CASAT Podcast Network

Hello and welcome to season three of CASAT Conversations.

I am your host, Heather Haslem.

This season we will explore the weighty topic of health equity within each conversation, we will discover insights from researchers, practitioners and experts on this complex and important topic.

We hope you enjoy today's conversation

On today's episode we have Will Rucker joining us, Will is the division director of health promotions for the American Lung Association.

He's also a podcast host and a leadership coach.

Welcome Will.

We're so happy to have you here today.

Hi Heather, thank you so much for having me.

I am excited about our conversation.

Me too.

So as we dive in, please tell us a little bit about yourself and what inspires you to do the work that you do within the realm of health equity, wow, great question.

Well, to start with the first part again, my name is Will Rutger and I am a dreamer, a visionary.

I'm someone that believes that the world could and should be amazing for everyone.

And so that's really what ties me into this health equity work because unfortunately it's not what we see as our reality today.

There are a number of populations that suffer and do not have adequate access to even basic healthcare.

So my mission is really to change that and mature healthcare is accessible and even a a right for every single human being.

Mhm thanks.

Well, so tell us, you know, a little of your background and how you got to where you are today and what does you know, a day in the life of will look like another great question.

Yes.

So background, I grew up in Detroit michigan, so the home of Motown music was all around, you know, from church to theater organizations, to the amazing acts that came to town, you would know folks like Aretha franklin and the temptations, all of those big names started right in Detroit and they visited and they were just like family.

So that's my background and that I ended up going to a performing arts high school where I then decided to move out of the arts and into business, which was really interesting because you get a job, you start making money and then you're like, oh, this money thing is kind of important, but I have never lost the love of the arts and that's always something that's deeply embedded in me.

Um, in fact, at that boarding high school, I started a gospel choir and that gospel choirs, What led me into doing ministry all around the world and so um, preaching and starting churches and things of that nature is really something that I did as a young person and something that I still help to support to this day.

Um, what brought me into the health work though was even though I had found a great career in telecommunications, working for Fortune 500 companies, things like that, I still wasn't really fulfilled.

I wanted to do something more.

I mean my life was great, but when I looked at the news or even just drove to the other side of town, other folks didn't have it as good.

And so I wanted to do something that really made a difference and I've always had a passion for helping even as a young kid in elementary school, I had to see the school counselor because I thought about the environment and I thought about civil rights and things of that nature and the teacher was like, I don't think you're supposed to think about that in first grade, but it, it was, it was something I care deeply about.

And so that's kind of been a thread that's gone throughout my entire life and wanting to make that difference brought me into the nonprofit world.

And so I moved to Las Vegas to make a long story short, moved to las Vegas where I reside now and joined the american lung Association.

It was just supposed to be a contract where I was supposed to deliver content to a few locations on a short term basis.

And that short term contract turned into a very fulfilling career where now I'm the division director of health promotions and division director, just means I oversee multiple states.

So I have teams from michigan to hawaii and oversee projects ranging from asthma to tobacco cessation to general lung health.

So I think that kind of gives you a bit of my background, what was part two of the question, I have no idea that day in the life?

Yeah, we're living it right now.

This is absolutely a day in the life.

There is no day that's the same and I love that I wake up every morning with a full plate And I go to bed every night just thinking about, Oh I still had 20 things to get done, didn't quite make it.

And and that's just how I like it.

I like to be productive and engaged.

And so a day in the life could range from doing a podcast like this to going to a city council meeting, to doing a training for nonprofit leaders uh traveling to uh you know, it's always an adventure.

But the one thing that is always consistent is I am working every single day to improve the lives of every human on the planet.

And I use that phrase very intentionally.

I care about us here in Las Vegas, I care about us here in Nevada, I care about us here in the US, but really, I think our planet is interconnected and what we do in Las Vegas really does impact everywhere else on the planet.

So if I can just play a small role in improving someone's life, that's what I'm doing each and every day.

Mhm awesome.

You know, I know that you worked on a happiness survey for Las Vegas and I'd love for you to tell us about, you know what led you to want to start a happiness survey first of all, and then second of all what were some of the key findings, wow!

