully I teach over here in Florida. I went to University of Southern Mississippi, where I got my degree in music education. And I've been an ordained teacher for seven years. I just ordained the day before I went to college. And then my favorite Christian artist is Jonathan McReynolds, and my favorite show on Netflix is I Think You Should Leave.

Blake Smith 01:44

I think you should what...?

Ethan Mitchell 01:45

I Think You Should Leave. That's the name of it.

Blake Smith 01:49

Oh, well, we won't get into that. I was gonna ask you what that's about. I'll have to look that one up. Now, I have to ask you a question that's not in the ones that I told you about. But I'm just listening to you. And I've been talking with you all week. And I didn't realize so you're from Crestview. Florida. right? [Yes.] And you went to Mississippi to college, and you don't have the deep southern accent like everybody else.

Ethan Mitchell 02:14

I know.

Blake Smith 02:14

How did that work?

02:17

You know, it's just because I think it's because my mom's from up north. {Okay.} And so like, I didn't have it real bad.

Blake Smith 02:24

You're not hearing it in the house.

Ethan Mitchell 02:25

And so you know, I turned out okay. Now it gets, it gets worse. Like when I go to like SPEC or something, I'm gonna, I'm gonna bring it out on purpose.

Blake Smith 02:35

Okay. Well, I just wondered because I married a woman from the Midwest, and she has worked for 37 years to get that worked out of me. So I just wondered how, who did it for you? And how did it happen so fast? Well, again, it's great to have you with us, Ethan. WE want you to just tell us your story and just kind of go through stages of life and, and how you got to this point. So what was church like for you as a child?

Ethan Mitchell 03:04

So I saw the question and I said, I feel like I really need to, for someone to understand me completely, I think to understand. I gotta tell the full story. So I'm gonna tell you a little bit about my family. Just so you know where I'm from. My mother's family has a very, pretty large family in the northern part of the church. Lots of cousins up there, Roger Rose, lots of guys up there. Those are all my cousins. My father's family has a very large family from the south, that's also in the church. We got a lot of Barns, cousins down here. And they met at Graceland in the 90s. And then just so also, I combined when I had my Evangelist Blessing and talked about this deep heritage that I had with the church. But I feel like the best part about growing up in the church as a child, was all my best friends. My cousins were all with me, and they're still my best friends to this day. We all got called to the priesthood around the same time. We all work together. And so you know, my, they're also my roommates, right now, and so, I grew up with a whole church family taking care of us, as well as best friends and real family because we were, half of us were related. We're all cousins somehow. That's, that's the south, we're all cousins, and everyone took care of us. And so, just for an example, I tried to do sports. And as you can see, I'm a band director, so the sports didn't really turn out.

Blake Smith 04:42

I'm with you there, brother.

Ethan Mitchell 04:43

So I was on a city league basketball team and my dad, he's 6'6" and he played basketball growing up and so he was going to be my basketball coach, and my best friend from school was going to be on our

