

# LEADING SAINTS

## How We Lead as a Stake Presidency | Inoculating the Youth from Difficult Church Doctrine/Historical Topics

April 7, 2021

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stake in interview president. Joe staples president. Alan matheson imprison davis smith and they are the members of that stake presidency now two of those names. Joe staples and davis smith may sound familiar to you because they are both former guests of the leading saints. Populists really dynamic leaders will link to those interviews so that you can have an opportunity to go back and listen to those as well because they are worth. Listen but we've been in touch. Ever since then and i found out about some things. They've been doing their stake to help the youth with a building and fortifying their testimony just gaining a deeper understanding of some maybe difficult doctrines and a church history topics that sometimes take people out of the church. And what they're doing. I think is phenomenal. And so i want to share it with you. So here's my interview with president. Joe staples david smith and alan matheson. Today i have the opportunity in sandy utah at the sandy utah willow creek steak with their stake presidency. I think this is the first time about complete. Stake presidency on the podcast. This is pretty cool. Even when i was in a state brenston. Give me the time of day to do this. So this is we have president. Joe staples davis smith and alan matheson and joe and davis. I wanna call you by your first name. So i hope you don't know i wanna be protocol hair but anyways you both been on the podcasts and Great interviews the night will definitely linked to those and make sure people know about them and Alan you're a newbie. here right new guy. but i'm looking forward to it. It's always good to be with you offline today what you do some fresno state will just give us a rundown of the stake in two minutes. What would you say three unless the tube in erfurt thirty seven hundred members eight wards and dependent branch the dependent branches part of an assisted living facility. What are the other unique. Things is of our eight. Units one is a mid singles ward and stake was established. Nineteen seventy eight. That's alright lake. Seventy are you around light seven but filled with just wonderful great people. Yeah that's great awesome and you. We've been in touch ever since we did that. Initial interview with you and i'm always looking for just unique approaches that stakes or wards or doing leaders are trying to implement especially during times where there aren't familiar. You know like a shutdown or a pandemic and so you told me an approach you're doing with With some of the youth a youth focus with.

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I guess it's more part of a overall approach to helping those that. Maybe you're being questioned their faith. And how can leaders better minister those individuals and help members better minister to them so or should we got this discussion. Let's start with the With what we did with the youth we did a set morning sides and maybe davis. He was the origin of how didn't come up with the idea again. Whoever we got the idea probably didn't come up with the idea either but Maybe have you just share where we got it go so first of all when we got called a stake presidency. President staples had some strong impressions round areas of focus and one of them was around helping people with faith challenges and so we started reading a few books together and really really enjoyed that actually We read a book called planted by patrick mason. Land it is a great one and then we read a book. Called bridges ministering to those who questioned by david. I know you've interviewed david austin and you've probably interviewed just to fantastic books that we really enjoyed and we had an opportunity to have lunch with a few other folks with patrick mason. Waist spoke and we all went together and that was a lot of

