

Chai Cant Even | Wes Hodgson

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SPEAKERS

Wes Hodgson, Blake Smith

Blake Smith 00:29

Hello and welcome to Chai Can't Even, a Project Zion Podcast series where we chat with young adults, or near young adults about life, faith, struggles and joys, and why they choose to stay active in Community of Christ. I'm your host, Blake Smith, and my guest for this episode is Wes Hodgson. And, I gave a little laugh at the beginning there, because we say young adults and we expand sometimes what young adults means. Wes told me that he doesn't really qualify as a young adult anymore, but he's pretty close. Wes was a student at Graceland University when I was serving as campus minister, which was just a few years ago, and I'm really glad Wes has agreed to sit down with me and tell our listeners his story about growing up in the church and what he's doing now. So welcome. Wes!

Wes Hodgson 01:19

Yeah, it's great to be here. Certainly is. Yeah.

Blake Smith 01:22

Wes before we get into the full story, I'm wondering if you might be willing to share a little bit about yourself so that our listeners can get to know you better.

Wes Hodgson 01:32

Absolutely. Well, thanks for having me on Blake. I think it is, it's important to acknowledge that that, you know, I'm 41. I graduated from Graceland in 2005, so we're coming up on, on 20 years away from Graceland here soon. But I think I'm pretty young at heart, on on a lot of things, which is, which is interesting, because I, I work with geriatric population in the VA hospital. I live in Des Moines, Iowa. I'm married to my wife, Rose, who also was at Graceland. We met there, and we both graduated in '05. She's a teacher in a suburb of Des Moines, which is not a big market. And I have two kids, an 11 year old, Violet, and a nine year old, Theo. And they are, I think any parent would say that their kid are the thing they wake up thinking about and think about when they're going to bed right like the our children are our life in so many ways, sometimes, in probably a wonderfully healthy way and maybe sometimes an unhealthy way. It had just consumed time, unique ways. But I'm not originally from Iowa. I moved here after grad school. My parents live in the Kansas City area, Independence area now, and I was, well, kind of my formative years were in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, and attended the church out in BC, and certainly think about Western BC and Canada often. And have a trip coming up here in 10 days back. So it'll be great to see grandparents and aunts and uncles and family out there. So I'm

excited about that. But yeah, I work in as I kind of shared in the VA in blind rehabilitation. So my job now is working with geriatric patients who have vision loss and mostly due to age related vision loss concerns. And I've been doing this now for 16, it'll be 16 years, 17 years this Fall, and I it's where I'm supposed to be. And kind of, kind of found myself in in blind rehab. And, yeah, blessed, very blessed.

Blake Smith 03:57

That's fantastic. Wes that Well, you say you've been gone from Graceland for 20 years? Yeah, I have to remind myself, because it seems like just recently, but I actually left what would have been after your junior year I got reassigned by the church in 2004 so it has been 20 years since I left Graceland. Unbelievable.

Wes Hodgson 04:19

Yeah, it's been a minute just flies by flies by.

Blake Smith 04:22

Yeah, And yeah my kids are now young adults themselves. They're 25 and 33 and so. So I guess that they still are my first and last thoughts many days. So anyway, well, let's get into the story about your growing up in in the church. What was church like for you as a young child in Vancouver?

