



## Improving Ward Teaching

Grady Kerr

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LLDS: Hello and welcome back to another session of the Teaching Saints Virtual Summit where we are striving to get various perspectives and expertise on the summit in different sessions, talking to enhance our ability as (00:00:30) teachers in the church and in this session we're... get the opportunity to speak with Grady Kerr from This Mormon Life down in the East valley in Arizona. How are you Grady

GRADY: I'm doing good. I'm doing good. Thanks for having me, Kurt.

LLDS: Yeah, well we've had opportunity to, to record interviews like this. Sometimes you're on the interviewer's side and sometimes I am, but uh, you create some good content and I was excited to include you in this summit and maybe give us a little background on you, your sort of the projects you work on and, and how (00:01:00) You've dedicated your life to enhancing teaching in the church.

GRADY: Yeah. So This Mormon Life know, it's kind of gone through a lot of iterations, but one of the things it's begun really focused on is helping teachers. And so you know this summit, when I saw this, I'm like, this is amazing. This is exactly what we need right now in the church. Um, I am so passionate about really good teaching. If you don't know yet, you'll find out in a few more minutes that I'm very passionate about the quality of teaching that can happen in the church. (00:01:30)

LLDS: Awesome. Well, what, what are some of the topics we're going to cover tonight? And maybe I'll just jump in and I'll, uh, I'll interject my thoughts or questions as we go.

GRADY: Yeah. You Bet. You know, I think with a lot of times, especially those of you who maybe are watching this that have a calling or you're in a presidency or some sort of leadership responsibility, you've got teachers in your, in your auxiliary or in your courtroom that you've got stewardship over. And I've just found that it can be really hard sometimes to (00:02:00)

Really focusing on those teachers and help them do really well and succeed in what they do. And so our big overview is just talk about how we can help you to show care to those that you lead and those that are teaching your organization and be able to correct them when maybe there's areas and they're teaching that aren't quite working that well. I'll go back to that one. So one of the big things here that I'm (00:02:30) really passionate about is the fact that we don't always teach our teachers how to teach.

Um, Brad Wilcox talked about it in, uh, the, the lesson a few days ago about how often we basically just give our teachers the manual or we say, you know, the manual is on LDS.org and good luck, you'll figure it out, give it the old college try. And off you go. Do you ever see that in kind of the leadership colleagues you've had? (00:03:00)

LLDS: Yea absolutely. These are different callings that are very overwhelming and sometimes you're lucky to get a teacher called let alone give him direction and information like that. So you point them in the right direction where the resources are online and hope for the best.

GRADY: Yeah! And some people that works really well with, you're going to have people that are called the teach and maybe they're really talented and so the, you know, they can get any content you give them and make it shine. You get people that have experience in teaching, maybe this is their 80th teaching calling and they're like, yeah, no sweat (00:03:30) I've taught gospel doctrine eighty times already I'm in. Or you get those people that are proactive and say, you know what, I'm going to magnify this calling. I don't know what I'm doing but I'm going to go out there and get it. Um, but I would say that's probably only about 30 percent of the people that are called the teach. You know, a lot of other people that are called the teach. They just don't know where to go, how to get help. And so what I want to talk about it just the idea as a leader to make it really easy for you to talk to those you teach, coach them, help them to see (00:04:00) what they need to do to be good at this and feel confident. Now I know in the church it can be awkward when we are having to have some correcting conversations where we see things that are, that are off. Um, I really like the parable that Q. B. Brown gives. Um when he talks about the, the Current Bush. He gives this, uh, this, this talk and this allegory basically this farmer and he's got this Current Bush and it's (00:04:30) growing and it's doing great. It thinks it's awesome. And the farmer comes and cuts it down, you know, this huge Bush and makes it tiny. Leaves are gone. The fruit is gone. And this bushes, just saying, why would you cut me down? You know, why would you? I was growing, I was doing so great. Why would you cut me down and the gardener says, you know, I know what's going on here. I know what I want you to be. Um, and I think a lot of times when it comes to teachers, we get teachers that are trying their best, you know, maybe they think that they're doing good enough and (00:05:00) Well the role of the leaders to come in and say, Hey, you know what? I'm glad you're having a good time, bringing in snacks every week, so everybody, um, but I, I want you to be more, I want these lessons to be more, um, and being able to do that in a, in a sense of love and caring, um, not to come at it in a way that is, um, authoritarian or makes them not want to teach anymore but does it in the way that they can see that you are trying to help them to become more than what they are right now. (00:05:30)

LLDS: Awesome. It's a great, great story and analogy to approach this.

