



LEADING SAINTS

Ministering to Individuals Who Lose a Child | An Interview with Julie Cluff

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KF: Welcome back to another episode of the Leading Saints Podcast. If you've enjoyed content on this podcast, it's important that I tell you about the Leading Saints newsletter that we send out every week. This newsletter keeps you up to date on all current Leading Saints content releases including podcasts, articles, online events, and even live events that might be happening in your own area. In this newsletter we also recommend some past episodes and written articles that you don't want to miss. Each week we include additional leadership perspectives and thoughts that you can only find in the weekly newsletter. So you definitely don't want to miss out. To subscribe to the weekly newsletter simply text the word lead to 474747 or visit LeadingSaints.org/subscribe.

Review: Hi my name is Lauralyn Hanson I am the Relief Society President in the Cape Girardeau Missouri area and I love Leading Saints because there has been several really great episodes on ministering and it's helped me in my ministering interviews to minister to the one and really connect with the sisters that I work with and it's helped me a lot with training my counselors as well.

KF: Hello, this is Kurt Francom with the Leading Saints Podcast. Welcome back to another episode or welcome to your first episode. If you're new to Leading Saints you should know that we are a nonprofit 501c3 organization dedicated to helping Latter Day Saints be better prepared to lead. And we do that through content creation. And a big part of that content creation is this

very podcast. So make sure you subscribe, leave a review, go to our website at LeadingSaints.org, and see thousands of articles there and so many more resources. Dive in. It's good stuff.

Now in this episode we talk with Julie Cluff who runs a business called Building a Life After Loss and she's actually a life coach you could say but more specifically coaching those individuals who have suffered the loss of a loved one, specifically children. Julie has her own tragic story of losing two of her children in a car accident and she tells us a little about that story. And from that she has started this, found this purpose in mission in life of helping others through this grieving process when they suffer tragic loss. And so I wanted to get Julie on the podcast and just ask her questions specifically in the context of how can we minister and lead individuals who've lost a child? What do we do? What do we say? Man, so heavy. But I know there's probably leaders out there that are in the midst of this of this situation or maybe this is far into the future. Leaders have come back to this episode and just wanna do a quick listen to make sure that as they go over to that individual's home that they approach it in the best mindset the as possible and so hopefully this helps you. Julie gives some great advice and tips to really minister to individuals who suffer the loss of a child. And I think you'll definitely appreciate it. So here's my interview with Julie Cluff.

KF: Today I have the opportunity to sit down for the powers of the internet with Julie Cluff. How're you Julie.

JC: I'm doing great. It's good to be here with you.

KF: Awesome so tell me, just give us some background. You have sort of a, there's a lot of different coaches and life coaches and individuals that are striving to help other people and use sort of have an interesting approach to it but maybe yourself, give the background on yourself and what you do and put yourself into context.

JC: Sure, I'd be happy to. So, you know, in my life, everybody has their unique experiences and I was led to become a coach but in a very specific way and that was from my experiences with loss. I had a brother who died by suicide. I went through a divorce from my first husband with three small children and then in on Mother's Day in 2007, I lost my two youngest children in a car accident. It was a rollover accident and I was the driver of the car. And that gave me a whole new level of understanding of grief and the pain of loss. And I felt compelled once I felt like I was in a place of healing and it was in a good

place, I felt compelled. It was a calling if you will, to share a message that would help others who were experiencing loss and grief and that led me to the certification that I have as a grief coach.

KF: Wow. It's so heartbreaking to hear about your loss, and you know, it's almost cliché to say, I can't even imagine what that would be like in the during that experience.

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KF: I mean I would imagine. You're injured in a rollover accident, is something that you found out about at the hospital? Or how did that happen?