So this happiness is kind of my thing.

I love to infuse joy and, and happiness into every environment.

And so when I moved to Las Vegas, it was my happy place I first visited when I was about five or six years old For a family vacation in the summer in August where it's like 120.

And I loved it.

I absolutely loved las Vegas.

And every year thereafter my parents would say where do you want to go to vacation?

And it was always the same.

I always wanted to go back to Vegas.

So that's what we did.

So when I finally got to move here in 2014, I wanted to make an impact and I really wanted to get to know my community and so an individual who was pursuing her doctorate at the time, she is now a PhD but she did all the survey metrics and kind of the data piece and I was the one that built the relationships to get the survey disseminated.

So what I wanted to know was what those that lived here in las Vegas felt about las Vegas.

I loved it.

But what did they think?

And so of course I wanted to shift the narrative from just, well how's the economy, how much money is the city producing two, what's the quality of life?

Because everywhere I've been, the thing that I've noticed is it doesn't matter how much money you have, you can have an amazing life or you can be in utter despair, I have friends that are wealthier than most, you know, in the millions and whatnot.

And unfortunately some of them struggle day to day despite having great wealth.

And then I've been to West africa where folks literally lived in mud huts and the joy was tangible.

They just had such an exuberance and just just a grasp of life and they had no monetary means.

So I saw that and I wanted to gauge what was happening in Las Vegas.

So of course we asked like on a scale of 1-10 on an average day, how happy are you?

But we also asked questions about relationships.

How many close friends do you have?

Do you have someone you can trust that is within your community or is it outside the state.

So we really asked a broad range of questions to get a full picture of what it meant to be a las Vegas and the results where people were longing for connection even in this city, which is really the wedding capital of the world, right?

So relationships are our thing and we're the tourist capital and all of these things where people come to visit us here to be happy, We didn't have that sense of connection Now, mind you, this is before the 10 1 tragedy and before he really had the biggest strong mantra.

But it still was las Vegas.

And so I was really moved to do things to help foster community because las Vegas is very diverse.

If you're looking for a type of person that type of person exists here.

So if you're looking from someone raised in the south, we have that in abundance.

If you're looking for a new yorker, we've got it.

If you're looking for someone from from Asia, I mean literally any, anything you can name, we have it.

And one thing that really struck me was the number of interracial couples we had here as well because where I come from, it's kind of homogeneous.

So I'm like we have all of this diversity and everything people could want, where is this disconnect for community.

And what we discovered is that even though we had houses are kind of close together, you had some sidewalks and you had the trappings of neighborhoods because people worked at different hours because people were so transient, you could form a relationship and then a year later that person is gone.

So there just wasn't that trust that oh this person I'm investing in emotionally is even gonna be here a year from now.

And so that was what was really adding to that, that lack of community.

Mhm.

So important.

Those are really key findings right?

As we look at what helps to fuel happiness or bring happiness and that's that meaningful connections with other humans.

Um Yeah, that's exactly it.

And you You mentioned 10 1 and basically pointed to like there being a potential shift Um right because you did this survey prior to 10 1 in Vegas strong and I'm curious if you hypothesize that community now looks different from las Vegas.

Yeah.

And this is purely anecdotal.

I don't have the data to support it.

But I do think the recognition of community increased exponentially after that because immediately you had folks standing in line for hours to give blood and people were coming together to donate and then you just had that mantra Vegas strong and so I think people who ordinarily wouldn't expect to feel supported in this town saw that kind of support and the outpouring of love that occurred and said, you know what life is too short, anything could happen anywhere.

Let me go ahead and begin to invest in relationships and of course, you know, unfortunately shortly thereafter we had the COVID-19 pandemic which we're still at the time of taping, still just coming out of hopefully we don't go back.

But even with that I think people were able to see, you know, I've been I've been dedicating my life to this company and neglecting my kids and neglecting my friends and in a moment my job could be gone in a moment.

This career could be over.

Let me get back to what matters most which is creating memories with people I love and so that's the shift I've seen with the creation of the resiliency center and some other facets.

We we've really created an infrastructure I think for community that wasn't here before.

We have a new energy.

Even within compassionate Las Vegas, which is an organization I'm proud to co lead, we are intentionally creating avenues for people to connect.

So we're teaching the art of conversation, my podcast compassion in las Vegas.

The podcast sits down with folks from all over the spectrum to just find out what gives you hope, what is it that keeps you going And the answer is always the same.

It always boils down to the relationships that we have.

So whether you are a parent and you're working to improve the life of your child or whether you're just getting started in life and you're you're just coming out of high school or you know, all of this boils down to having that that tangible relationships with, with what resonates in the heart space and so not to get too technical or or or google, but our heart residence is actually bigger than the residents from our brain.

So we have a magnetic energy, we are literally electric beings and our hearts are many, many times stronger than our brain.

So I think that there's something to that and that's why community and relationships matters because we really are heart centered beings.

I'd love for you to share more about compassionate Las Vegas.

So compassionate Las Vegas is a passion project.

It is a gift that I am so grateful I received.

And it's an organization that is founded out of the global Charter for compassion.

And so the Charter for compassion is a network of cities, organizations, even countries that have adopted compassion as their central virtue or central value.

There are over 440 compassionate cities and Las Vegas is a compassionate city.

In May of 2021, the city council voted unanimously to adopt compassion is our core value.

So this organization, we're not programmatic, we don't deliver services.

What we do is we act as a connection, we act as a resource as a platform for education where we really instill the value of compassion and a language of compassion.

So that when we say that word, we're all talking about the same thing, I often hear people say, oh yeah, I'm very compassionate about music and what they mean is they're passionate about music, but they've heard the word compassion and it kind of gets mixed up of it, but we define compassion as the desire to alleviate the suffering of others.

And so I don't believe that anything is another.

I think we're all one.

And so I didn't refer to others as my other self and so self compassion is a big part of that as well.

And so through infusing compassion into housing and uh infusing compassion into education into the environment, we're working to alleviate the suffering of all, and that's something I'm very, very proud of.

Um so I don't know if you want me to keep going on that one or if you have another question.

Well, really it sounds like you, a lot of the work that you do is infusing compassion into the social determinants of health which are directly related to health equity.

Um so I'd love to hear a little bit more about that work.

Yes, you nailed it.

You got it.

Exactly right.

So what we're really seeking to do is we want to pull people that are, you know, swimming down the river, we want to pull them out and and and rescue them.

But more importantly, we want to say why are people falling in the river in the first place?

And so we're going back to the foundations again to this idea of values, because our perspective is that poverty is a policy choice, That homelessness is a policy choice, that hunger is a policy choice.

And while we don't necessarily consciously choose to create an environment where people are suffering, our our decisions impact how that plays out.

So we we work with individuals through a program called compassionate integrity training where we look at what does it mean to live a life of integrity?

What does it mean to be mindful?

What does, what does it mean to be ethically mindful?

And we provide tools so that individuals, whether they are leaders, whether they're just getting started, they can actually stay at a state of peace where they're they're cortex and stay online and they can think rationally and we help them to develop the resiliency they need to ensure that their actions aren't causing suffering for others.

And so we look at things like wages like well you know what can we do to help ensure that people have a living wage But more than just the wage that they're paid, what is what is the meaning of their job?

And we help even something like a barista.

I just had a barista on the podcast and well she she almost a coffee shop but we were talking about baristas and I was saying how important my baristas are to my day and just at the smile that they give me and that moment of bliss I get when I take my first sips, I'm so grateful for that.

And so it doesn't matter what the job is, Your job is bigger than that moment that you're in.

And so we try to help people to create that awareness that whether you are ceo and responsible for thousands of lives, whether you're a frontline worker where you're just touching one at a time what you do matters and you have a purpose and there's meaning to everything if you choose to see it.

So that's kind of the approach is really shifting consciousness and the way of thought and the way we approach government and education and all of these things at one of the programs we do offer.

I know what I just said, we're not programmatic, but we do have one program and it's called Jamison Fellows.

And so this actually predates me by by about eight years.

But this is a program we've adopted with compassion in las Vegas that brings together about 30 leaders every year for 12 month cohort where they engage in intense self reflection and development.

They are tasked with intentionally being collaborative within the community and we provide them with training on things like communication.

And one of my favorite workshops we offer is called yes and and it's the yes and principle from improv.

And so we have an amazing facilitator come in, She actually worked with Robin Williams, she's that level and she helps people to just be okay with trying because a lot of leaders are so afraid To make a mistake or two misspeak or to drop a ball that they kind of hold themselves captive.

And so in this workshop, she has people stand up and yell and say, oops and just be really silly and just just break down those barriers and that facade and really get intimate and deep And honest, I should say with themselves and with others.

So throughout the 12 months we shed a lot of tears.

We we have a lot of laughter, but most importantly, we remember how to be human again.

And so over the course of the 10 years this program has been around.

We've had a little over 200 individuals complete.

We are in in the middle of a cohort right now that has 32 and I mean amazing individuals, a wide range diversity of individuals, both in their profession and demographics.

So that's kind of how we are being the change, which is my personal model, be the change.

We're giving people the tools they need to simply be human again.

Mhm.

I'm really struck by, you know, the you can continue to use the term be human again and that um You see us all as being one and the importance of also honoring diversity.

And so I'd love if you would speak to us more about that, right?

As we look at structural racism and look at how compassion can be, how you see compassion can be a tool to help deal with racism in our culture.

That's a great question.

I had to take a sip of tea to get ready for this answer here.

You know, the the thing that I love about this type of work is you really have the opportunity to unpack layers.

And so when we're looking at the issue of racism in particular, we have to go back to the founding of our country and when you look at the fact that our land was quote unquote discovered, that's the first place we can point to to say there's a mindset that others, others and not only others them but devalues their existence.

And that's really what racism is.

It's devaluing the existence of another human.

And when we look at things like there are expressions and say, oh, I don't see color, I don't see race.

While I understand the heart space that comes from could be pure and could be well intentioned.

We have to grow as humans to appreciate difference to see the color.

Um, I love looking at at gardens here in Vegas.

We have the most amazing landscapes in the world, whether it's red rock or Mount charleston or just you name it.

We we have beauty here in abundance.

But when you look at it, you see the color and you appreciate the color and you you appreciate the fact that on Mount charleston you can go and ski Like there's snow up there and then, you know, a few miles down.

It's 120°.

Like that's that's diversity.

And we don't judge it.

We don't look at it with the lenses.

Oh, this is bad because it's this or this is good because it's that and I try to extend that into humanity.

You're not bad because you're a female and I'm not good because I'm a male, we simply are.

And these are expressions of beauty and creativity and innovation from whatever source you believe we derived from whether it's a spiritual aspect or just some goof in a sea that exploded and came together like whatever you think, we all ended up here and we all ended up here different.

It doesn't matter the complexion of the tone or even your outlook on life.

I think that we limit diversity sometimes the categories of black racism, but we need to have diversity of thought as well because diversity of thought allows us to create things that never existed.

If we only continue thinking this one way and were never challenged, we never innovate and never create anything new.

So the work with systemic injustice and systemic racism really begins with allowing people to allow themselves permission to see difference and saying different is okay, it's not less than it's not greater than it simply is.

And what I've discovered is her the way that our brains work is they tend to hold onto negative experiences like velcro and they tend to release positive experience like teflon.

So any good interaction we had with someone, it kind of fades.

But that childhood memory for a young black kid whose father was called over by the police and then was beaten.

That memory is ingrained and it's it's held tight by the velcro and if that police officer was white then that that broad brush is painted of all white people because this kid that was their first interaction with someone that wasn't black And to reverse that if a white person has an interaction with a black person or maybe they don't, maybe it's TV because the movies that were out, especially when I was growing up in the 90s, it was things where the black people were in the hood and they were Gangsters and drug dealers and violent.

And so if that's your first experience with someone with dark skin, when you interact with them in the future, that's where you're going to go back to.

You may not consciously think that, but when we go back to how our brains again function, that early memory is, is going to shape our present experience and so just unearthing that and just giving people permission to admit, you know what?

When I see someone walk by my car, my door is unlocked if they're black, I locked the door because I'm scared giving them permission to say that without judging them and calling them a horrible human being is in my view how we address racism.

If we keep pretending it doesn't exist or if we make it out to be something that automatically is a determined of someone's character, then we'll never be able to evolve beyond it.

And so I have conversations just like this one where we just sit and talk and we were very, very real and I say things that are not politically correct for effect and intentionally to, to jar to jar someone awake and to say you actually agree with what I just said, didn't you?

They're like, yeah, I kind of did like I know because we all have these experiences.

We just had them in different context.

So the other part of that in this work of I don't think we'll ever completely overcome bias because it serves us for our survival.

But at least becoming more aware of these bias is simply exposure, getting people in the room together who are different, who have different backgrounds and who see things in in unique and interesting ways allowing them to have conversations starting with where they're worlds apart, right?

I think we should do a and you think we should do Z.

But then throughout this conversation you discover, you know what we both love em.

Like it's amazing how you can be in the middle.

I don't know if that's really the middle alphabet but just going off the cuff here, right?

But you discover that you have so much in common and even even words are amazing because I think of the word apology and I'm going to apologize to you Heather for being a jerk, right?

But that same word can also mean I'm defending something so like apologetics, I'm defending the action and it's one word spelled the exact same way, but with contradictory meanings and I think that's really life and I think that if we're able to embrace the fact that yeah, the same thing can mean something completely different to different people or in a different context, then we're better able to bridge these divides, which I consider to be totally illusion.

But we bridge these perceived divides and create a unity that isn't uniformity, but it really is a spirit of curiosity and wonder where I can look at something that I totally don't get and instead of looking and say, oh, that's yucky, I could say, wow, that's a very interesting way to approach.

So that's, that's in a nutshell.

I think kind of my approach to addressing racism.

Thank you for sharing um, really these important insights in, I hear several things, right?

There's uh, practicing non judgment.

Um, there's practicing acceptance curiosity and really honoring the diverse landscape of human beings.

Um, and acknowledging the diversity.

Um, so thank you for that.

Thank you will as a pastor, you are with people during, you know, some of the most important moments in their life, some being probably the most joyful and some being really the most sorrowful.

And so I would love for you to share with us your perspective on, um, on how do you be with people during times of challenge because you just shared with us, you know, the importance of having conversations and getting people in a room with one another.

And sometimes it's hard for us to be with people during challenging times.

So I would love for you to share with us.

How do we do that?

That's a big question.

Thank you for asking it where I would start is being uncomfortable is okay gaining the facility to simply be uncomfortable is really where you have to start, whether it is a joyful event or a time of despair and the reason I say that is mhm in the time of despair, I think we all kind of accept that it's okay to be uncomfortable.

It's like, oh, this doesn't feel great.

But there are also feelings of envy or jealousy that arise when someone's having an amazing moment and your life is not that great at the moment.

So being uncomfortable in that space.

And so as a pastor, you know, pastor nonprofit professional, none of these titles mean big bucks.

So, but I'm with people that have immense resources, right?

And I walk into their homes and like, oh, this is fantastic.

And for a moment I'm like, oh, I really wish I had something like this and then I'm just grateful to be in that moment, in that space with them.

So even I in this space still find myself wrestling with being uncomfortable.

Another piece is being okay with silence.

Sometimes the silence speaks far more than words ever could and just simply literally being present with someone can be a great gift, not trying to fix it, not trying to say, oh don't cry, it's going to be okay.

None of that.

Just literally being there.

And then maybe asking the question, what is it I can do for you in this moment?

What do you need in this moment and allowing them to even think and they may say, I don't know, but my experience has been, I'm just glad you're here.

I'll never forget one of my members, their, their mother was in hospice care and she was transitioning and so I was called to come now, I'll tell you I'm the one that does the happy events.

I do weddings and all of that.

I don't love the funerals, just just my personal way of being.

But in that moment he needed his pastor and his mom was a different religion, which is okay.

She wanted me there too because I was her son's pastor and she wanted to pray and I said, well how would you like me to pray for you?

And she said, just say whatever's on your heart.

And so my, my religion is love.

I know that's kind of a cliche, but it really is.

And so I just, I just prayed out about the love that she brought into the world and really highlighting the fact that she lives on through her son and that this is an adventure on the other side that none of us can say for sure what it's like.

And so that brought her comfort, but what really sticks with me is after she transitioned sitting with this young man who didn't know how to live this life without his mom because his entire existence had been with his mom and we just sat together and that's it.

I didn't read the bible to them.

I didn't try to say, oh it's going to get better over.

I didn't do any of that.

I just sat with him and he later told me how much just my time of being there really meant.

And so as we're dealing with these situations of life, it really is giving that gift of yourself.

Money can't buy time.

It doesn't matter if you've got a billion dollars or zero.

We all have the same amount of seconds in a day and your, your time is such a gift to others and your physical energy, that presence, you carry the literal warmth of your body being in that space can make such a difference.

During the pandemic.

My family started a month, a weekly zoom where we got on for sunday dinner because we couldn't get together in person.

And even though we weren't in the same space physically just seeing each other via the camera and hearing the voices and being able to dedicate that time where we're all focused on the same thing, carried us through the pandemic and gave us great peace and comfort even though we still miss each other terribly.

And when we were finally able to get together, you know, there's just nothing like that but using the resources that are at hand.

The other piece that I'll add to that is navigating the spaces of mystery, just being okay with wondering and, and, and sitting with it and saying, hmm, it could be, I mean, that's it.

It could be that allows us to experience and be present.

I'm by nature a fixer.

I want to fix things.

I want people to be happy.

That's why I came to las Vegas and started with the survey, right?

But learning that I don't have to fix everything is, is my personal journey and just allowing people to be exactly who and how they are and giving them the space to even change is how we navigate some of these spaces.

I had the privilege of conducting weddings for many, many couples that come to our city And I've done weddings for 18 year olds and I've done them for 80 plus.

I've done weddings that were the second time they were marrying each other, done weddings is the third time they're marrying each other.

And then, you know, everything in between were six and seventh weddings.

But what's amazing In that 20 minutes that I get to spend with that couple Because that's how long the wedding takes.

Only 20 minutes.

Not a big thing, right?

But in that 20 minutes I get to know their hopes for the future, their traumas from the past, what they're carrying in that present moment.

I get to know about their families and their upbringings, the towns they come from.

And there's one thing that is 100 universal, no matter their couple.

And that one thing is love and I often wonder like, you know, some couples are like sitting here when the bride comes in, the groom will cry and bust out and it's like, oh, that's so sweet.

Others are just stoic and you're like, are you sure you didn't like each other?

But when, when you talk and have those conversations, it's like there's a real love there and that love carries them through difficulty, that love keeps bringing them back together.

Sometimes it brings them to a different person, but everyone just wants that belonging.

And there's a lot of talk about self love, I don't necessarily subscribe to self love because for me, love isn't love if it's not given away.

And so I have to encourage couples like, hey, you your your greatest gift to each other is to give that love that you have and do for each other without condition, without expecting reciprocity, just give out of who you are and this love that you're feeling right now.

This joy you have, as you're saying, I do hold on to that because it's not always going to be easy.

Sometimes love will be an effort and when it's an effort remember this moment.

And so that's kind of a long way to get to the question of sitting with people in their their grief and in their joy is it's really being present and allowing that diversity of experience and diversity of emotion to exist.

Burn A brown has a great book.

It's a brand new one atlas of the Heart and in it she lists countless emotions, you know, when she did her survey, she actually found like, okay, well, people are angry, they can identify sad and that's about it.

But we have so many different emotions and if we learn to just really be present with ourselves and allow the experiences of others to be our teacher, we can then refer to that atlas and have such a wide array of emotions that life can never be dull.

It's one of my favorite books.

So we'll make sure to link to it in the show notes today, it's wonderful.