fun and when we were chatting with him after the lunch we asked him the question about. is there. anything that you've seen other stakes do to help those. That are struggling with their faith. Or maybe something we could do with the youth and he mentioned a stake in california. That was believe it was california it was basically holding a morningside for high school. Seniors teaching the gospel topics essays and when we heard that yes we all looked at each other like that. Revelation confirmed right. that's cool. That's how the origin of of the initiative and allen. Maybe you can. You can take part of his as far as just give us the basic structure of how these things you know. How often window who comes. How do you invite him. Those things where we started this last year. So we've been through one round and we've taken it up again this year but our focus has been on the high school seniors. The thought that we wanted of a smaller group a group that we could meet with in a setting. that would be comfortable. We meet with them once a month on a sunday morning at seven fifteen so it's a test of their faith in ours to do that either in bad or in our morningside don't have another conflict. That's right and learning from savior's example of the lows in the fishes. We started by having breakfast forum understanding that when they've got something to eat they're more likely to be there and and comfortable that hasn't happened. Of course since kovic hit so really our our first couple of sessions. We were able to do that. We've had five sessions each year. We try to do it those five months before they graduate and The ideas that will answer some questions. They inevitably will face when they get out on missions or in college or other places in the world and want them to be prepared to know that they're there are faith-based answers to some of those questions to just quickly hit on how we invite them. We've worked with bishops to identify the the high school seniors. Those that would be appropriate to invite and this year with covert. We've done a little differently because we can't meet together at presents staples home for breakfast. We've gone out on the saturday before and dropped off a little package with some chocolate milk and a bagel or something and a little reminder of the meeting and extended a personal invitation to those seniors to be there the next day awesome. That seems to have worked well so before. How would you not come right. If i took the time on a saturday to bring you breakfast for the next day. There's an obligation the and it's even like the opportunity of them in the eye in handing him the bank on saying listen. We we really want you. There goes a long way. So i know where you live. So before covid healthy your house then to death and in your state there's maybe fifteen seniors. I don't know how many there's probably about thirty. Okay sir more. there's a little more. I think we have close to sixty but a handful of those are from families. Some of them have not been baptized from families. That are less on the records. Right so i think the active probably around forty and have about close to twenty the show show which is k- pretty remarkable seven fifteen in the morning on a sunday. Yeah and i'd like that in. I mean i think there's a there's a benefit of holding it in a home like this with twenty people are some energy. They're you're not in this church that you know it's more comfortable. I would imagine it was. It was kind of other guards. Go down they feel of how much we for them and then we just to talk about the gospel topics essays and so when you think of those essays i mean this isn't we're not talking about real basic gospel truth.

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These are things. Like know becoming like god or mormons christian book of mormon translation. Race in the priesthood. I mean these are things that are pretty deep subjects. And as i thought about it i think that just about all of them have a cursory knowledge up them. You know so if you took a high school senior they could say. I know that there was a time in the history of the church that we practice plural marriage. And then they're kinda you know. It's it's pretty shallow. And our primary objective was we didn't want these kids to be twenty eight years old somewhere and all of a sudden. Go wait a second. Nobody ever told me any of this stuff. And all of a sudden they're in a faith crisis and and you know they're going side as we thought we don't want him to leave the willow creek stake without knowing these things so we go through every single one of these we teach them we ask them questions. We have a discussion around him. And then what comes out. I think is almost miraculous. Just some of the things that dawn on them. So let's take plural marriage as as an example one of the things that's taught in the gospel topic essay and we stick really close to these. We don't come up with other upbringing. other books research. There's plenty of those right so we stick to it. But as an example in plural marriage it talks about how joseph smith was had an angel appeared to him and The third time that the angel appeared he appeared with a drawn sword and essentially told joseph. You're going to do this and that's news to these kids. They go wait a second. I i didn't know that they were reluctant about this. You know joe smith. Translating the book of mormon. He looked into a hat. Okay well let's talk about that. So these are the things that our hope is that these kids get exposure to this. Learn these things in an environment that is conducive to them asking questions and thinking through these things versus off on their own at some other debt to their life. Yeah and is one thing for like maybe to try and mention it. More on a sunday school class or youth class or whatever it's a whole nother thing to creighton adventure ended at the state prisons house at a special time. You're going to his home. You're having this discussion around these things and that really there's an inoculation that happens on a deeper level that hopefully protects them from some of these surprises that can take him out in the future. I think one of the things that we've learned is we've been studying and also as we just had our own friends and extended family members that maybe have left the church for one reason or another. It seems that some the reason they're leaving is is a lack of trust. It's not even necessarily the social issues of the doctrinal issues and that's where we feel. We can really make a difference is some of these items are a little bit taboo to be talking about in a sunday school classroom elders former released cited class but when a young person is being taught these items in every and then the here their stake presidency talk about them and then hopefully the hurrying them at home all the sudden. They're not surprised when they hear about this when they're thirty years old and they don't have hopefully some of those those same trust challenges that that kind of wobble people's foundation and maybe there are a couple of things that we're hoping that they get one of them is that church. History can withstand scrutiny. Doesn't mean we've got all the answers but you can really presented an context this more understandable and just one example. A member of our stake is run. S plan who was the editor of the joseph smith papers. He's read everything. Joe smith has ever written everything ever written to him. And most of what's been written about him. He says that the more he learns about joseph smith the stronger his testimony gets and he's doing the same thing with brigham young and having that same experience. If we've got an example like that and say take the time to dive into the history a little bit. Look at the full picture. Not just what you read. On the internet