team. So he drafted our team nine and three immediately quit so we only had six. And then, in the first game, one guy rolled his ankle, so then we only had the five, which is what you play with. And then we got some guys that one guy that wouldn't come regularly. And so it gets to be this point in the season, I think I'm like 10 or 11 years old. And I'm playing the city league basketball team, we're 0-7, we have not won a single game. And we were so bad. And we tried, like some games were close, some games were not close at all. And my dad went to the church, and was like, the whole team, he told them, which was the truth, we were all 10 years and 11 years old. And you lose seven times in a row in city league basketball, and you feel pretty bad about yourself as a kid. And so, my entire congregation came to our last game. We had about 25 people from our congregation there. So most of them, and they cheered for us. They went "Yay, Ethan," when I got the ball, and they maybe they didn't make too many, like wincing noises when I air-balled by threes or anything, but um, you know it, we didn't win that game, either. We were 0-8 for our city league team, but I learned a lot from that. Particular that's one quick moment. And so the but then we had other congregation members who really just took church family and made it, you know, and you talked about them as well, but Jake and Della, from my congregation, were a huge part of that. They, so before I was there, there was all of this wonderful work that they did with the senior high's, and the junior high's, and they did all these fun trips, and we had Solid Rock and all this wonderful stuff. And as I was growing up, it was slowly you know, it was kind of going away when I got older, but as a child, it was still very much prevalent. And what they did is every Sunday, you know, I had a sister, or I have a sister. I have a sister and a brother and my cousin as well. But every Sunday, Jake and Della would pick one of us and make sure it was individually, not almost never both. And take us out to eat separate and talk with me about what I liked, which was probably transformers and monster trucks, then they would take me out to their house. And we would work in the workshop, like they had woodshop. And we would work in the workshop for a couple hours. And I would get the build something, and he would show me how to use the tools, and how to really, you know, just talk to me about life. And just so many good examples I got from that just how to be, like how to exist as a person. And then like there was once they knew I like spicy food, and I still do love spicy food. And they took me inside they picked there, they went out there we picked tomatoes and jalapenos from their garden went upstairs and we made salsa, homemade salsa. And I got to take a jar home. And so there were these people in my congregation that just kept taking care of me as a kid. And then so I get to be like, you know, I make it through elementary school all great, you know, and I'm an ideas guy. At that point in my life. I'm already an ideas guy. And so it got to be, I was I was baptized in the church, confirmed at eight. And I, so I was a full member of the church. So that meant I could go to business meetings. So I was in this business meeting. And my pastor's name was Tom Buscavage. And we were voting on who would do what for the year, like to plan what events. And, it got time to be our trunk or treat thing, and he said who's gonna do the Halloween event, the Fall Festival? Nobody raised their hand. So I raised my hand and I was like, maybe 13. [Wow.] Yeah. And I was like, I think it would be really fun. And I saw half the congregation gasp say like, appalled, like, this kid can never. And they were murmuring and stuff. And Tom shushed everyone and said, alright, Ethan, you're in charge. And I'll help. And Tom sat me down like two or three Sundays. And he just asked me what I wanted. And he'd write it down. And then I did what I could, which is I really wanted to have a Kool Aid making contest, see who could the best Kool Aid and who could make the best cupcakes. And so we had a Kool Aid contest, and a cupcake contest and some games that I wanted. And then what Tom did, was Tom took care of everything else that I didn't see. Tom made sure there was food, and Tom made sure everybody was gonna be there, and invited people and they made sure they had all the

announcements and stuff. Well, I got to help make the announcements too. And at the time, I was like, "this sucks, I wish I was completely in charge." And but I then I realized, [...], nobody would have ever let me do this. And it's so that's what it was like to grow up in my congregation and, was that from when I was able to talk, they knew, they cherished, I was I felt loved, valuable, helpful. I was, they were given, I was given tasks. I was allowed to take up offering, I said prayers in church. I was involved in my congregation, from before I was baptized. And when as I grew, it was slowly and more things that I could handle until I got to the point where now I'm 24. I'm on the pastoral team, for my church. I preach regularly. I preside regularly. And I have, I do Bible school; I do all these things. And it's no longer, we can't let this, you know this kids too young. Every Sunday I go to church, they come up to me and say, "I'm so glad you're here." And that's, and so, as a youth that was like, that's like, my God, like what church was to me as a child. I wasn't, my parents didn't let me choose, necessarily. But I didn't have to, because I wanted to be there. So I was never given the option to not go to church. It was just like what we did. Like, because my parents were both there. My parents both went every Sunday. And you know, and but, as soon as I got there, I had my needs met as a child. And that radically helped me start. [...] oh, it was Wednesday night scripture services. And I'd invite my friends, it Wednesday night scripture service, because they all they went to their own churches, right. You know, their parents, whatever denomination and I was in the converting business. And so I just invited them to come on Wednesday nights, because we always had food. And then afterwards, we'd play games. And we'd have prayer service and memorize some scriptures and like, learn about some stories. And it was a lot easier to invite people to that than the regular church, because of more of most of them are free.

Blake Smith 12:41

Yeah, so it sounds like there was just this really deep investment in you and the young people and not just in us, okay, here, well let them do a token thing. But when you're talking about Jake and Della, having you over, picking you out individually listening to you, and responding. Like letting you go and pick the tomatoes and jalapenos. And really, you knew that you were heard. Those are, those are great things.

