

Queerology: A Podcast on Belief and Being

Episode 40 – Jonah Venegas

Transcript

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Hey, friends. This is Matthias Roberts, and you're listening to Queerology, a podcast on belief and being. This is episode 40.

Jonah: When you choose to really step into your queerness, you really step into who you are as a person, who God made you to be, it's costly and it's painful. Sometimes it means that you lose most relationships, you lose some of those people who aren't quite comfortable or who really can't maybe at the time or maybe ever kind of stand with you in that.

Matthias: Jonah Venegas is a queer Asian Christian, a poet and a blogger currently working on his master's degree to be a mental health therapist. He likes to talk and write about the intersections of faith, sexuality, mental health, how to change the world and whatever Anime might currently be occupying his Headspace. He's a fan of a good cup of green jasmine tea and erogenous outfits and dry humor. Jonah and I are kind of talking about two things that are like separate and yet really interrelated in this episode.

The process of coming into ourselves and owning our queer identities and then the kind of the process that Jonah went through actually in dyeing his hair and what that brought him into as far as owning his queerness. Then also kind of the grief and the loss and the hardship that comes with that process and the intersections of those things of grief and loss, and yet fullness of identity. So many good complex things. Before we dive into that, for everyone who is going to be in North Carolina this weekend at Why Christian, I'm going to be there. I'm going to be hanging out at the Seattle School table in the exhibit. ...I don't think it's a hall. I think it's a tent this year. If you're there, if you're at Why Christian this year, come say hi. Come see me. I'll be hanging out there. I mean I'm manning the table. That's where you can find me. I would love to meet some of you all, and we're just going to have a great time. Jonah Venegas, let's go ahead and dive in. Jonah, hi. Welcome.

Jonah: Hi. Thanks so much for having me. I'm so excited for this.

Matthias: Yeah, me too. It's really good to have you. To start, a question that I ask everyone, how do you identify and then how would you say that your faith has helped form that identity?

Jonah: This is a super interesting question actually because I just attended an LGBTQ workshop on mental health the other day and we kind of went through some of the same things. I realized how kind of interesting my answer to some of these questions is. The word that I typically use to describe myself is queer and again of course a lot of people will ask, "What does that mean," which usually for me I'm okay with that question. Identify as a gay cis male, but then again like I said, the term that I usually use to describe myself is queer.

In terms of just like faith forming that and impacting that, I think with kind of a lot of the stuff and the theology kind of centering around LGBTQ people and queerness, I think it just kind of helped me see God and see faith in a more consistent way. Kind of how we're said that we're going to be a people that was going to be known by love. I think I've leaned a lot more into that. Kind of stemming from just interaction with church and interaction with other people of faith and kind of integrating that with queerness.

Matthias: I mean what has that training kind of been like? That kind of movement towards like a theology of they will know us by our love. Has that been a journey?

Jonah: It definitely has. For everyone who has known me since I was in middle school, high school, people will know that I was one of those people that was I would say pretty legalistic. I went to a small Christian school from like I want to say fourth grade through tenth grade. Like a long time. It was kind of being in that kind of conservative environment. I would say that I did tend to be like more along that conservative legalistic kind of side for a long time. I think it has been a journey because I think that for a long time it was kind of like, "Okay. These are the rules. These are the boundaries and limitations of what Christians is and what we can be."

Then kind of moving into that and coming out, coming into myself, I think there has been a lot of movement in terms of having to kind of reconcile those two things and I'm kind of also looking at other matters of intersectionality just like of race and gender and sexuality. All those different kinds of things and kind of seeing like, "Okay. If what God is telling us is that we're going to be a people known by our love and that's kind of like our job per se, then I think that changes the way that we see the world, changes the way that we see our faith, changes the way that we see the way that we interact with other people." Yeah, it's definitely been a journey for sure.

Matthias: As you were talking, I was thinking about one of your posts that I just read. I mean it's from like a year ago almost I think, but about you deciding to change your hair color and what that meant for you kind of in this journey and this step. I wonder if you could maybe tell us kind of that story and what that meant for you, simply the act of changing your hair.