and your faith can be strengthened. Maybe the other side of that too is a message that we're not gonna have every answer. I think some people fall into this trap of saying well if the church is really true to be able to answer every question that denies faith and we need these young people to understand that part of this life. We're not going to have every answer we can learn. We can study. But you need to have faith and have faith in those primary Truths the gospel lit.

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We have loving parents heavenly parents the care for us. We have a savior that. There's a prophet on the earth today. That the book of mormon this the word of god and a few technical questions here so if a junior or senior wants to come be to say well wait until your senior year is sort of a privilege. Maybe for those seniors to do that. Yeah for a couple of reasons. One does create a little bit of anticipation that next year to do this but the second thing is based on these topics we want to deal with this audience. That is mature enough for us to be able to talk through nass issues in a really open way. That's great and kind of fun the A number of adults in the stake of called and said why can't we participate to or could you do on the adult. Another thing that we did is. We held a fireside ahead of the morningside uncle and we invited high school seniors and their parents and so we that was our opportunity to say to the parents. Here's what we're gonna do. Here's what we're going to talk about. Here's with the subjects. Are if you have any discomfort with that. Come talk to us ahead of time but know that when when we meet the at seven fifteen in the morning with your high school senior for the next five months this is. These are the topics that we're going to cover. We also did a survey and ask them asked the high school seniors to rank the their level of interest in each of the topics. And we said we're going to cover them all but we'd like to know what you're most interested in and i think the results of that were were interesting. You know that was interesting. Because i think in our minds. There might have been a few topics that seemed like. Oh yeah. they're gonna wanna talk about polygamy that seems like a topic that everyone's curious out turns out. That was like one that people didn't really care much about at all It was other ones about mother and heaven that both years top of the list. It was some topics that maybe we wouldn't have guessed and so i think that was really valuable and allows us to really kind of focused the discussions on topics that are really relevant to them. I love that and it was also telling most of the survey responses gravitated to to a few but in every case there was some high school senior at least one that had one of those topics as their top pick so it just showed kind of the variety of what we were dealing with the as. We approach the topics. Yeah that's cool and so did you go through just one round of these sites free one and then you're done for that For that year so we take. It was thirteen. I think it's down to eleven topics. We have five sessions so we cover typically to two topics each morning. Okay to in one of morningside. Gotcha now i'm noticing these these books these manual type things spiral bound digits. Go officemax than your your duty. There wasn't we've got some great clerks. Who have helped. We took all of the essays and Did collect them and put them in. A binder presented them to each of the high school seniors before the morning sides. The hope is that they have an opportunity to read the essays before we made in come prepared with some background some questions everyone and make it as easy as possible for them to have the phase two to have something that they could take notes We passed out pens when we

met in person along with the booklets and asked them to record their thoughts. We talk through the thanks. Yeah and as i'm looking. I love simplicity in church leadership. There's no graphic designer that was involved in the protection of these things. That's what i love. Yeah they're super simple. I think one of the most special things as well has been the visits to these youth. The saturday ahead of time. i don't ever remember. i had a pretty phenomenal stake. president and stake presidency. When i was. I never remember them coming by my home. Yeah that would have been pretty special. And i think that's been really. I know special experience for me to see these youth after home and to kind of build that relationship and i know i'm chevron staples it's really break is he's going to be meeting a lot of them very shortly as the priesthood and they worked president matheson as they get the motivated. Preserves the gone on missions. So yeah yeah. That's the silver lining of the pandemic because otherwise we wouldn't have been going to their home on a on a saturday. We would've just expected them to come on sunday morning. it was. Editing is divide and conquer. You take this this group and you take the other you get right. Mix it up each month so that we go and visit different senior local. That's awesome. that's great anything else that we're missing the dynamic.