Ethan Mitchell 13:07

And there was like, my current pastor who asked me to be on the pastoral team. I remember when I was like 15, and I hadn't really talked to her that much like we were like, you know, maybe she talked about Sunday school classrooms or twice, we had a board game day at church, after church. After lunch, everybody came back to play board games, and she asked me to play Scrabble with her. Because I was, I was a word guy. That's the, you know, like, I did, I was good at grammar. I was good at reading, loved reading. And so I was like, 12 trying to win at Scrabble. And, you know, that's the kind of thing that you know, stick stuck real hard. And um...

Blake Smith 13:43

So it's probably hard, hard for you to say, because I know you mentioned that it was not an option for you not to go to church. And I kind of laughed when you said that. Because earlier this week, and again, we're at this reunion. And I did not know that Matthew was your brother at the time. But I had said something to someone after the first night of campfire that I was so impressed that when you as the campfire leader asked for people to stand up and offer prayer at the end, that seven youth stood up to pray and one was this really tall, you know, teenager that usually and by that time too cool to do

anything. And then so, I was just really impressed by that. And someone said, Yeah, because his mom would snatch a knot in his head. He didn't get up and do it again. For those of you who don't know, Southern that's just that's just a figure of speech. But I, so, I get an idea of how non-optional was for you.

Ethan Mitchell 14:42

I was I wasn't expected to participate. I was expected to behave, but that's kind of a southern thing, but make sure I was "Yes sir. Yes, ma'am." All of us pray, and, learned a lot.

Blake Smith 14:55

That's great! So, you mentioned about you and your cousins being ordained and coming up together and, and, and being 24 years old that had happened somewhere in that high school/college age. So tell us a little bit about that journey as you moved into teenage years and, and got you where you are today.

Ethan Mitchell 15:14

So I think so I started getting a lot closer with my church members, because you know, I was they were coming to my concerts, I joined band and middle school. Joined band, and I wanted to play jazz and I was a tuba player. And there was no tuba in the jazz band. And so I started taking bass lessons from a young adult in our church, or he was a young adult, probably like, just finished college, or was in college, I'm not entirely sure. And to be honest, I was taking bass lessons with him. And we played from his old book from the 70s, or whatever, it was hilarious. But we, so, I started taking these lessons, I started taking band. And so I got really involved in just high school in general. And it also really involved year, you know, we start camp at the completion of the third grade, not the completion of six or so we had Junior camp, third, fourth, fifth grade. And so I went my third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade year. I have all the third graders miss their mom on the second day, but at the end of it, they have a great time. Middle School, same thing, sixth, seventh eighth. And that's the first time I ever brought a friend to camp, the one time I got somebody go, I have a great testimony about that about being left, I actually got left in a thunderstorm. [Oh my gosh.] So we had a wilderness camp, which was out in the wilderness, right? No technology and no cell service. And we go on a canoe trip every year. And it was time to leave for the canoe trip. And I needed to step to the restroom. And I stepped to the restroom. And even my friend that I brought from high school or from middle school, forgot I was there. And they all drove a mile and a half off and left me in the middle of the pouring awful thunderstorm. And I couldn't do anything but repeat to myself, I was terrified. So it's just I had a mantra, "God...will..protect...me." Like I tried running in this rain through this, through the woods. And eventually they found me. And I've never seen somebody look more embarrassed than that kid [I bet.]. Anyway, so I'm going through camps, I'm having these spiritual experiences, I started those wilderness camps. And as I was when I was starting to figure it out, I could probably say a little bit. And then so they had me lead campfire at like, 14 at those wilderness camps, because nobody else could sing, and or at least was willing to sing, and so I ... high school and going through my camps. And so I'm an ordained teacher. And part of my gift is the ability to see into people and like, feel that, you know, just like kind of empathy, you know. And I would call this the first instance of me, this, I was not ordained at this time, I would say the first instance of me, fulfilling my office of teacher. I was probably 15. And the Spirit came on to me in such a way that I could not, not pray for people. And so there were, there's about 16 to 20 people that are,