Wes Hodgson 04:50

You know what I remember? I remember going to church. We went pretty religiously every Sunday. My dad was, I think he's probably, he's been in the priesthood since before I was born. And. And mom and dad were really active in church, and that meant myself and my siblings were there for Sunday schools and for camps growing up, and I certainly remember attending church. And I think you know, some of my early memories are, you know, do I did? Am I bringing my my coloring book to church. Did I forget it at home? Do I have a spot or a stash of crayons hidden somewhere in one of the classrooms so I can go grab it during church? But I remember, you know, vividly, the openness, the welcoming time at church. I remember having lots of friends at church growing up and and kind of our best friends were all at church, and certainly we saw them every Sunday. But you know, some of our friends growing up, we would see them through the week as well. And my, I don't know, I was probably eight to 10 years old at the time, and my parents were going on vacations with other church members, and they were doing adult trips. And church was a big part of our life growing up. My parents both grew up in the church. Their families were in the church. My aunts and uncles were all in the church. So it was a, you know, it was certainly part of a lifestyle, right? If you could, I think I'll, I think a lot of folks who have, who have been in the church of their family, would certainly say it that way. It was. It was something we just did. We moved to to the states to be near my mom's side of the family when I was in late middle school. And that was that was a real culture shock to go from Vancouver to east of Independence area. It wasn't Independence. It wasn't Blue Springs. It was further east, and Oak Grove was the was the town, and there was a great congregation there. I didn't really, we didn't really attend for quite some time in in Oak Grove, we there was another congregation that we attended on Colburn road and in kind of the South Blue Springs area. And we kind of attended off and on there. And probably when I got to be about 11th grade is when we really started attending a congregation in the independent, in the in the Oak Grove area, pretty regularly. And I think probably, like a lot of junior in high school, senior in high school, it was church was maybe slightly more of a chore for me. I struggled to relate to some of the

things that were shared in church, even though church was still a part of our life. So I went to SPEC when I was, the summer going into Graceland. So I attended Graceland. 2001 would have been my, my the fall of 2001 would have been my freshman year. I was a soccer player there, so I was there on a scholarship for soccer. And I think, you know, young child, I have these great memories of church. High school or older, I, late middle school through high school, I didn't do a lot with church, even though I did attend. Probably, what brought me back to church, though, was when I was at Graceland. I attended pretty regularly through my four years at Graceland. I was not on CCLP or I didn't minor in Religion, or take any of of Tony and Charmaine's classes, which I immensely regret now, immensely actually, but, but a lot of the guys on Cheville, there were, there were probably a dozen of them, and then attended regularly as well. And I would just go with those guys, right? And you know, the community in Lamoni and on campus is small enough that you get to know people uniquely well in a unique time frame, right? And certainly, certainly I that was, that was a good thing that I, that I attended and formed some really wonderful lasting relationships with some of the guys on the hall that I saw this past World Conference. And it was, it's great to see them, when I see them, and and always be grateful for that. So

Blake Smith 09:39

First of all, shout out to Tony and Charmaine. Lots of folks have endured the Tony and Charmaine classes, but I also understand they were pretty grueling, so...

Wes Hodgson 09:53

So yeah, I'm sure they were.

Blake Smith 09:55

I was the, as campus minister. I was there for comfort.

Wes Hodgson 10:00

Yes, yeah, I think that they're some of the stuff that, you know, they, they produce now, over the past, since I've left Graceland, is just, it's, I think it's really formative to where we are in a faith movement, right? So absolutely here, that was that opportunity that that wasn't taken. And I, I don't have too many regrets, but that's one of them. Was like, Oh, I probably should have got to know them a little bit or, or at least sat in on some of those from time to time. Yeah, yeah.

Blake Smith 10:33

Well, the good news is you can go and listen to some of their episodes on Project Zion Podcast. Yes, yes. They've done some. They've done some great episodes. They are, you're right. They are an essential voice. I want to, I want to take you back to something that you said there during the high school years, kind of separating church being a chore, and then kind of, and I think you mentioned even some struggle with some things in the church. Can you tell us a little bit more just about that part of the journey?

Wes Hodgson 11:00

You know, I think in fairness to the church, it was probably mostly with me that I had these they were my best friends. They were my favorite people, right in this church, in BC, and then I come to the