So will in listening to you just now, I'm really struck about the importance of spirituality in the context of health and as we think about health equity today and all of these really spiritual principles you've shared with us, I'd love for you to just speak about the intersection that you see between spirituality and health.

But yeah, that's a big one.

And when we look at like the wellness Wheel and all the different facets, some of them include spirituality, some of them don't.

But what I think can can kind of help us when we look at this because spirituality can kind of seem ethereal and something outside of their, I like to consider it really a sense of purpose or belonging.

That's where I put spirituality.

But having a practice that allows you a moment to be with yourself is so important for wellness.

When we are constantly going, we never get to reset.

So whether it's prayer where you take that time and even just you know, saying our father prayer or whether it's with the beads or whatever your practice might be, that is important.

And there are physiological effects that we can measure, but also the intangible that that spiritual peace, it is so critical.

The other part of it is when you are connected to something bigger than yourself, it allows you to think outside of yourself and we were talking about being in despair when, when you're having a hard moment, if you're connected to something larger, whether it is an organization or a church or community, you can then really see your situation in context and recognize while this, this is bad, I don't like what's happening right now and there's so much more out there that I can make it through whatever this thing is.

So spirituality for me is a critical piece when we're talking about health and if we're talking about the black community in particular, which I'm a part of church for us is important and so we, we need to get to our pastor and pray and be with each other and sing the songs, that's one of the ways we deal with trauma and we deal with stress and a lot of the dancing that you see in church.

A lot of that is stress relief.

If you look at the animal kingdom, if you ever see an animal hunt after it's done or if it has, it gets startled or something, once it's settled, it shakes because that physical release allows that emotional um energy to disperse.

And so we do that in church singing, whether it's if you're singing in a choir or just listening to a solo or an instrument that, that musical expression bypasses our intellect and gets right into the heart and allows us to receive a message or an understanding that we couldn't communicate using words for words alone, I should say.

And, and so spirituality is something that even those that don't believe in God, um, experience, they may call it something different.

I believe that there is a greater source than what we can tangibly demonstrate.

But I don't have to believe that to live the way that I do, I am able to see that our common bonds is humanity are bigger than any one thing that I'm dealing with.

So I think that spirituality is critical and should be infused into practice when I do work with tobacco cessation and and other addiction.

One of the things that I always do is encourage that person.

That's, that's seeking the treatment to find someone to go along with them to be a support person, someone that they can, can talk to and share their struggles and their challenges with and that will support and encourage them along the journey.

What am I doing?

I'm saying, hey get in community because to me, the answer for depression or addiction for whatever we're dealing with really is community.

So spirituality for me is a big, big umbrella term for a lot of really, really important things.

Mhm Thank you for highlighting that for us in today's episode as we wrap up today.

Is there anything else that you want our listeners to know about?

Yeah, thank you for forgiving me that open window.

I don't know if we have another hour left, but the the thing I would love to leave with our audience is just how much they matter.

I close every podcast with this roomy quote, which is you're not just a drop in the ocean, you're the entire ocean in a drop and what you do matters so live compassionately and what I hope people here when they hear that expression is, you know, the the entirety of the universe exists within me and every experience, every um imagination, every every desire that I have is real and it's, it's something that matters and is of substance and the entire the universe is within me because I'm the only universe I really know and I'm the only universe I can really prove.

And so I need to act like I have the entire weight of the universe behind me.

And I think if we can just put put our actions with that gravity attached will be a lot kinder when we see that individual that's struggling.

We may not have money we can give them, but we do have a smile we can give you have a kind word we can offer.

And if the universe is giving this person a smile that's a big deal.

If the universe is telling you, hey, I love that shirt on you, that's a great color on you, wow, I love the way you think if the universe is saying that to you, if everything in existence is saying that to you, then it carries a little different weight than if there's always just a little old me telling somebody No, it really, really matters.

It really makes a difference.

So don't underestimate the potential of your impact.

Don't underestimate the value you bring to the world and know that you really, really do make a difference.

Yeah, thank you so much.

Will.

Thank you for sharing your passion today for compassion um community and the importance of belonging.

Really appreciate you being here and grateful for you.

Thank you for having me.

Mm hmm.

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