there were about 50 people at this camp. And I think I prayed for about 20 people individually. I would just walk around and, just because I was so moved by the service that the campfire service, we just had, I prayed words that I didn't know they needed to be prayed for. I didn't know, I didn't pick people I was praying for except my best buddies. But even then, I didn't know everything that was going on. And I, like I said, people, I don't, I don't know how you knew to pray. but you said, just the right words. And so that was like when I was 15. And I'm still going through about this time when I get I you know, I get asked to share testimonies a couple times, not sermons, you know, testimonies, and building up my band career working, joined, like, I'm in like a four band classes at my high school, dual enrolled in college classes. So I could make that happen. So I'd go to school from 7am to 9pm at night, and have rehearsals all throughout that it was nuts to tell you the truth. And my parents loved me and supported me and get to be, so, I'm a summer birthday. So I turned 17. Then I started my senior year, so I didn't turn 18 till after I graduated. And so, I turned 17, and I get to be my senior year of high school. I'm trying to figure out what I'm doing with my life. I didn't know what I was going to do. And that was at this point. I was like, I'm gonna go into music. Also, I should say I went to SPEC. SPEC was lovely, I love SPEC. I performed at SPEC a lot. That helped me a lot, just really enjoying living up to like the Rockstar moments where I'm sitting there with a huge, like, actually good rock band onstage. All those, those are great performances. I have them, I look back on and they're wonderful. So I was 17, I my pastor pulled me back. And none of my friends had gotten called yet, but I was first, and they said, "Ethan, you've been called to the office of teacher." I said, "We don't have any of those in this church. What is that?" We didn't. I had there were not, there were no, the last teacher we had had that was a teacher that was not called to something else had passed away a couple years earlier. And I was like, what do you, what do you mean, I'm called to the office of teacher? What the heck is that? Not a teacher. Not necessarily. And, and so, that's when I found out that we had had several members who were teachers who were now elders or high priests or other things. And so, I started going through my Temple School classes. This is all during my senior year of high school, and Temple School classes, I did, we'd do them one at a time. I think I started with Intro to Ministry. Then, I think me and my cousin ... this is when my cousin Reed gets called to the office of priest and my friends Tyler and Tristan Ward from Baton Rouge get called to priest. And so there was also that, you know, "why are they priests, and why am I a teacher?" [Sure] And then, my last cousin, he finally gets called. He got a call around this time to teacher as well, after I finished my classes and stuff. And so, graduated high school, sang at graduation ... scariest performance in my life in front of like 10,000 people acapella. And finally, it gets time. So I have my evangelist blessing, my first evangelist blessing because I'm about to go to college and I'm scared. I decided to go to University of Southern Mississippi which is in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. And your, what you need to know is, that's three and a half hours from my house, and 90 minutes from any congregation close to that. And so, I was going away to a place where I didn't know anyone for sure. And so I graduate, I get called, so I get my evangelist blessing two weeks before I turned 18 I turned 18 on July 30. A week later, on August 6, I get ordained. August 7 was my first day of college. [Wow.] And so I just get ordained, I get shipped off. My parents leave me at the college.

Blake Smith 23:03

And you're not near a church.

Ethan Mitchell 23:04

I am. This. No, no church nearby. I was, I was given one name to find that was a member of the church that lived in Hattiesburg. Never found them. I tried. I tried. I don't know if they moved or what, like it was just, it was literally a name like, I don't know how to find this. You know, I'm not a detective. I'm a music guy. And so I started August 7 at marching band camp of college. And so now I'm surrounded in this room by you know, 25-year-olds, 20-year-olds, or 22-year-olds. And it's, uh, you know, "state your name and fun fact about you." And it's just me and I, and my section. I said my name is Ethan Mitchell. And I didn't want to say, I'm a priesthood member yet, so I said... but I did know that I was a patient man. And that patience was the key to peace. And instead of saying I'm a pretty patient guy. I said, "I'm Ethan Mitchell and I'm difficult to make mad. [Oh] And boy, let me tell you... I got ordained that day. Then that week was those weeks are some of the hardest weeks of my life.

Blake Smith 24:22

How was that?