congregation in, in, you know, I don't think it would have mattered what congregation it was right? That's the truth. It could, we lived close to Colonial Hills, which is, as some of some listeners may be aware, is a really phenomenal large church by Community of Christ standards. And certainly in the in the the 90s, it was, it was unique at that time as well, and I think it still is. So it, even if we had attended that congregation, which was another five miles from where we were going, at Colburn Road, I don't think it would have made a difference. I think it was just the fact that the people that I had developed these great relationships with and camp and all those things weren't there. And that was me separating myself. You know, I think that I was really focused on at that part of my life. I was really focused on my soccer and just trying to attain a high standard in that. I woke up in the morning, so I thought about that. I i was not real social in high school, and which is the complete opposite of anyone if they had met me at Graceland or now where, you know, I remember driving up to to Lamoni for pre-season soccer my freshman year, and I told myself I wanted to have friends and that that's what I was going to strive to do, and that's exactly what I did. And yeah, and, but no, in that high school time of where again, I attended, it just wasn't I didn't feel like I was connected there, and I certainly didn't have maybe that foundation or relationship with the Holy that that I, that I was even striving for. Maybe I could say it that way. It was, yes, I'm going to go to church. Yes, I will attend. Yes, I will say a prayer, and yes, I will live out, or attempt to live out that life, but it wasn't something I thought about. It wasn't it was it wasn't a call. It wasn't motivating to me at the time, and I think, I think I still lived out part of that life, but it wasn't a passion by any measure. And yeah, I, I learned a lot more, I think about myself in that time than in my church life than I recognized at the time, right? I recognized what I wanted to build in community, probably at that time, but really didn't find till again, till later in life. But yeah, again, my parents were, they were always there, and they would just kind of nag at me about things. And I didn't go to SPEC my first two years when I could have, which is, which was a regret I had the first day of SPEC when I did go. Like, Yeah, how did I miss out on this the last two years? And part of it is because I was, I was doing a lot of soccer stuff, and fishing was my other passion. And there were, there were fish to be caught in Colorado, when SPEC was happening, it was like, Well, I was a loner enough that I'm like, No, I'll go ahead and continue to go catch those fish. So, yeah,

Blake Smith 14:38

Very good. You're more likely to, more likely to bump into President Veazey on the rivers in Colorado than at SPEC.

Wes Hodgson 14:46

Yeah, yeah. I've we've connected over that in the couple of times we've met. That it's a it's a mutual passion. It is absolutely, yeah, yeah.

Blake Smith 14:58

Absolutely. So would you say that the. And you mentioned, on your way into Graceland, saying, I want to have friends. I mean, was that some connections, I know, on on Cheville house, you made some of those strong connections, probably in the soccer as well. It was one of your Cheville brothers that reconnected us after 20 years.

Wes Hodgson 15:13

Both, yeah, I think, I mean, I was, I was again, I told myself, I just, I wanted to have friends. So I made connections with people all over campus, and I those connections pay dividends to me today. And you know, I got to where, certainly Graceland was, was probably the one of the greatest decisions I ever made. And attending there. My parents went there. They met there, right? I met my wife there. But my friendships with people and connections with people are my best friends were from that I go on on trips with now were from Graceland. And, I was texting a buddy of mine that I met who was in my mission center growing up, but, but we became fast friends at SPEC and then my parents have spoken at his congregation that he attends, and in the Harrisonville area. And certainly I still, I still talk to my Graceland friends and church connections, probably more than, certainly more than my soccer, soccer family that I've had from Graceland. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. But

Blake Smith 16:13

It was one of your Cheville brothers that reconnected us after 20 years.

Wes Hodgson 16:23

Yeah, yeah. It was Jacob Blakesley, my my roommate from sophomore year, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Blake Smith 16:31

Well, those are some, some great connections. Well, across that journey, the childhood and having all of the friends, and in growing up, and then having kind of a separation and then coming back through grace. How has being a part of religious sacred community been in your life?

Wes Hodgson 16:50

Yeah, I think it's been, I think it's been grounding, right? It's been humbling. It's been more than just a blessing. I think that's not fair to say. Oh, it's church has been a blessing in my life. That's probably that's not really a fair statement. It's not that doesn't convey the profoundness of love from Community of Christ, right, from members, whether they were in BC or whether they've been people that I've met, you know during Graceland time of my travels to go visit college friends in Pennsylvania, and attending churches out there and and being out there. And I think that you know, to have, I can probably would continue to say that the same thing that maybe most people would say about what what keeps them or what's been an influence on them and in their church life is the relationships that you meet while you're on that journey. Right? And, you know, I can think of a when our daughter was born, Violet was like three days old, and my wife had just gotten out of the hospital, we she had to go back in for some complications with and I was able to call on church family to come and and go with me, who was a nurse, go with me to to the hospital. And then another family member, church family, was watching our daughter and and, you know, having church family watch your daughter while your wife is back in the hospital after a couple days, that's a bigger blessing than I could ever speak to right? And I can't help but think of all those times when church family have been that blessing to our family, right? We have a guy in our congregation right now. He's a mechanic, and the amount of times that he fixes and works on and helps people out of their difficult situation when they're depending on their cars is unique. Everyone in our congregation. I don't know anyone who doesn't take their car to Chris. And I tell people all the time when I'm at work here at the VA, I'm having car trouble, Oh, you gotta take it to this guy. He's gonna, he's exactly what you need, and I promise he'll do right for you and your car. And the influence of church really started to become a big part of my life when, it was after I left Graceland was