Jonah: Definitely. Definitely. Yeah. Let's see. This was probably in like August or September of 2017. Like it's been a while. I've had the white, the silver hair for a while now. It was one of those things that it didn't feel like it was going to be this radically profound or spiritual thing like when I did it. I was just kind of scrolling through Instagram or scrolling through wherever and I had seen a lot of just like the photos and it was kind of a trendy thing to have like the white, the silver hair or the gray hair, whatever. I toyed with the idea for a long time. Probably for like the majority of 2017 honestly. I toyed with that idea of doing it.

Then I finally just got the stuff and I just did it one day. Over the next few months it was kind of just like this crazy experience of having dyeing my hair kind of being a catalyst for so many things. I should back up quick and say that yes, I did my own hair. All the hairstylists, all the hairdressers out there will be very squirming in their skin right now about that because yes, everyone.

Matthias: Let's tell everyone what your actual hair color is.

Jonah: Yes. For everyone who doesn't know me, I am Asian and so I have really dark like black hair basically. To kind of get it to that color of the white, the silver, the gray, I bleached my hair three times on my own.

Matthias: Wow. That wasn't judgmental, but maybe it was a little bit. That's amazing.

Jonah: Well, no. I think that there are parts that judgment is probably warranted. I will go on the record and say that after the first time like doing this whole process all the way through, I don't want to spend too much time because this part is the irrelevant part, but after the three bleachings, I did this all in one day, I had like real chemical burns on my scalp.

Matthias: Oh my gosh. Yup.

Jonah: Like that is a thing that happened because I'm a really impatient human being. I want it to happen now. Anyway, three rounds of bleach and then you do a toner to kind of like cancel the yellowness, like in the blonde and kind of get into that silver color. I literally had to like put Vaseline on my head and like rest my head for like a day or two before I could do the toner because I mixed it up and like put it on. Literally I thought I was going to pass out from how much it was stinging. I was like, "All right. Nope. Nope. I'm going to get cancer or something. This is very bad." To everyone out there who is like contemplating on doing your own hair, I thought it was worth it.

I probably could have done it a little smarter, but it turned out pretty okay. That is the process. It was quite a radical change from like my dark hair that I've had for forever. All that aside, yeah, it was kind of this crazy experience of over the next several months kind of getting in this place of ... Well, getting into this place and going through these cycles of kind of like at first loving it myself, but then kind of like having this terrifying epiphany of like, "Oh wait. I have to go out in public now with this too. I'm going to live

with this for a while." I look in my bathroom mirror and I really liked it, but then I also ... I had work on Monday. I had class Tuesday.

There was a twinge. Probably more than twinge. There was definitely this sensation of like, "Okay. What are people going to think? How are people going to react? What are they going to say about the fact that my hair is like white, gray, whatever?" Moving through that and then kind of getting to a place honestly where the white and the silver hair kind of became a part of me. I have it right now and I'm kind of growing it out just because my hair is like really fried. Again the consequences of doing it yourself. It became this way of telling myself, "I am doing this for myself. I'm not doing the white hair to impress anyone.

I'm not doing the white hair to necessarily make a statement." It was just kind of something that I had wanted to do over the summer and finally did. Through that process, there's a lot of upkeep in keeping your hair silver, white, all the really light color like that. It's actually through this process that I ... I don't know. I had a lot of like personal and spiritual growth that occurred through this, which is super weird. At least to me like talk about it in retrospect, it felt really meaningful in the moment. Now I'm just kind of like, "Yeah. I learned all these like crazy personal, spiritual thing just from like dyeing my hair."

There's a lot of upkeep that goes into it. I have purple shampoo, purple conditioner, all these different things you kind of do to keep it not brassy. That's kind of one of those things too where I would be upkeeping and doing all this stuff. People around me, if I'd go to class, I'd go to work, I'd go wherever, would say nice things about my hair even though that it's a hard color, all that kind of stuff. I would be realistically and sincerely very appreciative of that. At the same time I kind of go home and kind of be like, "Well, right, but the color is not quite what I want it to be."

I think that was kind of a drastic shift of even in myself I know for the past couples years that, my hair has been a couple of different colors over the years, but things that I tended to more look at it and value it based on what other people thought rather than what I thought of it. It was kind of this small and subtle, but really impactful shift of going from that place of being like, "Okay. Well, I wonder what people are going to say. I wonder how people going to react. I wonder if people will like it," and even coming back from the first couple days I got out with it to this point then of people are still saying nice things about it.

People are still liking it, but kind of again being reminded that I did this for me and kind of being like, "Well, right. People think it looks fine and everything, but I still know that I kind of want it to look a little tweak here." It wasn't like an anxious thing or anything like that, but it was kind of one of those things like, "This is where I'm going with it. This is the shade that I want it to be." I think that process too just radically changed the way that I saw myself, changed the way that I kind of approached how other people thought of me.

Again if you know me for a really long time, like friends from middle school or friends from high school will tell you that me very much like struggling with what other people

think about me and struggling with those perceptions of others is like a big thing. It was kind of one of those epiphanies that I had or revelations that I had somewhere over these months where it's like, "Wow. I never realized that dyeing my hair and having to go through this upkeep process and everything would so dramatically impact the way that I saw myself."

Matthias: It sounds like an experience of letting go of what people think. I just think about how often and how daily it is I mean for me to sit in those places of like wondering how what I do is going to impact everyone else. I'm wondering what they're going to think of it.

Jonah: Right. Right.

Matthias: I mean that's so cool that you're able to kind of move into yourself simply. It sounds like a very embodied kind of experience.

Jonah: Yes. Yes. No, it definitely has been. I'm glad that you used that term embody because I ... Again kind of like going back to my roots like in a super conservative, kind of like Southern Baptist based high school and church and that kind of things, I think that I always felt weird or felt iffy about terms like embodied or kind of like things or ideas or theologies that made our real lives and our physical bodies important a part of that personal and spiritual formation. I promise this tangent makes sense. In college, I was a TA for this class called Christianity in Western Culture. If anyone's listening to this, shout out to my CWC fam. I love you guys. One of my best parts of college.

Through that we kind of learned a lot about the history of the church and going through all these different theology and different things, like first century, second century, kind of going all the way through the history of all that kind of stuff. What that makes me think of honestly is kind of this idea of like platonic dualism or like narcissism, like all those of kinds of things that say the physical is bad, the spiritual is good. I think so much about how even today Christianity we wouldn't necessarily say that we've been influenced by Plato or by the gnostic sect or anything like that, but so much of it is there.

Anyway, I'm really glad that you used that word embody because I think I've been leaning so much more into that. Our bodies are important. Our bodies are just as important as our spirits and our minds. Yeah, I think this is definitely one of those ways that has kind of taught me that in this really weird kind of roundabout way of dyeing my hair and realizing that yes, our physical bodies and the way that we see ourselves and the way that we look do have an impact on the way that our lives go and have an impact on the way that we see ourselves, how other people around us see us too. I love that term. I love that term.

It's one of my new favorite kind of spiritual leanings to be into. It's like no, we are here as humans. This is an embodied experience.

Matthias: Absolutely. There's a theologian that I love named Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury. He writes on one of his books, "Only the body can save the soul." Saying like we live in our bodies on this earth and everything that happens to us on this earth

takes place within a body. We have to acknowledge that because it's our embodied presence in the world that allows the spiritual to happen. We're not spiritual without our bodies right now at least in this world.

Jonah: I love that.

Matthias: I mean there are many theologians that say we will always have our bodies. They will remain, but currently we are bodied people. I love it. It's one of my favorite things to talk about too. I'm curious, this is a little bit of a shift, but ...

Jonah: I'm down for it.

Matthias: Okay. Another one of your blog post, a more recent one, you kind of talked about noticing seasons and cycles and kind of movements of life especially in regards to queerness and coming out and relationality. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about that.

Jonah: Yeah. Yeah, definitely. Yeah. This is something that I've been thinking about a lot recently. I'm in a master's of marriage and family therapy program right now. We are constantly being forced to analyze our own experiences and think about our own stuff that we bring into the room and all that kind of stuff. I think I've just been so much more in tune as a result of that recently with just kind of like where my feelings are going, where my emotions are going, where my thoughts are going. Again as we're in March now and spring is finally starting to roll around, I think I've been so aware of the passage of the seasons.

Maybe even more so just because of this entire past year in general of ... Again I think I did my hair dyeing thing kind of over the summer and we kind of moved into fall. Fall was a crazy time. Then winter and just kind of ... I think I did a lot of deconstruction, a lot of different things in winter, and then kind of coming back in the spring, I think I've been really in touch and in tune with this idea of the cycles of life. At least in terms of queerness, I think it's been really fascinating because I honestly would say, and I've been out for ...

I mean I guess it's really complicated because I'll say I've been out for about six years in some capacity, but then I wasn't like out-out at like school and college, everything, until maybe about four years ago. I only came out to my family probably three years ago. I think all these different shifts and kind of spiraling back to like a lot of the same things. If you think of a spiral kind of going around one point, you kind of come back to the same things a lot. Anyway, six years, four years, three years, whatever the number is that we're going to use, I've been out for a while.

Just kind of seeing how things have changed both I guess in terms of the overall general opinion and perception of like the world around us, but then also just kind of like in my own life. I guess that's kind of what more I was writing about was yeah, is that it's hard a lot of the time. I think that as queer people and I think as queer Christians we talk about that a lot more around very specific events.

I'm kind of thinking about specifically of like coming out events or even around holiday sometimes because that can be hard to go home with your families and affirming or around weddings and engagements because obviously it's something that we have to look at and say like, "Okay. Well, are people going to think that we're allowed to have the same thing?" Like all those kinds of things. I think that something that we don't talk about as much is kind of those in between seasons. If you kind of think about the year, you can pick your coming out as kind of one date and then you have your holidays, weddings, like all those different things as other dates.

I think we don't talk about those in between times as much. It's kind of like the downtime I guess you could say of the daily life and the things that are happening. I guess specifically what I talked about in that one blog post that you had mentioned is just kind of the idea that we talk about how hard things are, those individual points, but we don't talk as much about kind of the quiet parts. The parts that don't get blog posts necessarily. The parts that don't get Instagram posts. The parts that don't get Facebook posts necessarily.

I think that a lot of that is because we as queer people still kind of don't feel like we're allowed to talk about those things or we're allowed to have those emotions and like we're allowed to be in places of grief. You know? One specific thing that I talked about in that blog post is that as I've kind of thought about my own personal history and as I've kind of thought about the different churches and schools and even just like relationships that I've been in both like platonic and otherwise, I've been struck recently by how much movement and how much loss there is that we might not necessarily give ourselves the space or permission to think about or feel a lot of the time.

I talk about two specific things there and one was just as I think about high school, again I went to this really small conservative Christian school for middle school, high school, I think even a little bit of elementary school, and to this day I ... Now I'm graduating college. I'm doing my master's program and all that kind of stuff. I regularly talk to one person from high school. I know that people don't talk to a lot of people from high school anymore. It just kind of that it happens. A lot of the time you make you really, really good friends in college or what not.

As I thought about that, I was kind of shocked and surprised and honestly kind of sad and also a little bit of angry I think too because ... Just to give you a frame of reference of how small my school was, it was a K12 school. There were 80 students in the entire school. In the high school, there were probably like 20-25 of us. It's pretty small. You know everyone. You kind of know what's going on with everyone. I was at this school for six, seven years. We grew up with the same people. I would have considered myself at the time to have been pretty good friends with most of them. Now let's say fast forward seven, eight years later, I talk to one of them.

It's hard too because I live in Minnesota. I'm up in the Twin Cities and she lives down in Rochester. She's teaching down there. She's doing her master's down there. I won't use her name because I didn't ask permission, but if you're listening to this podcast, she'll know who she is. We still talk pretty regularly, but the rest of them we don't. I know that some of them I would still love to be friends with. I would still like to be in

relationship with, but I think that there's so much complexity that goes into that. I think that at least for me one of the things that I think about is I wonder how my queerness has like impacted those relationships. You know?