Ethan Mitchell 24:23

So this is one of my I think it's one of the testimonies I feel very proud of. But I knew at that point, they said oh, we'll see about that. You know, you know, you know boys are, and college kids, and can't say it was hazing because we were in a group more like bullying, which was weird in adults, but it was more just picking, it was more like a test, you know, because I you know, I wasn't slighted. You know, they didn't definitely not a friend or anything, but we still hung out. But um, so it started right here like in between my bicep and tricep here on my arm. Every time they walked past me, every single person in that section was supposed to punch me in the arm... But you think Yeah, that's okay... as they depart. But after a week, my arm was purple, and yellow. And

Blake Smith 25:24

Just to see if they could get through my head.

Ethan Mitchell 25:26

And I knew at that point that what I felt was, Jesus turned the other cheek. I am not going to show them, I'm going to win. Me and my faith are stronger than this. And then I lost my name. And I got a lot more explicit names for several weeks. And then it gets to be game days. And we've determined that game days where we have been very game days were slap Ethan on the back of the head for good luck day. And so it's so all this time, we were having monthly dinners, tubas did. And we, we, we acquired steaks. That was an interesting story, too. But we, I would, I would show up, I'd bring, I'd make it a little dessert. And they found out very quickly that I was very serious about not drinking and not doing anything. They tried to slip me stuff. And I would very, I was smart. Unfortunately for them never worked. And they would ask me about this. It's like, you know, I'm like, I'm ordained at my church, like, no way. And I was like I am. And it gets to be October. And we're about to eat. And my section leader, who's an agnostic, atheist, says, "Ethan, I think you should bless the food." I said, "what?," "I think you should bless the food." And everybody looked at me and like, there's, there's kids ...well, there's adults with beers and stuff. They're like, we want you to bless this food. And I was like, "Okay," no, like, I see, I see where we were going with this. And it was, I learned that I didn't have a congregation. But that's when it was made so obvious to me that my job as a teacher was not to peacemake in my congregation. Wherever I was, that was my congregation. The, my marching band, that was my

congregation. Those guys, that was my congregation, I was in the music, fraternity, my congregation, find me or anybody I've been wanting to know. That's, those are my that was my congregation. And anytime somebody needed prayer, I would offer it. Was it often? No. But I can tell you this much. I got a call, well my best friend stopped partying as much. He said, "I think I'm getting too old for this." And you, and so we would go and he would sit with me. And we wouldn't do it. You know, like, we'd hang out. And but, and then I got a call a couple of weeks ago, from my roommate, one of my roommates, I had in college. And he has since gotten married and since been hired by a church, to be a music director and organ player. He's phenomenal. And he was not raised in any churches. His parents, it was very interesting, because they had a funny life. But he called me and he goes, "Ethan, you were really the guy at college." I said, "What? What're you talking about?" Because at the time, you know, I had a lot of struggles in college. And mental health was bad. Mental Health was bad. I had counseling for four years, it was rough medicine, stuff like that. And so I didn't. And he said you were talked a lot about this and how I was there. And he's like, "it's crazy to think that you were Christian, but you didn't know me as a Christian yet," because he has since converted to you know, been baptized. And while he wasn't a Christian, when he took that job at that, well, he had taken another church job and was like, starting to like, listen to the sermons and stuff because, I mean, we were musicians, we needed money. [Right?] So he gets paid to play the piano, he might as well listen while he was there. And so he wasn't a Christian until recently, and I went to his, I was the only one from college that he invited to his wedding. Not that everyone else sucked or anything. I was just, we were just really close. And he called me like three weeks ago, I was like, "I, I want you to know that like, you've meant a lot to me." And like that. He was saying all that and so, college high school, it was, that's when it was I kind of developed my personality and really started to figure out what it was that teachers were, so I was, I've been a teacher for seven years. So, you know, I've just kind of started scratching the surface, and I hadn't even gotten really into faith at that time yet, that's something that's kind of come in the last couple of years too. I was a believer and all but [...]. But it was such a, such a hard time for me to go through. I never got to make it, you know, Saturday night football games. were tough on going to church on Sundays. And then being poor, college boy, I remember months it was peanut butter jelly month, or peanut butter and jelly weeks, and paying gas to church seem was enough for me to not go. And then you throw in COVID. And I actually was going, I was participating in more services once COVID started because I could, Zoom was, had been made readily available to all college students. And so people asked me to be in services in like, I was in Mission Center Services, I was in my home congregation services, I was in other people's services. And I we did the next faithful step thing for a while. And so it was I was getting to participate more and more, and I was trying to finish my degree. And

Blake Smith 31:44

if you mentioned that your faith in something that's really built in the last few years, and yet it sounds like faith was a really foundational point for you. I mean, not everybody survived, well college in the first place to be bullied and pushed and kind of prodded like, they're going to make you their project. And yet you help strong through all of that, to whom do you give credit for that?