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This is great. I love it but the anything any other tips of a stake wanted to approach this. You know. I think the to just take the approach that these young people are going to get exposure to these topics at some point in their life if they go on a mission. Somebody's going to push on about You know the doctrines around Race in the priesthood. Are or polygamy or some of these other things so recognizing that they're going to face these things. How much better is it that they face them with you. You know you care about them. We care about our high school seniors and so for us to have this opportunity to talk through these subjects in a meaningful open way. We'll take any question that they ask us. We don't dot kerr or dodge any of this and as president. Matheson said you know. There's some things where we say. Just like president. Hinckley said in in one of these. He said you know that's a that's a subject we don't know a lot about and we'll we'll tell him that The last questions that will go and research and come back the next time and say hey. I did find a little bit more about that. But i think at the end of the day we recognize that we have a responsibility to to these young people. And we're not going to let them leave our stake. We're certainly going to provide them the opportunity to talk about these things while were a part of their lives. Anything worth mentioning as far as the format of the actual morningside. Did you each take a turn to sort of lead the discussion. Is that the the idea. We take turns since so Each of us is in charge of During the month and will teach a couple of the essays and and then rotate around. And that's been kind of nice to that. Each of us gets the chance to interact with the seniors and of course the others chime in with the great comments along the way. Yeah how did the engagement with the youth gun Did you get some good questions and discussion going. Yeah it's amazing that that early in the morning their brains are working. You know i have. I have a high school senior right now. Myself so But they're actually this year. I'm thinking specifically the last two sessions. We did incredible questions like questions that were deep and sincere And i will say there's different levels you know on zoom. It's a little more challenging. We don't require the kids to have their videos on and they might be

in their pajamas in bed still. That's okay like yeah. We just want them there and then we have one young man that he has video on the shirt and tie in sudan and ready to go ready to go and he's got great question so there's going to be all levels of engagement and these kids know that it doesn't matter we love them we just want them there and we're just so thrilled they're participating go. I think it makes a difference when that first high school senior has the guts to say. I've got a question and and gets appreciation for the question and gets a good answer. Others feel more comfortable and they start coming forward and we've also asked them at the end of one of the sessions will say what stood out to you know. What did you learn that. It didn't know before admittedly that was an easier. One to get answers to when we were in person than over zoom but still causes them to ponder and think about what we just talked about as great awesome. I love this. I think this is you know again. The simplicity of its very duplicative. Little is not one more thing you know the huge thing that's on your plate in the end it keeps your focus where where you want dues helping these youth succeed especially in the context of their testimony. Yeah so that that stake president in california. Thank you. yeah that's cool and then let's just talk more broadly about any other approaches. As far as ministering to those with faith challenges that you've tried or navy tried some things that didn't really work or or other. I the simple approaches that way. i think. One of the other big initiatives that we did is we decided. There's a book by david. Osler called bridges and he did a lot of primary research. We read the book together along with some others on this topic and one of the questions that david asked people who had left the church is. Do you feel that your ward and stake leaders were prepared to help you through your faith challenges. And if i remember right strongly agree that they were prepared. I think got two percent so no between agree and strongly agree. So did you know ninety. Six to ninety eight percent. Were saying no. They didn't and we thought we can do something about that. We can help prepare our leaders. And so we're getting ready to do another one of these sessions but we held a session that We essentially took the learnings.