Not to necessarily put that on myself of being like, "Oh, the queerness is what destroyed it." Not even to blame it either necessarily, but just to kind of think about what that does to relationships and kind of that impact that that has because that's something as queer people we're always carrying that with us. It's not something that we can necessarily put away. We can try to, but it's not something that we can kind of isolate away from the rest of ourselves. I just think about how I consider those to be losses.

Again not necessarily to blame those people or to blame myself or to blame anyone really, but just to think about those losses of these people that I no longer am in relationship with ... I can say the same for other friends in college, other friends in other areas of my life as well, at church, whatever. Just kind of thinking about that and how as we move through our lives and as queer people as we kind of come out and come into our own and start to really figure out who we are and decide where we stand on theology, where we stand on different queer issues, I think that definitely does create a lot of movement in our interpersonal relationships.

I think I've just been thinking a lot about how it causes a lot of loss as well. It's okay to feel that. It's okay to miss those people. It's also at the same time okay to be okay with the fact that we're not in relationship with them anymore for our own health.

Matthias: Right. I mean there is a complexity there to it of like sometimes those relationships do fade because they need to fade because they're not necessarily healthy relationships to be in anymore.

Jonah: Absolutely.

Matthias: Regardless of whether that's happening or not, like the element of loss that just comes with loss relationships, I think that is something that we don't talk about enough. It's something that I think so many queer people have experienced in such very real ways of loss and sometimes loss that is heartbreaking. We don't really talk about it. This links in to a conversation that I had with Trey Pearson.

I don't know how many episodes ago that was, but I mean he talks about that on his new record, on his new album about the loss of like what it was like to even though step into his new identity as a gay man, but also realizing losing his wife and the grieving process that goes on even as we're stepping into new identity and fullness of who we are, who God created us to be. There's still a lot of grieving that has to happen. I think for a lot of us it makes us think like I can't show people that I'm sad because I'm supposed to be happy.

Jonah: Right. Right. Yeah, or even that and also just the sense that I think so many people who come from maybe less affirming camps or from people who are still wrestling more with that idea. I think too there is some sensation or feeling a lot of the time that maybe they

might not necessarily be trying to give off, but I think that as people we kind of take it in the sense of feeling like, "Oh well. I mean this is just what comes with the territory. This is the natural consequence of coming out." You know? I think we kind of get a little bit of that too.

I think that I know that I definitely felt some of that in just the sense of like, "Okay. Well, yeah, of course. If you're going to embrace like again your gay lifestyle," any of those things that they just say that like, "Well, that's what's going to happen because ..." I think it's hard too with faith communities and things like that. I try really hard to come at these things from this perspective. They're trying their best. I try to come at a lot of things from that perspective, but it's hard a lot of days.

When they just come at it from this perspective of well, that's your cross to bear or this is happens, I think that also kind of comes into that same idea of then us not really being allowed to grieve those things or not really being allowed to feel sad about it or feel the loss or experience those negative emotions because there are so many people out there telling us like, "Oh well, this is kind of your fault."

Matthias: This is making me just think of shame. We trade I think one kind of sense of shame of like being in the closet and worrying about our own identities for another shame of like then coming out and then realizing, "Well, it's all my fault that all these people have left me." Maybe it's not a different kind of shame. Maybe it's all the same kind of root, but that fear of like, "If I'm truly myself, then no one will want to be around me." Then we come out and people start validating that and they'll be like, "This is your cross to bear." No, it's not. We know very well this is not the way things are supposed to be.

Jonah: I think it's just so hard for us to allow ourselves to grieve when those things come. One other thing that I wrote about in there was over the last year or so, I feel like I've really come into my own queerness. I think for a long time in college and even like the couple of years after, I think that I still very much was in this place of kind of being like, "Okay. Yes, I'm queer. Yes, like all these things," but also kind of trying to tow the line or trying to be in this in between place where, "Okay. Yes, I'm queer and that's fine, but also I'm going to try to I guess fit in with like the rest of the world."

I will say that that's a hard place to be because you kind of have one foot in two worlds and you're not really being your real self either way. Again that's not to say that you have to pick one or the other, but I think I was trying to please two different worlds. I was trying to be two different versions of myself depending on what the setting was and that's what I want to say. I was trying to be different people depending who I was with. I think over the last year or so I think I've really started to be able to integrate those two different ... Well, all the different parts of myself.