Ethan Mitchell 32:14

So that's yeah, that was faith. And I don't know, who I give back credit to, probably my grandmother back home, family, congregation. I felt proud of that. And I, you know, I wanted them to kind of know that, you know, I wanted to stay faithful. I had just been ordained. And I knew I wanted to be, I wanted

to reflect Jesus as a peacemaker. That's what I was called to do. But as someone, like I told you, with this deep heritage in the church, and this family that supported me this whole time, I was ready.

Blake Smith 32:47

So you've been through all that. Sure, you were raised in the church, you've got deep heritage in the church with the family connections, and all of that. You've got friends, and colleagues who are part of other traditions, folks from your band days in college, who have gone out and gotten jobs in other traditions and stuff. What is it that's kept you in Community of Christ?

Ethan Mitchell 33:13

That was something you know, I consider that in college. I was a priesthood member and I was like, there's no church here. There was a Mormon church. So I started meeting with the Mormon missionaries. And I wanted to know the differences. I went to maybe one or two services there. But I just I couldn't get, I can't get behind it. You know, it's not like, you know, I'm sure that's for some people, it's just I know, what having women priesthood members did for me. I know that having those priesthood calls, not be given at a certain age, I knew that having you know, the Book of Mormon, I was, I was on board. I, we studied the Book of Mormon, when a couple of my Sunday school classes as a high schooler. It's just tough. I've learned, I live those ideals. That's why I'm I, when I, I'm a very reflective person, I'm a deep thinker. So all this time, I was thinking to myself, who am I? What am I going to be? And I took those role models from church and I said, I'm going to be this peaceful person like Jake. I'm gonna listen to those who want to help like Tom who was my pastor that one time, he wanted me to do that thing? I want to be able to be gentle with youth, like Jacob, who was my counselor at senior high camp. And, I felt all that and I said, you know, this is who I want to be. And when I made this list of all these characteristics that I wanted to have, when I died, what legacy I want or to have. The church's and values were evident, and how to treat people and how to and how I how I felt about different, different questions that just come up, it was, seemed like I was almost always siding with the church. And it's crazy how that would go. And then, just more recently, even more recently, I've had like, it's not that I wasn't fully awake and ready to respond. But I was, we, we've been talking about the sower [Parable of the Sower] all week, and so on, and I had been on this path, I graduated college and immediately started working. I got a high school job right out of college, where it had been run to the ground, band had 30 kids in it, everyone was mad, band room was disgusting. It was a bad situation, he got fired halfway through the year, that kind of deal. I come in, 21 years old, [Wow, in a high school] in a high school, about to start teaching. And they say we need you to make this. So, I immediately rebranded and all this stuff. And so it was hard for me to love. I was at that point time where I had a second evangelist blessing I should mention. And that did wonders. Because I was really worried about this career because I want to, I really want to do it right. And I can tell you, first year teachers always say their first year is horrible. Not my first year, my first year went great. I have nothing but to thank but by God and my family for supporting me. It went so well. And the job was like, I've grown my band now. Next year, I have 90 members. And so that's exponential growth in the last several years. But, what I was staying, it's I when I got out of college, and through college, you know, college was really thorny. I couldn't grow because of all of this. And I was kind of shackled by like depression and like I was having panic attacks every day. And I couldn't grow my spirituality because I couldn't function very well. And then so I kind of the thorns moved off when I started working, but now was the path where I couldn't get anything done because I was working so hard. And I couldn't, I