probably the largest influence, and it's what kept me in in Community of Christ. But I moved for graduate school to Kalamazoo, Michigan, and I attended Western Michigan University, and there happened to be a congregation in Kalamazoo, and those people loved me to death, and they loved me into church. And I think they personified, you know, all the things that we think about in the New Testament of of God's welcoming. Love was what the Kalamazoo congregation was to Rose and I and, yeah, that if I think about, you know, an influence on my life, I have to think about the Kalamazoo congregation as being transformational in Not that again, I didn't attend at Graceland. I certainly did, and that I, for those two years after Graceland, where I was kind of not really sure where I wanted to go, but that Kalamazoo congregation really like that was it. And when I finally did get a job after my internship and my my graduate school stuff in Des Moines, we attended the very first week, was at a congregation here in Des Moines called Northwest and, yeah, I jumped in both feet. And I think that the congregation in Kalamazoo really kind of taught me enough that, hey, you can do that, and that church will respond, and the community will respond, and they will be there to support and to love and to not judge of anything, not that there was those things, but that they would be supportive of wherever I was on my journey. So, yeah, Kalamazoo?

Blake Smith 21:25

Well, a special thanks to the Kalamazoo congregation then for embodying that welcoming, love you to death, yeah, mentality and keeping folks in, which kind of leads, and you've you've mentioned a little bit an answer, the Kalamazoo being really the main part of that answer. But, you know, we don't have to look very far around to see that there are only a few remaining in in certain age groups, and yours being one of them, and our young adults in general...

Wes Hodgson 21:58

Yeah, that's true.

Blake Smith 21:59

You know, the church is making some efforts, specifically, really trying to be awake and aware to that. So you've mentioned again a little bit what's kept you in Community of Christ, when you think about specific denomination, obviously, faith, community and welcome. But is there anything else specific about Community of Christ as a denomination that has kept you around?

Wes Hodgson 22:27

Well, yeah, absolutely. I think that what, what it was, was that that Kalamazoo loved on us so much that I could then see how the Mission Initiatives and the Enduring Principles worked, but the theology of Community of Christ, the the ideology of of our beliefs, have certainly resonated. And I would hope that for any listeners out there who maybe aren't familiar with our Enduring Principles and our We Share document, our Mission Initiatives, that they would go seek those things out, and that Community of Christ has this wonderful, welcoming, loving approach to being a disciple, and it's full of a lot more hugs and love than it is of any judgment. And the fact that we welcome all, speaks to you know what, what I would continue to attempt to live into, which is a church of the New Testament, right? A church of Jesus and how he treated people. And it's not it's It's completely different from those, those bracelets back in the 90s of the "What Would Jesus Do?" That's not where I'm going with it, but that idea of how did this Jesus actually treat people, and what were the impacts that he had on people, and how did they

change people, right? And my favorite, I think my favorite story still, of Jesus is, is the woman of the at the well, right? And how the impact that he must have had on her was so profound that she would then go and get the rest of town to come out and and be a part of that. And that our ideology or theology, our Mission Initiatives, our Enduring Principles, offer that to anyone that we you know, it doesn't matter what orientation someone is, they can, I think that they can relate to our Mission Initiatives. It doesn't matter, you know, what color or language someone speaks, what their intellectual capabilities are, that Community of Christ is a place where someone can come and find a home, and a spiritual path for them to take where they will be surrounded by others who are also on that journey. And you know whether, whether you whether the listener gets to to actually walk the path of the disciple through the Temple, or whether they listen to the words of the song, or whether they're just on this journey by themselves, I hope that they would explore connecting with the Mission Initiatives, the website, the app on their phone, where they can find out all about our theology, to see that it's quite different from a lot of other churches and mainstream secular communities currently, in the most wonderful way.