I even wrote a little bit about how that integration itself kind of creates more loss and creates another cycle that we kind of go through. Because I mean obviously there's this point where it kind of feels like there's a dramatic shift when you come out and when ... This is kind of like new information to like so many people or maybe it's not new information. I tend to think of myself as not being super straight passing, so I'm always kind of surprised when people are surprised, but that's just me. That's just me. As you

go along that journey, you get to these different points of integrating this or integrating that or integrating that.

As I've kind of like integrated the queer parts of myself into the rest of myself and start holding all of that at the same time wherever I go, it has definitely created more loss as well. I know that even like some friends that I hung out with in college, even some friends that I still talk a little bit from high school or whatever a few years ago, we're not really close anymore. We're not really in a relationship anymore.

Again not necessarily being like a choice between this or that or these people or those people, but just kind of like your individual relationships. Kind of seeing how when you choose to embrace that instead of trying to hide or trying to repress it or trying to pretend it's not there. When you choose to like really like step into your queerness, you really step into who you are as a person, who God made you to be, it's costly and it's painful. Sometimes it means that you lose most relationships, you lose some of those people who aren't quite comfortable or who really can't maybe at the time or maybe ever kind of stand with you in that.

Matthias: I mean that's such a real thing. As we own more of who we are and step more fully into that, other people will respond to that in ways that we can't control.

Jonah: Right.

Matthias: It will effect them in ways that we have no control over. Sometimes that means they go away. It's so hard. It's so hard. Gosh. I'm curious too like seasons, cycles. Maybe to wrap up, you kind of started that post around like talking about growth though and stepping into kind of like how ... These cycles of grief lead us and push us into ... I mean there's a whole nother side of that cycle. I don't want to be like let's jump to hope because I don't think like jumping to hope is really ever a good ... It's such a glib thing and yet there is still a whole nother side of that cycle that is growth and hope and goodness.

I'd be curious about maybe where you seen some of those things in your life as you have been in this cycle.

Jonah: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I guess kind of going back to that metaphor of the seasons and the cycles, I kind of think of, and I really hope I get this right, I think of like perineal plans. Just kind of like the cycles of how there are these plants that spring, summer, they are alive and blossoming and blooming and thriving, but as fall and winter come around, they start to wither and dry up and die. They kind of lie dormant for that period in the winter and then come back and then kind of spring back up again in the spring.

That's kind of how I think I'm seeing a lot more of these cycles at least for me of kind of that perpetual cycle of renewal and rebirth and new life and blooming and thriving. Then also kind of going back to these points of harder times when things start to get colder, things start to get darker and things start to die and maybe even lie dormant for a while. I think that's something too that I've been learning over the least few months and even years is that winter season I think was one that I always forgot exist. I think I

always was going straight from springing up and blooming and thriving to dying, to going back right to it again.

I think the winter, I mean just in general, I mean I'm just coming out of it now, is that kind of dormant part, kind of the dead part, the cold part, the frozen over part that I think that I have forgotten a lot over the last months and years. A lot of the time there is this period of like in winter it's like three, four ... In Minnesota, probably like, I don't know, six months of deadness and kind of frozenness. Things are kind of just laying dormant there. Kind of laying there and waiting for that next season. I will say that I think at least in terms of life, I think even the last year or six months has kind of been that winter for me. I have a word of the year every year.

In 2017, my word of the year was abide. I kind of consider all of 2017 to kind of be like one of those dead winter places where things are kind of just lying and waiting, things are kind of sleeping. It kind of sucks in real life. It sucks and it's hard because you're waiting for the next thing to come and you're waiting for what's supposed to happen after everything has died. You're kind of waiting for the rebirth and the renewal and it's not there yet. That's kind of what my 2017 was. It was a hard time, but I think I grew a lot through that, which kind of brings me back into 2018 where my word of my year is pursue.

At first I didn't really know what that meant or what that was going to mean. It's one of my things where again I kind of have to integrate my queerness and spirituality and like all these different things because it is one of those things that I will pray about for like the entire month of December. Kind of feeling like what is my next year going to look like, what is the word that's going to define this next year. I think at the time even just like several months ago when I was thinking about that and I was given this word of pursue, I wasn't really sure what that was going to mean.

Even now as I'm talking with you, I'm realizing too that it's coming back into that spring season of the cycle, of pursuing new growth and pursuing renewal from all the things that have died and been waiting to come back up. Right now I think I'm seeing it in a lot of small different ways. I don't really think there's anything super giant or anything really crazy that's been happening recently, but just kind of in little ways of A, not really being ashamed of the queerness anymore.

I think for a really long, even having been out for six years to certain people for a long time, I think that there was a still part of me that again in certain situations I didn't want to reference the fact that I was queer or kind of like pretended that I wasn't or even just like on a lower level just not really being super outspoken or not really being too gay I guess you could say. I mean it's kind of a tangent from that or peripheral to that, but just kind of being more outspoken and not really worrying too much about what people think. I think that goes in a lot of different ways whether it's theology, whether it's like personal opinions, whether it's even like some political stuff.

Without those kinds of things too I think I've gone to a point with kind of like the integration and the growth and the spring season of life where I ... For my third thing, it's kind of as being self-differentiated enough to know that it's okay if I am this person,

if I'm the person that I am who has beliefs that I have or has opinions that I have or has relationships that I have or is queer and that's okay, and also it's okay that other people have different opinions, different views, different things like that. Those two things not really having as much interplay or interface as they had before.

Kind of being in the place where even if other people aren't okay with who I am or things I believe or even if other people aren't okay in general, kind of as more of like an empathic person, I'm still okay. For me I think it hasn't been like really gigantic things, but I think it's these underlying personal spiritual things that I think have changed the most and I've been seeing the most growth in coming into this spring.

Matthias: I love that. Stepping into differentiation and like I am still okay regardless of what's going on around me. That's different than like not being impacted by it, but like still being able to move that sense of that self. I mean it's so important. Such hard work to step into and yet so needed and meaningful.

Jonah: It's something that I want for all the queer people, just like you are okay who you are and where you're at on your journey, on your path. I think especially like in terms of things that I've learned over the last season in my life is that ... I think especially that you're affirming. This is just something like you don't need to be in a relationship to prove that it's okay to be affirming. I think that's something that I've struggled with a lot over this season. I just wanted to say that I learned that I don't have to be in a relationship. I don't have to make a relationship work right now to prove to other people that it's okay to be affirming.

Matthias: Yeah. That's so true. That's so true. Amen. Jonah, thank you so very much.

Jonah: Yeah. Thank you for having me on here. This was so fun and I think fun is kind of a weird word because we were talking about a lot of hard things, but thank you so much for having me. I had a lot of fun too.

Matthias: Likewise. Yeah, me too. Thank you. How can people find your blog?

Jonah: Yes. Yeah. My blog and all my different things. My blog itself is www.jonah-ven.com. Maybe I'll just spell it because I'm that kind of person www.J-O-N-A-H-ven,V-E-N.com is my blog. Then I also try as hard as I can to make sure that I get that out on different platforms on social media as well. Usually if you follow me on Twitter @Jonah_Ven, same spelling, or Instagram @Jonah.Ven. I think I have a Facebook Page too that I put stuff on too. It's just my full name Jonah Venegas.

Matthias: Well, thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Jonah: Yeah, thank you.

Matthias: Enjoy the rest of your day.

Jonah: Thank you. Yeah, I hope you do too. Hopefully we'll recover from the daylight savings time with the little kick that we got.

Matthias: Yeah. You can find Jonah's work over at his website Jonah-ven.com. He's on Twitter @Jonah_Ven and on Instagram @Jonah.Ven. He's also on Facebook like he mentioned Jonah Venegas. Queerology is on Twitter and Instagram @QueerologyPod or you can tweet me direct @MatthiasRoberts. Queerology is produced with support from Natalie England, Tim Schraeder, Christian Hayes and a bunch of other Patreon supporters. So grateful. To find out how you can help support Queerology, head over to MatthiasRoberts.com/support. A really easy way to help up Queerology is by leaving a rating or a review.

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