couldn't breathe. Like I wasn't centered. And then, I was planning events I directed three men's retreats. And they were very spiritual for most people. I had this feeling after every one. It was like, I didn't you know, like this deep, like I didn't know if I felt that, you know, I didn't feel a lot. I directed, I started a camp here that we were doing. And I hadn't felt them. Yeah. And then this year, I got kind of slapped across the face with the statement that sent me completely, like I said like a reawakening of spirituality that set me even more on fire. Gary, brother, Gary Howard, he's an evangelist in our church. He was preaching at the men's retreat this year, it was the first one in the while that I hadn't actually directed. And I believed all these things growing up. And I believed I believe that Jesus died for me. And he looked at us, and I don't know if he was looking right at me, but I felt it. And he said, "Do you believe that Jesus died for you, or do you know?" And I, my mind was rocked. I was, someone that's such a deep thinker as myself. I was gone. Like I, they were like, "we need you to leave campfire." I was like, "I can't, I can't lead campfire right now, I'm having a crisis." And I completely went back. And I was like, that's what I was feeling that I kind of believed. I did believe. But at this point in time, that's what I knew. Deep down. I knew I knew what I was in. But I as at that point where I was like, re-committed myself and changed a lot about how I was living, which, not like I was living poorly. But I just started tithing more of my time. Spending more of my time in Word, in the Scriptures. And you know, both of my evangelist blessings, said to study the scriptures and good books every day. And at that point, in my time, I still wasn't. Even though I said it's why.

Blake Smith 39:47

Sometimes it takes time for us to catch on.

Ethan Mitchell 39:49

And you know, I was like, Okay, I got it, I got it. So I started doing more, and then that's when doors started opening... weird doors that I would have never expected to have opened. And, and it could all be a coincidence, but it's not. You know, I wasn't ready before for some other thing. So that's why am I still in the church. It's because this church has been an absolute blessing to me. I love the ideals. I love. I have a poster of the Enduring Principles in my dining room. I have you know, I uh... the mission, the Mission Initiatives. I've had those memorized since I was 14-15. First SPEC probably. IYF 2014. That's, I considered those, like, I thought about those. When I was in college, I was like, I wish somebody would have abolished poverty right now. I'm hungry (laughing) No, no, it wasn't about that, but um, yeah, like, I was like, I need to know pursuing peace, and then developing disciples to serve, inviting people to Christ, in my own way. Because I don't I know, I don't like being told to do things. But I, I felt called to be this example. And that's, you know, so that's, I have decided this church, that I believe. In I do, like the thoughts about, you know, us not being the one true church. And I do feel like there's a, as far as the Christian faith movement goes, I believe, you know, there are going I don't think if they go to other churches, they're gonna go to hell. I love my friends that go to other churches. And I know that we have talked about our faith. And they're just as spiritual. I went to a wedding that was not Community of Christ. And it was deeply spiritual. And I loved it. And it was my best friend from high school. And so I, I wouldn't, I don't put down any other churches. Not really any I'm sure they have their moments. But that's not what I'm supposed to be doing, I'm supposed to be this the peacemaker, and they're all you know, I'm supposed to love. And we're a Community of Christ, whether that means... I'll tell you, I'll give you one example. I was at one conference last year. And I was with a group of young adults. There was an elder in our church. There was me, I was a teacher. There was, there was a member from another

... He was just another member. Really funny guy, not priesthood, but he was very business. He was in charge of business where he was at. We had a guy that was with us that had done when he was like part of it like a satanic church for a while, but he was checking out our church. These guys had been like, with like, some been on like reservations and going through spiritual stuff on reservations. And I was like, "this is wild!" Here I am just a small town southern boy up here, I don't know if I'm a small town southern boy. I am, but I'm up there and I'm just like, I, I did, that was not unnoticed on me. That moved me a lot to like, I thought a lot about what community meant at that moment, what Community of Christ meant. It's a calling. And I am, I agree, or that there should be a community of Christ.

Blake Smith 43:57

Awesome. Can you tell us so what are your hopes for Community of Christ?

Ethan Mitchell 44:03

I am a ... I'll say I'm a teacher. I'm an empath. That's kind of what comes with the train. I feel a lot of things. I've been to two of the last three mid world conferences. And there's so much tension it hurts. I have, I feel like I have to go, so I could just be, to drop it just a little bit. I'm very excited for the next one, it's going to be in June, so I won't be in school so I can go. I had to take unpaid time off to go last year. Because I was seven days off from teaching high school but um, so I, my hopes would be that when, you know, I mean world peace, you know. But even the smaller just my hopes would be that we get to spend more time together creating music, well in music terms, to create harmony. And I'm from the south. There are a lot of, there's a lot of dissonance in the way in how things have gone. And it hurt growing up, it hurt. We had people walking out of stuff we had, we had preachers sat down. We had people who are no longer, no longer allowed to preach anymore. People that are really good. And when it was, as a young man growing up in that... a young person, it was just it was tough to see such division and while I, you know, I do have my own opinions and stuff, I do appreciate the steps, the document that we have about the safe conversations that we've the... [faithful disagreement] faithful disagreement, and I think there's a certain level of ... I don't want to, I don't want to call it pride, but it's kind of very similar, where you have, your it's a very, you know, very rooted to you, and if it is rooted to you, that's okay. But it may not be rooted to somebody else. And you know, we talked about completely different countries. And when that's the case, you're gonna butt heads just because it doesn't match, what you're culturally used to. And it's so just my hopes for the church would be that that Spirit of peace, be with all of us as we as we talk with one another. And that's my hope within the church, but without outside, you know, within our own church, but also that we are being that peace as a church, for our communities. Whether there are churches preaching against us in those cities, or churches working with us. I know I'm directing Bible School in a month. And I've, I've had it on my heart to invite RLDS congregations in our town, to that Bible School, for whatever reason. It's been on my heart for several weeks. So I need to call the pastors and invite their people, and invite several other you know, these other denominations. Because it's not our denomination based. It's just Bible school. It's pirate themed. We've got, we're gonna rent a \$500, one and a half story waterslide that's shaped like a pirate ship. You want to come? [What is the date?] And you know, so why would it? It's not. It's not an exclusive church. You know, it's an inclusive Church. And that means, so our hopes is that peace, peace, peace, peace.

Blake Smith 49:00

All right. What is it that you need the church to hear you say?

Ethan Mitchell 49:05

I'm not sure if it's the people listening to this that may need to hear this, but they can pass this on to their congregations. But do not lose hope. Keep growing the talents and gifts that God has given you until you feel you absolutely must share, and share those gifts and bring Christ to your communities with a love and peace that is the Holy Spirit.

Blake Smith 49:28

Very nice way to wrap things up, but I don't want to wrap it up completely. Because I just want to say, is there anything that you'd like to say that I haven't asked?

Ethan Mitchell 49:36

I've loved having you down here this week. It's been wonderful. And I am grateful. I, one of the one of the things I love our creative solutions to ongoing problems. I would love to I love to find out, I had no idea that you have this, the podcast was going on. I knew that there are other pockets is going on. And I just I was excited to hear that there was this there were people that were part of this community about this podcast community. That is the Community of Christ in itself. It's a creative way to answer different callings. So great.

Blake Smith 50:17

Well, Ethan I can't say thank you enough. It has been a pleasure to be with you this week as well. But especially for you to take the time because you've got some significant roles here at the reunion. And for our listeners who might not, I realize that I've mentioned reunion a couple of times, and we may have some of our listeners who don't know what that is, but it's a multi-generational family camp that has been a part of our tradition for a long time. And Ethan has some roles here at the reunion and family camp that we're at. And so, Ethan, I just appreciate you really taking the time to be here and to watch you in your ministry this week.

Ethan Mitchell 50:59

Thank you. Thank you so much.

Blake Smith 51:01

Special thanks to our listeners here at Project Zion Podcast. You've been listening to a Chai Can't Even episode here with Ethan Mitchell. And it's been a pleasure to be with him, and it is a pleasure as always to have you join us here at Project Zion Podcast. If you'd like to hear other episodes of Chai Can't Even, please go to projectzionpodcast.org, and you'll find a "Series" drop-down menu in the upper bar, and you can just scroll down to Chai Can't Even, and that's where you'll hear more of these. But also in that list, you'll see all of the other series that we offer. There are over 700 episodes there on the website. Feel free to go through those, and join us on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays for further episodes as we move into the future. Thanks for joining us and have a great day.