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We got from from the books that we had studied. And we trained everybody in stay councils and ward councils on how to minister we talked about things that you shouldn't do We talked about what are good approaches. Things that you can and should do. We talked about some very specific things. Inside of ministering to people with face challenges. And i think the the response to that was really really strong mainly from people saying i did all the things that you're not supposed to do i just And i thought the same thing. When i read some of the some of the research. Yeah send him. Watch general conference tax battle. That'll certainly solve it so some of those kinds of things But i loved those those sessions that we did we did them. We held think we help three three different ones just to make sure that everybody had an opportunity to go through them again. These were ward council members and state council members. And then the one that we're getting ready to do so. You will three sessions that they could just pick one that works for the scheduled to come in there on these individuals were on word or state council exactly yep and then this year Our plan is to do the same thing. Just because people in leadership change the abbot to open it up to anybody else in the state that would like to attend because what we recognized. Is that there are people who they may not be in a leadership

position but have family members that are struggling with their faith and they wanna learn how to help them. Imagine just from your own personal study preparing for these morning sides and whatnot. Your your faith grew. Your knowledge grew a deeper understanding of these topics at school when they will add to that president staples invited a member of our stake relief society presidency to help teach that with us which i think was really important and so that i think added to the depth of the conversation and sure that you know half our stake is is women and make sure that we have representation of some of the remarkable female years that we have in our state participants who i think was really critical awesome worth worth highlighting there in his book. Bridges brasler talks about three things that people are looking for whom religion based on his research. One is trust. One is belonging one is meaning trust. Is they wanna be able to trust that. Their leaders care about them are being honest with them and are trying to help them along. Life's path belonging. You know we all need that. We all wanna feel that we're part of something bigger something that matters and meaning they wanna see a connection between. What's todd in church. And what they're seen in the world. The the principles of the gospel address the challenges that we're facing in the world and we use that structure in our training session and divided up those topics when into them in more detail without that was pretty effective. Hit any else's far as your general approach with helping you know minister to those with faith challenges that i mean. That's you're doing a lot in this great as cool. And i love just the heavy said we can do something about that like reading something and empowering yourself to make a difference and i take for like a a stake presidency to listen to this and like man. I've got so much to do already. And now i kind of feel guilty. I'm not doing morning sides. You know but this. You could've easily handed off to your young men's presidency you're doing presidents. They do these morning signs right at least do something right and that It doesn't have to be this. Exact model is exact way but the fact that step forward and did something great. Maybe one thing i'll mention. We actually through president. Smith's contacts we got in touch with brother ostler and we shared with them are materials actually do the same thing with patrick mason and had them look over and make suggestions on whether we were on the right track or if they're additional research might have suggested some changes we would make and we found the those conversations were useful as well. Yeah and if people want to contact a david osler you can contact us at our at leading dot org slash contact in all ford on any message to him. Because i know he'd appreciate it. So yeah i think we we just looked at it and thought the good that we can do is around helping people that need help. And if you think of people who are having faith challenges oftentimes. They're silent sufferers right. They don't know who to turn to. They don't know who to talk to. And we looked at it and thought to fulfill our stewardship. We should be as well versed in this topic as really in anything that we do.

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Because we're going to encounter people who just for whatever reason have lost their way a little bit and the the more prepared. We are to be able to to do what we can to help them. We just thought that was important. But then how do you scale that. They don't the three of us in thirty seven. Hundred people in the stake is a challenge. So that's when we said okay about all those people in work. Councils elders corn presidents relief society presidents bishopric