GRADY: Yeah, I've, I've kind of brought it down to like four quadrants, um, when it comes to leadership and the way that we can correct, um, you know, or, or help and guide and inspire. Um, one of the first things that we see as the idea of caring and accountability. There's kind of these quadrants in the Church of everyone. They kind of fall all along (00:06:00) this spectrum. Um, sometimes people care a lot. Sometimes people have a lot of accountability to those that they lead. And it's important to find yourself in the right quadrant. You know, we see it a lot where there's people who don't care, people who don't

really hold accountable, those that they lead, particularly in our teachers, and there's hopefully none of you here that are in this boat. I mean, if you're here trying to attend the summit, trying to improve this probably isn't you, but they exist out there. (00:06:30)

Um, but then we get kind of, you know, those who are hold their, the people that are super high accountability but still not much care. Um, I've seen this before with overzealous Elders Quorum Presidents that says I want a hundred percent home teaching, no matter what, do what you gotta do to get the door. I don't care what it takes. Um, and they, they kind of started going this unrighteous dominion slant where they don't really care about doing the Lord's work. They're just administrators with no ministration (00:07:00 to what they're doing. Um, but I would say probably the most common is the other end of the spectrum where we care so much about those that we lead. We want them to be happy. We want them to not be offended. Um, and so sometimes we shy away from holding people accountable, you know, I had this once where there was a home teaching supervisor and I didn't do my home teaching. I was, I was younger and I was distracted and (00:07:30) I told my supervisor, he said, you know, hey, have you seen these families? And I said, no, I didn't. And he goes, that's OK, you know, it's so hard. They're hard to get ahold of, you know, it's no problem. I'll tell you what; I never home taught that family because I knew I didn't have to. If I didn't, if I didn't do it, then there was no accountability there. And what happens is it was helping me do bad things. It was helping me not do what the Lord wanted and I wasn't growing. (00:08:00)Um, it was when I got called into an elders quorum, presidency, you know, sorry, it was what I was, um, Sunday school president and we were talking about people in the room and I had a bishop who really lived in this fourth quadrant of servant leadership and we're talking about families and one of the families I actually home taught and I hadn't home taught them and he looked at me and he said, you cannot sit on this council and not do your home teaching. It is everything that we're (00:08:30) trying to do is go out in these families and get in their homes and reach them and bring the light of Christ into their lives. If you can't do that, you can't be on this council and I want you to here. The Lord called you here and he needs you to do this work. And all of a sudden I felt empowered. He, I knew that he loved me. I knew that he loved the people that I was serving and he was not shy to take me to task, let me know that I had messed up. And that's a really hard place to be in that perfect balance of caring and love (00:09:00) and also accountability to make sure that everyone knows what's expected of them and how does be successful in their callings. So as teachers, you know, that's a great place to come in and say, Hey, I've noticed there's some areas of improvement and I want to talk more about how we help in that improvement, you know, Kurt, what kinds of things have you seen in this kind of caring and accountability quadrants as you've had? Leadership opportunities.

LLDS: Yeah. Especially the, the enabling one stands out because at the end of (00:09:30) the day, this is a volunteer or organization, right? And uh, we're lucky to fill that position, let alone have them maybe excel at it or really give it their all right and take that into consideration. Some other things that are in life that may make these callings difficult, but um, you know, I, I want to be part of organizations that are encouraging me to be better and to magnify my calling into and point out to some areas that I can improve. Right. And Nice. I hope, you know, my leaders feel like they can, they can (00:10:00) say that to me.

GRADY: Yeah. And you brought a great point. I think we were offline when he brought it up, but just that a lot of times in these teaching callings, you're happy just to fill it as a leader, you know, you've given maybe you know, five different names to the bishop. And he said, no, no, no. Because they were needed in more admin callings are more noticeable callings, you sent an email this week about that. Just the idea that there's such a need of good quality teachers and so there's sometimes a fear to say, hey, if I say something and they hold them accountable, they might give up and they might (00:10:30) say I'm done. I don't want to teach anymore, it's too hard and I want to help you guys to be able to have those hard conversations because when they're had in the right way, they aren't hard conversations. They are conversations that people enjoy and people love having. Um, you know, I think one of the biggest things is to grab that person maybe after class or do a home visit and talk with them about their calling. I would highly recommend, this isn't something we grab them (00:11:00) in the hallway and say, Hey, can we talk? You're not good at teaching. That's where we go a little too far. And that accountability because of grabbing people in the hallway to do church business is awkward and weird. I can't, I can't stand it. You know, that person is there in church that Sunday to feel uplifted and to feel the spirit and when you go and grab them and tell them, hey, I've got some hard news. It's weird. It's uncomfortable. You want to make sure that you're in a space where you can sit down and be open and have the time you need to talk about what you need to talk about.

LLDS: Yeah. (00:11:30) you know, it reminds me of a time when I was bishop, I had a standing appointment, you know, with our auxiliary leaders every month, right. So, um, and the relief society president knew every second Sunday at this time that we would meet. And I think it's good to have something more regular and meet with the regular. You know, the Sunday school president could meet with all the Gospel doctrine teachers or the youth teachers. Whatever it is. On a regular basis and that way every time that you are going to talk, it's not because they're in trouble or they (00:12:00) need to approve or there's some criticism coming, right. But, and that's where I think these relationships can be built and so therefore when the correction does come, they already know you care about them, they already know that you know them and that direction is better received

GRADY: Yea you've already made deposits in the relationship. So it's not something like, Hey, I want to talk to you this, there's something wrong. Um, and so yeah, and if you're not doing that now you know, there's opportunities, you know, maybe having it as part of your regular PPI's or like you said, you know, when you're meeting regularly with that (00:12:30) leader, you know, have those conversations, you know, go to their home, maybe have them stay after class. I said that phrase like stay after class. I guess that has a negative connotation with it, but you know, sometimes I know like last Sunday, me and the other leaders we chatted for like 20 minutes after our lessons. The guy could have dived into that lesson more, that content more to see how we could better presented it because he had a tough when we talked about grace and actually pulled a lot of Brad Wilcox's talk, um, on grace and we, you know, we just didn't quite understand it yet. So when (00:13:00) people, other leaders that were there and so we dove in and those are great conversations and I learned some stuff about maybe as a teacher I could have been more clear on. And the other teachers that I teach with, you know, they learn some stuff about how they can share this in the upcoming weeks as we get further and further into the atonement. Um, the recovering this month in deacons quorum. I think one of the things that's really good in these conversations too is to highlight what's working well, when I was Sunday school president and that's

where I really learned what my calling was. I remember I (00:13:30) was first called to be Sunday school president and actually it was called as a counselor first and um, you know, the kind of that what they told me was, you know, you ring the Bell, you go and hand out the role, um, you find substitutes if no one shows up. And then we had a wonderful Stake Sunday school president who reached out to me and said, hey, we're having a Stake training on this calling. We'd love for you to come with your president. And my president, I talked to him. He's like, ah, that's not really for me. And I'm like, OK, I'll go. (00:14:00) And that's what I learned that Sunday school president is so much more, you know, the Sunday school president is in charge of teaching for the entire ward and not just in callings also in the home, you've got such a huge calling. And I went back to him and said, hey, did you know, we get to do all this stuff? And he's like, look, when they told me about this calling, all they told me was that I had to do was ring the bell, pass out the role. That's kind of all I really want to do and I was so deflated and I went and talked to the bishop. I'm like, hey, how can I help? I don't know what to do here. Like that week he was released (00:14:30) and I was called, but I just learned so much more and I started doing, you know, even teacher visits, you know, if you're not in the class, like if you're a primary president or in the presidency or if you're a Sunday school president, go and visit that, those classes and just see how things are, you know, ask, Hey, can I come sit in your class with you today? I really want to see how you teach and what's working well for you? Um, you want to make sure that they feel like, Hey, I'm here to help and I want to find good things. And that's a great way to just open up that conversation to say, (00:15:00) Hey, what do you think went well this week? What kind of parts of the lesson went as planned? Because I know for me there's parts of my lesson that go really well and there's other parts, I think that did not happen than we had expected it to. Go ahead.

LLDS: I think as important as these conversations happen or as you sit in class, it's not if there's a Sunday school, Sunday school president out there that's thinking, well, Geez, I'm not a trained teacher. I don't know like all the best teaching tactics or whatever. Hopefully they're (00:15:30)

picking some up from the summit, but I think the point of it isn't necessarily sit in the back with a clipboard and uh, that didn't go well. I'll talk about him. I'll talk to him about that later. But just to, to have that experience with the teacher. Then after or some other point when you're talking, you're sort of that sounding board for them, right? Just like you said, asking them, how do you think that when you use that, this visual aid or, or this attention activity, did that go how you want? What did you think? Just this process of allowing them to articulate and (00:16:00) describe their experience. That alone is going to help them and it's not that you're saying, well, let me give you the three steps of doing an awesome visual aid, right? But just having that conversation.

GRADY: Yeah, that's key, right there is that you're not there to prescribe and tell them what they need to do. Oh, you know what? I noticed he did these three, three things wrong. Here's what you need to do. You're there to help them to come to their own decision or their own discovery of what the best thing is. Because the fact of the matter is the Lord called (00:16:30) them to teach that class. And so what you can do is help be that conduit to help them to be inspired to know what they need in those situations and sometimes talking things through, um, being that sounding board helps that discovery to happen, um, helps them to be open and be able to be receptive to the spirit because now they're asking

questions that they weren't asking before. And I think we've learned through the history of the scriptures and the church the best way to receive answers is to ask questions. (00:17:00) and that's what happens during these conversations. Um, you know, the big thing is these people that they're teaching, they want to be good at, they're calling, they're trying really hard. They just don't know what to do sometimes. And so I think it's really important as a leader to kind of be that sounding board to say, hey, what about this? Do you think that would help if they're kind of getting stumped, um, you know, and help them with that. And the big thing I think is the most important part of this is following up as you talk together. (00:17:30) And maybe they come with a plan to say, hey, next week I'm actually going to do, um, I'm going to do my testimony bear my testimony at the beginning of the lesson because I keep running out of time at the end. Wonderful. Let's try that. And then a couple weeks later a week later, whatever you think is appropriate follow-up and say, hey, how'd your lesson go this week? You know, when you bore testimony in the beginning, did you see a difference? And if they did wonderful, celebrate the wins and if it was the same day and say, what are you all still think we could do, um, you know, and be there to help (00:18:00) them out and follow up. The worst thing that you can do is tell them you care and that you want to help them. And then as soon as you have the conversation vanish away and leave them back on their own again on, you want to be there as a resource to help them with these things.

LLDS: Yeah. And going back to the quadrant and you talked about, you know, the caring aspect to it that just this creating this engagement with them. Again, you're not, you're not engaging with them because you're the smartest teacher in the ward and that's why you're the Sunday school president and you're going to tell them how to do it, but just this engagement with them letting them know that they're supportive, (00:18:30) that they have someone to talk through these things with, you know, the difficult parts of their lesson are being heard and being, you know, you're having empathy for that. Just that interaction engagement that's creating a lot of caring, which is going to make accountability a lot easier.

GRADY: Yeah. And you bring up a good point of, you know, maybe you don't feel like you are the best teacher. Um, and that's OK. Um, there are so many resources out there, so many helps out there that if you're trying to help your teachers improve, that you can utilize and (00:19:00) call upon to help them to be able to do that. Um, you know, I think some of the things I've seen is that if you're the president of the presidency, maybe you call a counselor to be over the spiritual matters. Um, and if you haven't called someone yet, maybe you call someone who is a good teacher, um, who's, who's really patient, really good ideas that can share these things. You know lean on them. Um, you know, I've, I've, I'm in a, it's not a presidency, but it is a trio. There's our second counselor in our young men's presidency. (00:19:30) There's our scout master, and then there's me who was an advisor and we all served together the three of us helping the advice Deacons quorum and all three of us all have different strengths and different things that we bring to the table. And so like my role is helping with spiritual things and teaching just because I like it. Um, and I think it's a strength for me. And so look at your quorum or your presidency and say, OK, who's the best person to have this conversation? Maybe someone in your presidency is better suited for it and you (00:20:00) can give them that assignment. Of course, the other thing that you can do is invite those teachers to attend teacher council meeting. I've gotten a lot of help from these meetings. I've seen different styles of teaching council meetings. Some I've seen very effective, some less effective. Invite your teachers to go and then go with them. In fact, why don't you

just grab them and say, hey, teacher council meeting is this Sunday. Let's go there instead this week and go with them. It's also a great time for you (00:20:30) to help them get the help they need in a corner and a forum where lots of people can offer feedback, you know, if their problem that they have is that they're sunbeams keep falling asleep. Maybe you can offer that question and you can say, Hey, I noticed that a lot of classes that I have, the kids fall asleep, what can I do to help them and help your teacher maybe not feel as embarrassed to share and say I'm not good at something. And I've seen some people in that room that they will not share their problems. They just only find (00:21:00) solutions and I'm like, our whole thing is we've all got to share what's going on. What's wrong right now, of course you've got the teaching in the savior's way manual, which is a wonderful resource. Um, I would say if you've got someone who's struggling, invite them to incorporate that in their scripture study. Um, especially if they have a problem that they're trying to solve, you know, maybe you can point them into a lesson in there to say, hey, you know what? There's a lesson actually all about loving those that you teach and that one kid (00:21:30) that's really tough to love. Maybe that lesson can give you some ideas and then of course follow up and see how it did. Of course, there's The Sunday school president, like I said earlier, the Sunday school president. His role and responsibility is to improve teaching in the ward. Help him magnify his calling. He might think he's there to ring the button, ring the bell and pass out roll. Tell him he's wrong and pointing him in the right direction and say, I've got a teacher who needs help. Can you work with him? Um, we had a new teacher who is a convert (00:22:00) to the church and he was actually the cousin of our Sunday school president. And so I, you know, when he was getting ready to give us his first lesson in our class, I said, I want you to work with the Sunday school president and have him help you create your lesson. And then I called the Sunday school president and said, hey, your cousin's giving a lesson. I need you to help him prepare it. So that they can work together and he can magnify his calling and teaching and it says, co-president can magnify his calling in helping people teach. Of course you've got this conference, you know it's great Curtis got this ward pass that (00:22:30) you can get all of these courses for all your entire ward. And then if you get new teachers called, you can share it with them and you can say, hey, these are the things you should be watching, um, in your new calling and getting ready for that. Um, and of course, you know what I do over at this woman in life, I've got a podcast. It's also dedicated to helping people teach better. I'm talking about ideas and teaching, um, things that you can do differently. Helping to get questions answered. Actually have a chat button on my website and I get (00:23:00) people on there and say Hey, I'm preparing this lesson can you help me with some ideas. And I'm like, yeah, you bet I'd be glad to. So I've got chat on my phone and I'm having a conversation with lesson and talking through, you know, oh, we've got this thing and here's this talk. And, um, you know, the thing that I know, the most important part of this all is, is having a desire to magnify your calling. Having a desire to do with the savior would do the savior was the master (00:23:30) teacher, you know, as you read about his life and you see him the way that he interacted with his apostles, the way that he taught them. Um, you know, he loved them. The woman who was taken in adultery, he cared for her and had mercy on her. But then, you know, Peter, who was out fishing, instead of preaching the Gospel, Jesus held him accountable and said, you know "Lovest thou me more than these? Feed my sheep." Savior is a wonderful example of how to love those (00:24:00) you have stewardship over and also hold them accountable. And when you do those two things, they will draw closer to Jesus Christ. And the whole entire purpose of why we have a lay local leadership comes to pass,

an a ward grows, it gets stronger, and all of a sudden the teachers are edified, the learners are edified, and everyone is feeling the spirit during these lessons.

LLDS: Awesome great message. Anything we're missing, Grady you think? Does that sum it up?  
(00:24:30)

GRADY: Um, you know, one of the things I think is, was it came about when I was called an to be in an Elder's quorum presidency once and we had two teachers on teach and they're both very different. Um, one did not want to be there and he would come with the lesson he and he'd say, you know, I didn't really prepare anything. So where I thought we could do is I'll just, you guys just pull (00:25:00) up the lesson and the you guys can discuss it in groups. And I was like, ah, this is awful. And then we had another teacher who tried his darndest to do really good lessons, but he struggled. Um, you know, he had a really hard time, um, you know, getting the content out and guiding the discussion. And I remember being in a elders quorum presidency, meeting and telling my elders quorum president that I'm struggling coming to class. Like I don't want to come to Elder's quorum anymore. (00:25:30) and I think I'm pretty true blue dyed in the wool. And so if I am struggling coming to class, all those people that we're doing home visits for and saying, come to elders, quorum, we need you there. There's something for you when you come to class, it's going to be amazing we want you there with us. And then they come to these teachers that don't care or don't have the tools that they need to, to deliver spiritual lessons that people come and they go, this was not worth my time. You know, I missed a Raider game (00:26:00) for this. And we lose them. Um, it's important that you call really good teachers and if you don't have good teachers to call that, you make your teachers good teachers work with them, um, help them. They want to be better. We took time with these teachers, well, I did. Um, and, and they called me to be the teacher. We released the guy who didn't care and I got called to the other teacher and we're two hats. And I worked with him and I modeled this and showed like this is what a good lesson is like. And then afterwards we would talk (00:26:30) and he'd say, how did you do that and why did you do it this way? Um, and he was doing so much better three months later than, um, than he was before. But it's because he took time out. We worked with him. It's important, don't, just release your, your teachers because they struggle, work with them. Unless they don't care, then you're probably going to be OK to release them.

LLDS: Awesome. Well Great. Should we cut it off there?

GRADY: I think so.

LLDS: Cool. Well, I encourage people to go check out Grady, his good work. He's doing it This Mormon (00:27:00) Life and you can google that or type that into your browser and, and uh, and easily find it. So.

GRADY Yeah, if you do a search for it, it's like the only thing that comes up.

LLDS: Awesome. Well thanks Grady

Grady: Thanks a lot Kurt, and have a good night.