Blake Smith 25:43

Wes, I know that you're serving as a pastor in Des Moines. What do you

Wes Hodgson 25:47

I was, I was, I'll correct you. I was on the pastor team [Okay] 10 years. 10 years. I'm not on my pastor team anymore. Okay, it was a team approach. Thank goodness no one could have dealt with that for 10 years. I don't think. But, yeah, the leading congregation is a mission program. I think it was Ron Harmon's, kind of, I don't want to say baby, but him and Rob Borkowski and Tom Mountenay, and there was a team, and they were gifted and wonderful and brilliant. And our congregation was lucky enough to be a part of that back in, I think 2000 well, maybe so, yeah, I was on the pastor team for for 10 years, and rotated off. This will be the, I've been off now for about 18 months. But, but, yeah, that's, that was a wonderful journey. And now it's, it's, I get to just be a member, right? Elder for a while. Yeah, yeah. So, well,

Blake Smith 26:47

well, thanks for clarifying that, and thanks for your service. 10 years is a significant gift to be able to be a part of that. Well, with your history of being a pastor and long term member of the church, what do you see as the biggest struggles for the church going forward, especially as we try to reach new generations?

Wes Hodgson 27:07

Yeah, yeah, that's a doozy, isn't it?

Blake Smith 27:09

Yes it is, and I hope you have the answer, because...

Wes Hodgson 27:13

Oh man, yeah, yeah, don't we? All right, well, I think, you know, I obviously we're aware that there's a lot of that out there that kind of shares that, that that certainly not just the Church of the United States, or the people you know all over the world are kind of moving away from organized religion and society.

And I think it was a Diana Butler Bass who had her a couple of books, and there's been novels about that. But I think what the big struggle right now, I'll share, just for me personally, is we have this, this thing that, that that would be called competing loyalties, right? And here my daughter is, or was, she's just kind of finished, wrapped up her season of competitive soccer, and her competitive soccer has three practices a week, and they a couple of games a week, and sometimes those games happen at 10 o'clock on a Sunday morning, right? And here now I've invested this substantial sum of resources financially for her to have have this opportunity. And now and now there's there her game is taking me away. And it's not just taking me away, it's taking her away from those opportunities to be at church, which is not just a Sunday thing, but like boy, she misses out on Sunday school, and I miss out on that, and then she misses out on on the children's moment and the rest of all the things that happen, all the relationships that happen at church on a Sunday morning, she misses out on because of that. And so competing loyalties would certainly be, would be one of them, right? That is a real struggle we face, and I'm not sure how that tide is going to change, right? Or how the wind is going to stop that movement. And, you know, trying to compete, we have a we have a really, we have a big mega church in Des Moines, in West Des Moines, and it's about half mile from where I live, and they do some wonderful things. And I have, it's kind of the hip, cool church to attend in town, and they have a bunch of satellite congregations now all over town, and they have a, you know, teams, legions of of Pastor teams and whatnot. And it's, it's, it's a spectacle. And I, I can't knock them for anything, but trying to compete with that Instagram church is very difficult in our in our moment. And I have a number of friends. I have a number of friends who attend that congregation in that church, and Lutheran Church of Hope, good and good for them. And. I said, Well, what, why do you what is it you love about them? I love that I get to go do mission trips with them, to Dominican Republic, to work on X, Y, Z, right? And that's what they love about them, is that they're doing some neat things there. But I think a lot of that, I think that's what that is growing that particular church, even though they have, you know, 30% turnover on any any given Sunday from the previous Sunday. But yeah, competing loyalties, competing with the newness of a professional musical band church or Instagram church, I think forming new habits is hard, right? And I think getting children to church is hard. The the preconceived notion of judgment that if you're not wearing your Sunday best might be something that keeps young families away. I don't I don't know if that's true, but it could be right? But, I do see that that for me, it was difficult to get into get my kids into church, and bring them into church, and then my son is crying, or my daughter's crying, and then, you know, I didn't struggle a lot, like some might, with worrying that my child is too loud or too noise or whatnot. That wasn't something that personally bothered me, but I know that I have friends that that bothered them. And then our goal at Northwest was then to start creating this idea that, hey, if you're, if your child is crying in church or unhappy in church, that's a blessing to the congregation. That is not something to be concerned of or worried about. And you know what we need all the young kids and voices and and people at church, and if they're, yeah, yeah.

Blake Smith 31:39

I know many congregations who would love to have a crying child just to say they had a child.

Wes Hodgson 31:44

Absolutely, absolutely, I think, you know, in fairness, I think we're speaking real here. I think our buildings can be, can be crippling to us, right as we look forward in biggest struggles for church, the debt that they may cause us on a on a monthly or yearly basis, and our tithings come in and it just goes

to pay that right? I think that, I think that when it's possible that when young families come into church and they see that their tithing and then their money is going to just paying for air conditioner and heating, that that may be a concern, right? And then I think that there's this thing that we struggle with mightily, and it's also my hope for the church, is that sometimes we struggle to have the really difficult, deep conversations. And I don't mean about why you're not coming to church. I mean about abortions, about addiction, about homelessness, about divorce, about whether, about nationalism, okay, about about those kind of things, about politics, right? And we have, we have people in the congregation who are conservatives and people who are liberals, and then how do we have the conversation that Jesus was for all, and that is hard and that is difficult and, and I think that that's something, that's something we have to, we have to explore deeply, right to, to come to common ground and common consent. And you know, I think the church has really grown on those hard, some of those hard conversations over the past 15 years in brilliant, wonderful ways. And I think now for me, the tide has moved away from some of those difficult conversations into this, again, abortion, addiction, homelessness, divorce, into that realm, more so. But yeah, those are, those are hard conversations to have, and the politics of it all, especially in our moment, don't make it easy.

Blake Smith 33:58

There are many who think we shouldn't be having those conversations. It's kind of,

Wes Hodgson 34:01

Oh yeah, yeah.

Blake Smith 34:02

There's no, I don't want to touch it,

Wes Hodgson 34:04

Yah. I guess that would be, you know, I think that would be my hope. That would be one of my hopes for, for Community of Christ, right to, okay, yeah, yeah. That would be one of my hopes, is to be able to to explore and learn ways to have those difficult conversations. It's incredible how many people I've met, and again, I'm 41 but how many people I've met over the past eight years, 10 years, probably 10 years, right? How many young couples struggle with infertility? And yet, it's not a topic we talk about. It's not a topic that's brought up in the in the consciousness of of conversations. Hey, how are you? Oh, I'm fine. How are you? Oh, I'm fine. Okay, let's go sit down in the chairs of the pews, right? But how to have the deep conversation of how common infertility is? It wasn't something I've struggled with personally or my wife, but it's something that a lot of my friends have. Yeah. And how that separates people from church, how, how they see my kids at church, or they hear the noises. We have a lot of kids in my particular congregation. We're very we're uniquely blessed. But how that may keep people away from our congregation, and the lack of building that bridge is absolutely a problem, and it's that's my hope, right is being able to build that bridge right? And I think at my particular congregation, you know, LGBTQ+ movements, we've been really blessed at my congregation. I can't, I'm not in those shoes, but we have a a really, really important member of our, of our, of our congregation, who is, and I hope that we have welcomed him, as I would hope we have. But, only he could say that, If that's the case, right, right? But, yeah, those are that would be, certainly some of my hopes for to have those

conversations that are difficult, which I think are what separate us or keep us from having some people in the doors

Blake Smith 36:15

That's great, very helpful. Thanks. Thanks Wes for sharing those, those insights. [Yeah] if you could, is there anything that you would like the church to hear you say, whether that be leadership or whatever.

Wes Hodgson 36:31

I think that they do a great job of trying to continue to explore living into a church of the New Testament. I think we've done a really great job. I think we've, we've explored a lot of wonderful ways about, you know, Mission beginning in the margins, right? Which is my favorite saying. Dan Gregory told me that in years ago, right? Mission begins in the margins. But there's this thing, and I think about it often at work, and I call it the law of the rubber band. And the law of the rubber band states that your preferred personal and professional groups, growth stops when you lose the tension from where you are to where you could be. And I think about this idea often, and I've shared that that law of the rubber band often in the last couple sermons, I've had a church, but where are we in church, and where are we really wanting to go? And, you know, sometimes I, I, I have this, this, this other idea about change, that if change doesn't cost you, it's not real change. But if we're not really exploring what that means, then we're missing the boat. And in I know that our faith movement, is not a business, but I would say at certain times we might have to treat it like one. And actually we had, you know, the the church is, is made a huge different change here in the past six months, with regards to sales of property and the generating of funds for the the World Church moving forward at a, at a at a high dollar value that really costs a lot of heartbreak and concern to many in the church. [Yeah] And, and part of me thinks of, again, the law of the rubber band and the idea of, if change doesn't cost you, it's not real change. And I see that. And while not wanting to alienate people or make them more unhappy than they may be, I can't help but see that decision was the pulling back of the rubber band saying something has to change. What is it that will and that's a, you know, from a, from a purely analytical standpoint, you know, personally, that was, that was a choice that I thought was a, was a smart financial one, and yet I recognized that I didn't have a personal connection to those places, And that many people did, and there was immense loss and heartbreak and hurt from that. But if, going back to that quote, right, if, if, if change doesn't cost you, it's not real change. Where does our church want to be in in 10 years and in 20 years? And you know, if we, if we can't find ways to release our ownership of of property, then those properties control us more than they should. And I continually go back and it's a, it's a, this is a difficult conversation right to have and to think about, but I. Back to to that Jesus guy, right? And his chastising of his, of his, of the people of the time about ownership of buildings and of things and of of materialisms. And I think I would want to want the World Church. I would want Stassi and and Steve and the, you know, the Twelve, to really recognize that boy. I hope that we're exploring ways moving forward to continue to mission in the margins that that we're looking to find ways to release our burden of of buildings, and maybe to look at storefronts, maybe to continue to really be on the cutting edge or forefront of of online ministry, right? And the Beyond the Walls in Toronto and John and brilliant stuff, right? But how do we continue to do that all over not just North America, but the world and and was it that Einstein quote? I love I love quotes and cliches, right? But our significant problems we face can't be solved by the problems or the same level of thinking we had when we created the problems, right? So we're going to have to have some outside the box thinking on how we're going to mission in the

margins, right? How are we going to fund the church moving forward? How are we going to have support staff to take over for staff that are, that are sun-setting into retirement, right? The gifted people we've had, and I think that would be, that would be what I would question of our leadership that I would want to be in, in the struggle with them for, is those kinds of conversations moving forward, because those are, again, not easy, telling a congregation that they have to close down because it's poor financial stewardship to keep open when They have six people there, that's a difficult, hard conversation, right? And yet, what, is that, Is that great for the church? Is that good for the church? I don't know if closing down a conversation congregation is ever good for the church. That's the opposite where we want to go, but how do we do it, right? And those kind of conversations are, certainly where I would be willing to be a part of or, or think of, and certainly we have them on the mission center level. And I'm lucky enough to be a part of our current mission center leadership team, and, and, and I'm not, I'm not sure if people, if the consciousness of the church is ready to have the most difficult conversations that need to be had yet, and that the the conversation we were, conversations we were having 15 years ago, about, I guess it's been 20 years, about name changes then, and about people in same sex relationships, being in the priesthood and marriages and all those, I think those, those same kinds of listening circles need to happen again about where we're going to go as a church, right? And that if we continue to let the the current movement of mission initiatives and and our, our movement like that lead. I think that's the way to go. So I'm thrilled that that Steve has been, he's been an incredible leader and present profit. And I, I'm Stassi, is uniquely poised and gifted, and I'm so happy for the church and and excited by where we're going moving forward, that I hope people will see us in in five years at my congregation and say, oh, man, why do you go to that church? Well, I go because they're doing all these really cool things with homeless veteran or homeless people veterans, I work with veterans, but those two, but right homeless people in our in our camps in Des Moines, or that they're working, and they, they're, they're doing these things with with kids in schools who need shoes and clothes. And, you know, I hope that that, that those are the things people are saying about our faith. Why do you guys belong to Community of Christ? Well, hey, not only do they welcome everyone, but they're doing the XYZ to reach people who are hurting and who are cold or who are hungry or whatnot. My hope would be that people would see us in time as a church that continues to live into the New Testament that we're modeling the peace, love, openness, compassion, right relationships with with our community, right? And, that we would continue to make the decision that's, that's hard so that we we can make the decision that would live into the teachings of Jesus, right? And yeah, be, we gotta be fearless in our pursuit of that.

Blake Smith 43:29

Wes. I just want to say that I can, I think the last 20 years has been really good for you.

Wes Hodgson 43:45

Oh, yeah, and it has.

Blake Smith 43:58

I mean, not, not, not that Graceland was, was a bad time, but just, you know, one of the things I guess I appreciate most after having been working for the church for so long, is to hear not only the thinking, but the pastoral way in which you're doing it, recognizing that there is a spectrum of understanding that's one of the things that we constantly deal with in the church, and so being willing to ask the hard

questions, which you're just spot on with, I believe, but also understanding that it is hard questions and that folks will come from different perspectives, and just, just acknowledging that is a huge step that I think a lot of folks on either side of the spectrum don't want to do. You know, they've come to their conclusions, and so the difficult questions are good, but the difficult conversations is something we need to be somewhat pastoral about, I believe, anyway, so really, thank you so much. [Yeah, absolutely] those insights and thoughts. Is there any anything that I haven't asked that you'd like to that you wanted to mention?

Wes Hodgson 46:36

No, no. One thing that occurred to me the other day and I was, I was driving up to Minneapolis for a wedding for a really good friend, and I was thinking about our congregation and about our congregations growing up. And it was, it's a, it's this idea that that an area of mission that we probably should all explore more, which is the idea of missioning to people with different abilities. And just this, just today's Monday. Yesterday was church, and we have, we had a a boy with autism in church yesterday, and he, he is such a blessing to our to our community, but he was up and down, and sometimes he makes noise and he's loud and he's he can get in somebody's personal space. And there, there's this idea that for a while that I've been thinking about of, how do we, how do we help the body on a Sunday morning recognize that we need people like him to be in our church, and that we need his parents to be in our church, and that we need to find ways to offer ministry to his parents and love and compassion to him, and that maybe there's something on that moving forward, just exploring, how do we help those people who have different abilities, and whether they be high functioning or low functioning? But that would be, that's my, that's my, I guess my challenge that I think about, you know, what keeps me up at night sometimes when I'm thinking about church, is, how are we going to meet the needs of those people who have really difficult needs? And I don't have any of those answers, but that's what I think about.

Blake Smith 48:21

Well, keep me posted when you do, yeah, yeah, yeah. Because we'd like, we'd like to do an episode on that.

Wes Hodgson 48:26

Yeah, yeah. We'll have to figure that out. Absolutely, yeah,

Blake Smith 48:30

absolutely. Well, Wes, thanks so much for taking the time out of your schedule to be a part of the project design podcast. Family. I really appreciate you. I appreciate you being willing to share your story with us, and especially appreciate what you're doing with and for the church, and have been over those 10 years as pastor and continuing on as a member and leadership in the Mission Center. So thanks so much for being with us.

Wes Hodgson 48:57

No problem. Thanks again. Blake, yeah, absolutely. I

Blake Smith 49:00

want to also thank you. You are listeners for being a part of the project Zion podcast family. If you'd like to hear more from the Chai Can't Even series. You can go to Projectzionpodcast.org and click on the Series drop down menu, which will take you to a list of all of the previous episodes. You can also, of course, find episodes in other series by doing the same thing. I'm your host, Blake Smith, and you've been listening to project Zion podcast. Additional episodes are always available on our website, and all your favorite podcast platforms. Have a great rest of your day.