members. Let's train them. Let's teach these principles to them. And then hopefully they're going to share them and teach them to people inside the organization says well. Let's just a great leader point in general. Because i remember that feeling of going from bishop to stake presidency and i sort of felt like i had a bishop. 'cause i was used to being a bishop but there was overwhelming because there were thousands of people but then when i made the shift of. I'm actually the leader for the leaders in the state. It's like oh i can handle that. I can definitely be a good resource there. And that's exactly the dependent. You followed this great will. let's As we wrap up. I'm just curious. Maybe we'll do a a fire round here as far as adaptations that you're either taken. As far as during the shutdown anything unique tried outside of you know maybe faith challenges just in general anything that's worked or hasn't worked or anything comes to mind. I'll share one. We can headed doesn't work again. So last night. I had a zoom meeting with all of the ehlers corn presidents in the high council representatives to the wards the work with and i kind of styled it as a group therapy session so this is a chance for you to come together. Relax little bit know that you're with peers. And we just took terms going with those elders corn presidents to talk about. What are the challenges. You're facing what frustrations are you experiencing especially with covid and throw out their concern and everybody had kind of way in and saying. Here's something we've done. This is a best practice. And at the end i think not only did many of them leave with a page of notes but They felt they weren't alone and they felt kind of comforted that there was a group they could go to and get some insight and get some ideas and get maybe some moral support and i've noticed over last year just a common leadership feeling is that i feel like i should be doing something but i don't know what to do in so i guess i won't do anything but i feel like i should be doing something you know and and to sort of hear others maybe share ideas but then find community there of leaders in first pregnancy to do that things a great tip so any other this. You know the two things that. I think we've emphasized over and over again. Since the be the beginning of the pandemic can we had to make adjustments. And i think you know as a stake. I think we've been fairly Call it aggressive in The actions that we've taken we haven't gotten out ahead of the brethren but we also haven't sat around and waited for every instruction So you know. We looked for opportunities to make sure that we still achieve the objectives that That we had but two things one is. Elrick door has taught multiple times. Look for what you can do. Not for what you can't do. And we've emphasized that to our bishops and and throughout the stake for the leaders to instead of focusing on. Oh well. I guess we can't meet with our youth anymore. Okay but what can you do. And how can you do that. And the other thing that we've done is an elder hall and todd this principle that we need to if we go through this pandemic come out the other side and haven't changed for the better with missed a great opportunity and so we've emphasized that a lot we have a stake website and we've actually asked members to record one minute videos of how they've changed for the better during the pandemic and what they've learned and i think that It's great for the ones that have recorded it but hopefully it's also prompted everyone to just think through that question even if they don't record a video have i changed for the better. What have i learned during this. Because there's some great lessons at our heavenly father wants us to learn them But it takes some effort on our part to do that. Allen i'm going to have you Set off because i've already asked this question and it so people want to hear their answer. Then go to the previous episodes. They've been on but as you have Amateur he's been. This isn't your first go leadership and in some in this context but As you have added opportunity serve as a leader.

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How has being a leader helped to become a better follower of Jesus Christ probably has a number of ways one is that I've felt incredible love for the people that I serve as a leader and that's helped me understand a little bit better. Maybe how Jesus Christ feels about me and others of his disciples. If I can love my neighbor as much as I do a much more perfect savior must love me more than I can imagine. I think also maybe been a little more understanding of people's challenges. You hear what they're going through in their lives. You see how they're dealing with the inevitable challenges of life and they rely on the savior often those that do find comfort fine guidance and helped me recognize the source of my comfort. My hope which is in my savior. Jesus Christ. He's my savior and redeemer. He cares about us leadership. Has I think refined me. It's humbled me and helped me realize that. It's not what I do for others. My job as a leader in the church is to help people access savior and the spirit and at the end of the day. I don't want the people in our stake or when I was a bishop in our ward to say that bishop helped me the way that bishop was my rock. I can't live without him. want him to say. I trust the savior. I can access the severe. I can access the spirit directly. And I can be self sufficient spiritually in another way interview with president. Joe Staples David Smith and Alan Matheson really dynamic guys. I mean prison. Matheson your remarks at the end or so touching. And I love it. I don't know the best answer to that question. I typically ask. But it's definitely up there so I would love to know who else is doing. Something dynamic remarkable out of the box out there. I would love to be put in touch with them. We gave the longlist growing. But we're always looking for more and we want to share that with the world so that maybe you know stake presidencies listening or bishopric or young men leader and you're thinking we could do something like that and we go right. And we're blessing the world in more more waste than one real us at leading saints dot org slash contact and let us know who we should interview on a future. How I lead segment on the leading saints podcast and remind you once again to text. The word lead to four seven four seven four seven in order to subscribe to the leading saints weekly newsletter came as a result of the position of leadership which was imposed upon us by the God of heaven who brought forth a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ and when the declaration was made concerning the own only true and living church on the face of the earth we were immediately put in a position of loneliness loneliness of leadership from which we cannot shrink are runaway and which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability.