

S1:E34 - Todd takes us through his intimate story of his struggles with same-gender attraction, addiction, self harm, and how the atonement worked in his life when turning back to The Church of Jesus Christ

ASHLY

00:00

Let's go ahead and just start at the beginning. I'd love to hear what your younger years were like in the church and where it all started.

TODD

00:13

All right. Well, I was raised by a mom that was a member of the church and a dad that was not. And for all of us kids my Mom had us going to church and though my dad wasn't a member she was a very strong member. We stayed pretty close to the church. She was our spiritual foundation. When I was little I was different from the rest of the family. I don't know if I was right from the start, but I would steal my dad's beer, and smoke his cigarettes behind the tree. I was that kind of kid. My dad asked all my older brothers, "Where's my beer?" and "Which one of you boys stole it?" But me the whole time.

ASHLY

Oh, my gosh.

TODD

That was such a small bit of my life. Really, I was raised so well, it was crazy. I was raised so well. My dad actually passed away when I was nine and so my mom remarried. We lived in Idaho Falls, and then we moved to Rigby when I was nine years old and I went to school there. Even at home, when I got baptized one of our neighbors, even at the time I thought, "You know what? There's something different about me." I just had this attraction to my friends. I literally was a gay boy that didn't want to be gay and didn't want to know anything about it. This was way back in the seventies. I dealt with this feeling of "something's wrong with me" for so long. Really for most of my life. So it was tough. It was really tough. All my family were into sports, and I love sports. I just truly tried to follow my brothers' examples, and they were football players and basketball players. And I was pretty fast. I was pretty good at sports. But at the same time I always had this same-sex attraction. It was horrible because I thought I was such a horrible guy and a horrible kid. There was nobody to talk to and so I went through a lot of self doubt about what was going on inside myself and it just continued on, until I was a sophomore in high school. When I was a sophomore, I actually had an experience with a kid that just sent me backward. I thought, "Oh, I hate being gay. Being gay is the worst thing I can think of. There's something wrong with me. That is the worst." In our church at that time, there weren't a lot of answers. This was back in the day when we didn't know very much about it. I thought I truly had something in me that was not right. So I continued on. I went through high school, played all the sports, and tried to get any gay thoughts out. I went to seminary, but I got kicked out of seminary. But I always wanted to go on a mission. So I was going to go. I thought, "You know what, when I go on a mission, this gay stuff's gonna stop, because that's what they told me. I won't be gay anymore. If I can just go, I'll pray it away and it'll leave." I went on a mission, and it was funny. This is how much I knew about the scriptures. When I got to the MTC, I went to my first class, and they said, "Hey, why don't you turn to First Nephi." So I flipped through the Bible. Everybody was waiting and eventually someone said "Hey Elder McKinley, you're in the wrong book." That's how I started. So when I got into the mission field, I thought, "Finally I'm here. My feelings will change," because that's kind of what they told me was going to happen. I had a wonderful trainer. Our first place that we went was actually to a fair. At this fair we were proselytizing from a booth. We were doing something with dirt and gold. I was looking around and this kid came up and looked at me and I looked at him and I thought, "Oh, my gosh, what is happening? This dude is just so cute." So I thought, "This is horrible. I'm on my mission, and this is happening to me." Thank goodness, he lived in Long Beach, and I lived in Selma, California. That was my first area. So I thought, "I cannot stay out here. I can't stay on this mission and not know that what I'm doing is true." So I said to my companion, "I've got to figure out if the Church is true." And he said, "Well, I want you to go back into that room, into the

closet and start praying.” So I said, “Okay, I will,” and I went back there and prayed for an hour. And I was just begging to receive an answer, “Is the church true? Is Joseph Smith the prophet?”

TODD

06:33

I was there for probably another half hour. Then all of the sudden, I felt what was almost like a light. It was a warm, unbelievable, buttery, light that hit my heart. It was like, it wasn't only true, it was extra true. It told me the Church is true. So now that I had what I wanted I was able to finish out my mission. In fact, I became an assistant to the president. I loved my mission. It was the best thing ever, because I knew the Church was true. I didn't have gay feelings out there, and if I did, I just pushed him away. Everything was alright and I just moved on. When I got home, things were great. I actually got a calling to where I was teaching. In primary things were awesome. Of course I quit reading and quit praying, and quit doing those things I should've. And some of those stupid feelings were coming back. I thought, “What is going on?” I was trying to date and I thought, “These are the cutest girls, but I'm not giving them my attention except for a few minutes, and they're interested in me.” I would think, “I can't wait to get out of this date.” I wondered “Why again? I don't want to be gay.” So I decided I had to work through it. I would do things like be a coach in high school football. I was a JV Junior High coach and coached my little brother. I actually became a cop too. I thought all these manly things were going to help me to overcome these feelings. I was dating girls and thought, “I don't know what's happening but this is not working. I'm not feeling right about it.” Of course I started looking at guys and hated it. I just didn't really know what to do. I graduated from Rick's college and went to ISU. Then I met another man. That was the start of me coming out. I actually moved from Idaho Falls to the ZCMI in Salt Lake City. At this point I was a full fledged gay man that was going on weekly trips and trying to go to different places and find gay people and see what that lifestyle was about. I ended up moving there. I started to drink and do the things that most gay people do. So I drank and I partied, and had sexual relations and went to bars and really just enjoyed what I knew to be the gay lifestyle. So I continued on, and on. Of course, the drinking and partying started to have an effect on me. I started needing it and became addicted. I was actually in the hospital twice with acute pancreatitis, because of drinking. I don't know how much cocaine I was doing a day but I became very addicted. I got a boyfriend hoping that might help me calm down a little. He cheated on me and I cheated on him. That was kind of the gay lifestyle at that time. I think it's probably that way even now. And I thought, “You know what? I'm done with this life. I'm just done.” So I tried to kill myself with large amount of cocaine. I thought, “You

know what? This is the end. I'm done. My time has come, I just want to just leave and go home." I woke up and I had black in my nose and in my ears. Every part of my body was just black. And I thought, "Oh, my heavens, I can't even kill myself." I was very sick and it was just horrible. And I was still alive. So I tried to live my life better and continued doing the same things. I ended up managing my first bar. Then I ended up buying or being involved in two more bars. Now I was in the bar business, which is probably the worst thing that an alcoholic like me could do. I did that probably for the next 10 years. And it just was amazing to me, I always thought I would be dead. I had three roommates that literally killed themselves. It just was a common thing to do back then. We just didn't know how to handle our problems. I had this suicide pact with one of my best friends and he committed suicide. But I thought "No, it's not time for me. I'm not going to do it yet." This is just a horrible thing but my life came to the point of literally living week to week. I thought it didn't really matter what I ~~deid~~ this week, because next week ~~I'm~~ I was going to be dead. ~~And so~~ So I ~~live my way to you know what, and~~ lived this way and ~~I tried a couple I tried~~ some pills to overdose on and ~~I just, it~~ that didn't work ~~I tried~~work. I tried ~~one more time~~ kill myself one more time with the exhaust and ~~other I thought you know what,~~ I thought "my BMW must have some really good exhaust because it sure doesn't kill me very good". ~~So I just like this, this this~~ My life was so bad. ~~that I was I was this was the time of~~ This was a time where AIDS was so prevalent. ~~And so you're~~ So I was always trying to watch ~~yourself and myself~~ and watch others and know that there ~~was chances~~ was a chance ~~you might~~ I might get something ~~and I~~. ~~One time~~ One time I actually got hepatitis and I thought "~~y~~ You know what,? I'm going to die of AIDS." ~~and I~~ I thought ~~that's that's that~~ ~~good~~ would be good. ~~And so I~~ I waited for this sickness to come ~~on~~ and it never came ~~on~~. ~~and I'm like well you know what, then~~ So I just decided I'm ~~gonnaing to just you know sleep wisleep~~ with this guy that has ~~d~~ AIDS because then ~~I'll~~ I'd be gone. Of course that didn't work. I literally was living day to day ~~like, wondering~~ what my next move was going to be ~~what is my next move, I~~ because I just wanted to be ~~out of~~ done with this life. ~~And a~~ Then in ~~t that time that this was about~~ 2008, ~~and there was~~ the financial crisis, ~~or it's going on,~~ and the bars weren't doing ~~too~~ well, and the country wasn't doing ~~too~~ well. ~~And m~~ My mom called and said ~~that she,~~ that my stepfather had ~~fell~~ fallen on her, and that he was going to go to assisted living, ~~and she~~. She was in the hospital, ~~and she wanted me to come home. And I thought, oh, gosh,~~ "Okay, ~~you know what else~~ I might as well try and come home." ~~And it~~ took me a bit of time to ~~actually to~~ get home because I was so ~~I'm so~~ addicted to everything. ~~I'm~~ I was so addicted to alcohol and drugs, and I just didn't know quite how that was ~~gonna~~ going to work. ~~And, and anyways, I make~~ Anyway I made it home. Every weekend, I would come back to Salt Lake and party, because I just was still in my body and my soul. ~~And t~~ That was what I was ~~gonna~~ going to do. ~~I had~~ In 2010 ~~I drove,~~ I think ~~it was~~ just after Christmas I drove ~~A~~ and I decided I'd start drinking. ~~Just I was~~ Just as I was going down to party, ~~and~~ I got a DUI.

16:28

~~And I was a mess.~~ I was a mess. ~~And I~~ Thank goodness, I got pulled over. I can't remember ~~lots much~~ about it, except that I was in jail. ~~And because I was a cop.~~ I remember I had another DUI that was earlier and I ~~was like~~ thought, "~~You know what,~~ Just don't blow. Don't blow, ~~don't blow,~~ and everything will be better. They might take your license." ~~But as,~~ I knew this because I was a cop. Well, I didn't know they changed the law. ~~So they changed the law. So if you~~ They can actually get a court order and take your blood. So ~~I'm in~~ while I was in jail the jailers came and said, ~~all and all the jailers are coming up and you know what?~~ "We're gonna come and take your ~~blood we~~ get blood. We got a court order." I said, "No, you're not." I had a fight with them. ~~And anyways, they got away~~ Anyway, they got ~~with~~ my blood. So ~~I'm like~~ thought, "Oh, no, I'm ~~now really screwed~~ really in trouble now. I am just, ~~it's~~ done. ~~It's a done deal.~~" ~~I am.~~ I ~~don't~~ didn't even know what's going to happen ~~n now~~. ~~Because~~ I'd have to have a breathalyzer in my car. I knew I'd have to have jail time. I knew that there would be a lot of things that would happen. It wasn't ~~you know,~~ my first time. I'd been charged with ~~that~~ DUIs before. ~~So it~~ didn't look ~~too~~ good for me. ~~And so I~~

17:42

I went home and I thought, "~~You know what,~~ I really am going to kill myself this time, and I'm going to use a gun."

17:52

So I ~~go in to~~ went into my stepfather's guns, pulled out a gun, got really drunk, said "You know what, ~~? this is~~ I'm done. I'm over ~~this~~ this life." ~~And I~~ went outside, put a bullet in the chamber. ~~A,~~ and I shot it against the fence just to make sure it worked.

18:17

~~And Then~~ I ejected the bullet, put another bullet in, put it straight into my head and shot. ~~a~~ And it didn't go off.

ASHLY

Mmh.

TODD

I thought, "Are you kidding me?" So I ejected ~~this~~ bullet, ~~like~~to check that it had one in "~~Did I have one in?~~" and it ~~flies~~flew out.

18:39

I put another bullet in, and I shoot ~~against the~~~~the~~against the fence again and it ~~goes~~went off. I'm ~~like,~~ thought, "Are you freaking kidding me?" ~~And~~I just sat and I bawled, and I cried and I cried. And I'm ~~like,~~I thought, "Why? Why do I have to go through this? I hate ~~this~~-being gay. I hate everything about the church." My mom ~~says~~said, "Hey, maybe we ought to go to church," and I said, "You know what? ~~Y~~If you ever ~~asked~~ me to go to church again ~~and~~I will never go to church, I promise you." And she never did again. But what a wonderful mother. She was the most unbelievable loving mom and ~~and~~ I had the most unbelievable loving family ~~that~~ that has been by my side as a gay person and as ~~a~~addictan addict. So I was pretty lucky ~~that~~that I had my mom ~~and she took a bunch of~~ that stayed by me with all of my ~~crap~~my problems. ~~and~~s

So ~~my~~my next fail of my suicide didn't work ~~and and I was like well I went back to~~workso I went back to work ~~and~~and life was pretty bad. ~~and and~~I still ~~have~~had these addictions ~~and I said, my~~. One day my buddy, ~~Brian, that I told you about earlier,~~ ~~says~~said, "Hey, why don't you come to an addiction recovery program? And you can just tell people how you got over drinking." Well, he didn't realize that I was still drinking. But I said "Okay, I'll come," and I ~~ll,~~ ~~ll~~ was going to lie to him and ~~tells~~say ~~them~~how good I've been ~~and this and that~~. ~~And~~sSo I went, and this addiction recovery program was the first time I'd actually felt the Spirit. ~~Again,~~I felt the Spirit again in some way, shape, or form, and I'm ~~like,~~ thought "wow, this is, ~~that's~~ pretty cool." ~~And~~Then I left. ~~And, and~~. I would go periodically, ~~and~~ I still, of course, had addictions. ~~to where~~I was drinking and watching porn. ~~And, and I,~~The one thing that I didn't do ~~is, is~~do was do drugs or go back to Salt Lake City. So I was getting ~~fa~~urther ahead. ~~And~~It was then that a buddy of mine ~~as he says,~~said, "Hey, Todd, ~~can you or~~do you want to come ~~and and~~ see my son? ~~has a,~~ hHe's getting off his mission, and they're having his welcome home talk." And I said, "You know, I haven't been to church in 15 years," ~~I says,~~ but you know what, I'll show up." So I ~~go~~went to this ~~welcome home~~homecoming. ~~And~~I was late, of course, and I ~~sit on~~sat at the back of ~~this the~~ chapel. I actually was in the gym, ~~because~~ there ~~was were~~ that many people, but I was ~~on in~~in the back row. ~~And~~As he started to talk, ~~and~~ all these feelings of the mission and the Spirit ~~came back~~. The Spirit came back and just overwhelmed me. ~~And I'm~~I just sat there ~~sitting and I'm~~bawlingand bawled. ~~On the~~In the back row, I'm ~~like~~thought, "Are you freaking kidding me?" ~~And~~I ~~am~~ was just wiping tears. ~~And this is nuts, that I~~ thought it was crazy that I was ~~am so,~~

~~so-so~~ emotional over ~~this~~it. ~~And I just,~~it hit me so hard. And I was like, "Oh, my gosh, it's the Spirit again, the Lord loves me. He, ~~he's's~~ giving me something. ~~he, he~~He saved me. He's done these things for me." ~~And now,~~Now I felt that same spirit that I had in the mission field. So ~~it was the start,~~it was the start of something good. ~~And I, from that time, I had then gone back in~~ Then I went back in April;. I was supposed to go see the judge about my DUI. So ~~lit~~ ended up on my birthday, April 19th. ~~Go~~ went in ~~and I,~~and my lawyer ~~is was~~ there that used to be my lawyer when I was in the bar business?. He goes, "Well, let's take a look at this DVD and just see how ~~this~~this DUI worked out for you. Let's see what you did." ~~And how I go,~~this is gonna know this was going to be awful. ~~So we're putting in~~We went to put this DVD in so we ~~can~~could watch it. ~~And it's not working,~~ but it wasn't working. ~~And I'm like, you know, I said, w~~"We'll fix it." ~~I mean, I'm~~I was kind of embarrassed;. I ~~know~~knew this ~~is was~~ going to be bad. So he kept working on it ~~and working on it goes,~~and says, "Okay. I'm going to tell the prosecutor it doesn't work. But I'm gonna go get your blood alcohol limit, and we're going to just see where this goes." So he ~~leaves~~left and ~~he goes~~went to the prosecutor, and ~~he~~ goessaid, "~~You know, we~~We need to get the blood alcohol ~~then~~for trial and decide what we're going to do." And the prosecutor ~~say~~ssaid, "We don't have it. We lost it. ~~Now w~~We can reschedule. ~~O~~ or you guys can take ~~a less,~~something less ~~than a~~ DUI to where you just have to pay a fine, do some community service and go to an alcohol class."

ASHLY

Wow.

TODD

And my ~~my~~lawyer was like, "What? Yeah, ~~yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah~~let's do that." He ~~goe~~stold me, "I've never seen this. This is crazy, Todd." My mom had driven me to this court hearing: ~~and the F~~first thing she ~~say~~ssaid when I told her was; "This is a miracle, Todd." I ~~go~~thought, "Oh my gosh, I know ~~what a crazy,~~ the Lord is looking out for me. ~~A~~ and ~~h~~He wants me to live. He wants me to ~~to~~ be able to help others." ~~And so t~~This was the beginning of me trying to get sober. So ~~I,~~I never went back to Salt Lake after that point. ~~And so that It took out the idea of,~~ of drugs. That took away the opportunity for drugs. And I got over the drinking ~~part through some,~~a little. ~~just between my mom and me and,~~and I never had a smoking problem, so that wasn't ~~a big deal~~an issue. ~~And~~ I probably was working on ~~this now for~~this for ~~a,~~probably a year and a half and, ~~and I,~~ I started to recognize and see some things about pioneers ~~and I'm like,~~"Oh, the pioneer stories" ~~and blah, blah, blah.~~. So I ~~actually~~picked up this book at Deseret Book: *The Undaunted* by Gerald Lund. ~~And it~~ was a book that is just ~~amazing is a~~amazing. It is a story of a young boy that became a member of ~~T~~ the Church;. ~~he~~He came from ~~started~~

~~in London. But~~ but it was a, it was a pioneer-type story ~~to~~ where these people sacrificed; and died. ~~And just, you've seen 17 miracles, and~~ And I just bawled my eyes out. ~~It's like~~ thought, "Oh, ~~that~~ All I've been through ~~had~~ has been nothing, ~~through nothing~~ compared to these people, ~~that were our~~ There were pioneers that actually believed so strongly in ~~T~~the Church that they'd give their lives ~~and be,~~ and freeze ~~and I'm like going~~". What? That is just crazy;." ~~and m~~My testimony just continued to grow. So I kept doing this same thing, ~~and~~. I started to go to church ~~and,~~ and it was really odd, because people ~~like,~~ treated me really weird;. ~~b~~But I didn't care because I knew the church was true, ~~or,~~ or I wanted it to be exactly how it was. ~~And so I didn't, I mean,~~ I just kept going and, ~~and~~ I was at work and my stake president lives ~~sd~~ down the street. He ~~comes in and I go~~ came in and I said, "Hey, ~~I've gotta,~~ I want to talk to you sometime, if you have a chance, maybe?" He said, "Yeah, please, please come in." ~~I was o~~One year, ~~year~~ later he ~~comes~~ame back in. I said, "Hey, Stake President, seriously ~~I probably,~~ I need to talk to you if you have some time." He said, "Oh, yeah." Well, he ~~comes~~ame back ~~the next~~back the next month. ~~Hey, Stake ...~~ ~~and~~ and he put his arm around my neck and ~~he goe~~ssaid, "You come in this Tuesday, because they're going to release me by the end of this year. So you get in here." And that's when things started to change. I was able to understand the ~~a~~Atonement, and to have this opportunity to express myself ~~and I~~. I said, "Well, just so you know,

27:39

Stake President, I'm gay." And he goes, "So what?" I said, "So what? And what do you mean, so what?" He says, "You know, ~~you can be gay,~~ you can be gay, ~~you can be~~ in the church, you can get a temple recommend, you can have a calling. Are you wearing your garments?" and I said, "No." He said, "Get some garments." I thought "Oh, my goodness. I hope I can be gay and I can be in the church." ~~Oh, this,~~

28:19

~~†~~This ~~i was like~~ like an answer to a prayer that I didn't, I just didn't plan ~~on because I wanted, you know, if I was gay, and well, bla bla bla on~~. So the gay part was never even really an issue. ~~It was~~The conversations were more like, "~~You know what, I~~Let's talk about your addictions. Let's get over those. Let's talk about your drinking and your drugs and your sex that you had" ~~and blah, blah, blah. And h~~He ~~say~~ssaid I pretty much ~~got the picture~~understood what we had to do. ~~And s~~So I just ~~kept watching or~~ kept going to him ~~for~~ every week for a while. Sometimes every two weeks. I'm not sure how long. But finally he ~~say~~ssaid, ~~You know what,~~ "It's time for you to have a council. It's time to have an obedience council." And he ~~say~~ssaid, "You're ~~gonn~~agoing to probably be excommunicated. Or you're ~~gonn~~agoing to be disfellowshipped. I don't know, exactly.