JC: Yeah it was. I was a horrific accident. We were traveling across country on interstate. And I was like I said driving, I had my three youngest children with me, who were 12, 10, and 8. Carey was 10. David was 8. And when the car rolled, they were thrown from the vehicle. And we had emergency vehicles show up and we had two ambulances show up. Carey and David who were thrown from the vehicle, so I didn't see them. So, I'm sitting in the car with my son. He was my oldest son who was 12, that was with me and he was injured. I was injured. We were taken by one ambulance to one hospital. Carey and David were taken to a totally different hospital. So, I actually laid in the hospital for I don't even know how much time went by, asking questions about how they were doing. If they were okay. And obviously it was, the whole experience was, I can't even express how devastating it was. How awful it was. When the car landed, I knew, like when we came to a standstill, I knew that lives were changed forever. Like I knew in that instance that our life was changed forever, and I didn't know what that looked like at that point. And I really, I started to call out you know, "I killed my kids, I killed my kids," cause I couldn't find Carey and David in the car, and then I realized they were yards away from us you know, on the sidelines of the interstate and I had no idea what their injuries were if they were going to survive any of that so I laid on the strike board in the hospital. It turned out my injury, my personal injuries were pretty minor. But, but they didn't make it and it was, it was a major turning point in my life and the life of my family.

KF: Yeah, was there a like a social worker of some type at the hospital that communicated that tragic information to you?

JC: When I kept asking and I would ask the nurses as they would go past me, "What about Carey and David? What about Carey and David?" And how are they? And you know an I if I can just kind of put you in that place I mean I was

between just, devastation in crying to actually feeling the peace of the Savior coming to me during that period of time and just really feeling this place of peace and as I would ask people, you know, how are Carey and David, I would get answers like we're still working on figuring that out. We're still, we're still looking into it. What I didn't realize I was far away from home. We lived in Houston, Texas at the time in the accident happened in Mississippi and it happened to be about an hour and a half from where my aunt and uncle lived. And I when, what they were doing was they were waiting for my aunt and uncle to get there to be there with me. So, soon as they arrived they put me on the phone with my husband who was in the airport in Houston trying to get to where we were and they put him on the phone and he's the one that told me that Carey and David didn't make it. And then right after that was when I found out that our son James was going into surgery he, he needed emergency surgery on his leg. And he was injured in the accident.

KF: Wow, so heartbreaking and how is James doing at this point in his life?

JC: James is great. He's married with two adorable children, which we just love. He's doing well you know, we both have had things that we had to overcome because of this accident and we both have experienced PTSD at some level or another from being in the rollover accident. And I'm just grateful. Super, super grateful to understand you know, that our Savior's role in our healing process and while that's not overnight and doesn't happen instantly that healing is available.

KF: I wanna ask you a question, maybe I'm looking for shorter answer to a very long process but you know, after you sorta recoup and get out of the hospital and try and you know, get through funerals and things, how do you begin to grapple with life or get a hang of life again? And how would you describe that process to then get to a point where you think, you know, I'm going to help other people go through that process, as a coach, just like I went through?

JC: Well you're right, it's a very long answer. And I'll do my best to give the short answer. It's one of the reasons I wrote my book, Miracles in the Darkness is because it is a long process. It's not an overnight situation. It was, it's hard to describe how painful and devastating and hard it is.

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JC: It is impossible to describe being in that place in that crushing painful place. It's, unless you've been there you know so, I appreciate what you said

earlier about I can't imagine, because honestly, I couldn't imagine either before it happened to me. And even since this happened it's unimaginable to me how I survived it. It really is soul crushing and, it's, it's it is a long process. And I think for me, I had some remarkable things happen. I had some really, really hard things happen. I had some really, really dark places in that journey and I had some remarkable miracles happened and I was at the three-year mark I was in a really bad place. I had been called to be young women's president of the girls in my ward. The young women that were in our group were my daughter's friends. My daughter was ten when she died. But by this time these girls were beehives an extremely painful experience for me, but it lead to healing. And in that discomfort, in that pain that I felt in that calling, in that experience, I received a blessing that really, there's no other way to describe it, except for that I felt the weight and the heaviness in the darkness lift. And that didn't happen in the first month. That didn't happen even though we ask for that along the way it didn't happen in the first month, it didn't happen in the six-month it didn't happen in the first year. It happened when the timing was right for me to appreciate what the Savior had done for me. And I think it took me a while to really understand and when I when I started to when I started to understand that my role was then to bring hope to others and to share my story cause that wasn't my natural thing like I didn't share my story early, on I wasn't I didn't immediately go to the internet and start, you know, sharing, "this is awful." That was not my go-to it wasn't my was not my MO. I was pretty quiet about what the suffering and the difficulty that I was going through although it's impossible to be that quiet when you're that when you're hurting that bad. But it took me a long time to understand why my healing came the way it did because everybody's doesn't. Everybody's doesn't come in that, that moment where you can feel the difference from that morning to that evening. It's, it's just not always the way it's done and I and there was more healing to do after that but it was a huge turning point for me and, and in a way in a way I felt guilty about having such a remarkable miraculous experience because I felt like I almost felt like I couldn't share my story at, at some point because I couldn't share that I had this miraculous awakening because then everyone would be looking for this miraculous awakening and thinking, "Oh well you're just special. You're just you know you just had the special experience and so therefore yeah you get healing but nobody else does." But in reality, what I learned while I was writing my book was that I was

given that experience so that I could testify of healing. So that there would be no question in my mind where that healing came from. And while I, I used all the resources that were available to me, therapy to get over my PTSD, my ,my bishops, and my other leaders to, to help and sustain me through, it a physical activity with my neighbor, I mean all the resources that were available to me, I took advantage of but, ultimate healing comes from our Savior.

KF: Yeah, I'm encouraged by this term of healing. I think maybe it's natural for us to conflate the idea of grieving with healing, you know, you typically hear about the five steps of, of grieving or whatever and we often think by the time you get to the end of the grieving that the healing is done as well but maybe that is true. But how, how would you help us better understand the concept of grieving verse healing?

JC: So grief is the way I understand grief now, is grief is the grief the path to healing. We see grief as the problem but really grief is the, is part of the solution. So, let me give you a, let me give you an example. Kurt if you went out and you were jogging and you broke your ankle, Ok. When we think of physical healing, like that's easy for us to imagine.

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JC: So, but when, when we break our ankle what happens. We feel a lot of pain. We feel pain. And there's a good reason we feel pain. Because if you tripped and you broke your ankle and you didn't feel pain you would keep running and you would injure yourself further. So, the pain of a physical injury is very similar to the pain of grief. Grief is, is that pain that we experience that says that we have experienced an emotional injury and we need to take care of it. And when, when we have a physical injury and we feel pain then what do? Like, you wouldn't get up from breaking your ankle on your run and he running, but a lot of times we hear, we hear you know, just, just ignore the pain of grief. Just keep going. Just you know we, we hear keep busy and that's equivalent to saying keep running. And it doesn't work. I mean I'm reminded of Elder Uctdorf's talk, I don't remember which talk it is, but where he talked about when we experience turbulence like the pilots a lot of times, young pilots think, "Oh we need to go a little faster. He says when you, when you experience turbulence you need to slow down. So, when you experience pain you need to slow down you need to simplify life. Slow down and take care of the pain. So again, if you break our ankle we slow down. We get the

help we need. We get the support we need and we allow ourselves to heal. Now, we do the things the protocols that allow us to heal. And it's, it's in grief. KF: Yeah, and sometimes we can get discouraged as the sort of a third party. You know that we're trying to minister to somebody who's, who's grieving and trying to heal and we sometimes feel like, okay, it's been long enough like, like you need to move forward and ignore the healing or ignore the wound they have or the brokenness and then hopefully they'll go away. But sometimes it's that pace of it that we have to be patient with.

JC: Absolutely! And I think that's the hardest part is because the emotional injury is so much more intimate for the person that's experiencing it than the people that are outside of them and emotional pain is painful for the people around. I mean, we, we once, like, it's part of our being to want everybody to be okay. We just want that. We want everybody to be okay and so it's really, really hard. It's really hard to see people in pain and to trust the process and to trust Heavenly Father and his timing and is it's, it's just really difficult. And I mean I experienced that myself, after two, you know, a couple of years of being in really deep pain and the having, an, I will say, I didn't have a ton of people saying to me ok, "It's time to get over it." Which I think a lot of people experience that, I didn't have a ton of that, but I felt it. Like I felt it from people it's like, "are we still talking about that?" Know why is this still.. I don't know. But I do think that I, this is the wrong word to use but there was an advantage in the fact that that what happened was so tragic, you know, to lose two children and to, you know, eight and ten years old, who had friends and you know other families that were impacted by it and it was just such a devastating event that I think people weren't as likely to do that. You know say, why aren't you because they're like, "I don't know if I can get over it," but there was that sense of okay, "It's time, it's time." I did feel that. And I felt that from my leaders is who I felt it from.

KF: And so I mean. Is there an appropriate time to go there, to is, is healthy for to encourage someone to, to move on and, and get over to some extent so that they can find some normalcy in happiness? I mean we sometimes get trapped in the grief and healing too much.

JC: You really can. And one of the challenges especially with parents who have lost children, one of the challenges is if you, if you go online or you, cause a lot of people are going online for support they, they find a Facebook group. Facebook wasn't really a thing. I think I joined Facebook the year after

the accident you know, it wasn't a prevalent thing like it is now. We think about oh I wanna to be a pilot, I'm going to join a Facebook pilot group. Or I want to learn how to be a coach or whatever, right you know, a podcaster, I'm going to go on and join a Facebook group and we do the same thing.

00:20:07 - 00:25:09

JC: Our society does the same thing with grief, as we go to Facebook or for support a lot of times defined like people who help us to feel like we're not alone in our circumstances, but a lot of times what happens in the synergy of those groups is that it's pain is just kind of passed around and, and it is very, very real thing that we can get stuck in our pain. One of the best, you know, I just reread it recently, it was Elder Scott's talk, I don't remember the year but it was called "To be Healed" and he kinda refers to that. He refers to the fact that it is, it's crucial that we be an active participant in our own healing. And I, when with grief, grief is this strange thing that most of us aren't, most people aren't well educated on. I equate it to being thrown into the middle of the lake and you'd never learned how to swim. You're just drowning. You have no skills, you have no tools, you have no understanding of it, you don't know what's normal, what's not, how to move through it you know, are there steps? Are there things I'm supposed to do? There's it's a very, very nebulous experience in a lot of ways it's very, it's very confusing. And so when I say, you know, what I'm talking about Elder Scott's talk about effort, a lot of times when we hear effort were like what does that look like. I mean what kind of effort do I need to put in, in healing? In healing grief specifically and, and I think that's where it's hard, is if you broke your ankle I would say okay Kurt you need to go to this doctor and get a cast and you need to and he's going to give you a protocol and you do this, this, and this and that's kind of what I've tried to do with grief as really help people to understand grief at a, at a better level so that they first of all don't pile on additional emotions on top of that because we, we grieve and then we pile on shame and guilt about our grief. Because we don't know what to do and there really are steps that will help us to heal. But I loved Elder Scott's talk about putting in the effort and not relying wholly on our leaders to make it all right. So, to your question as a leader, the challenge is to honor their grief path and to honor the pain that they're experiencing. We can't talk somebody out of pain. And I think as a leader. That's what's hard.

KF: Yeah. Yeah.

JC: That's what's really hard.

KF: That's awesome, that's fascinating to contemplate, 'cause sometimes we think, well they've sort of created this additional pain and this pain does have to be there so even if I tell him to go past it they'll let go of the pain. But and I would imagine as long as these individuals, I mean, have resources and help and, I mean, it's not, I would hope that a leader doesn't feel like they need to be responsible for that pain and somehow it's up to me to tell them to move past it. That's not necessarily the leader's role or a loved one's role, but just mainly to be there and validate it. Regardless of, you know, how much it's real not right.

JC: Well and I love that. I think that's so smart is, is like you said we're not responsible for somebody else's healing. And yet at the same time we can be there to support. And support looks like, support looks like not only accepting that they're, you know, if, if someone says to you, I'm in pain and we say oh well you wouldn't be if you did such and such. I mean if you go and you, you read what Brene' Brown has said about sympathy versus empathy. That's the, the quintessential example of giving sympathy which creates more pain versus empathy which is that's gotta be so hard. It's being human, it's like putting ourselves in the place of the other person and going, I don't know how I would do it either. But, also holding onto that hope and that faith of healing. And I think that's where we, we struggle, but that support looks like not only a validating the pain and how painful the situation is, but it's also offering support for what they need. So, really asking the person instead of telling the person what they need, asking them asked them. Asking them, what would help you right now? How can we support you in your healing process?

KF: Yeah, that's really helpful. And in, I sort of asked you to in preparation for this to maybe from your reflecting on your own personal experience and also the many individuals that you coach through grieving and loss what are some perspectives or thoughts or principles that we consider as from the leadership standpoint that maybe we'll help us be better prepared to lead in, in these circumstances?

00:25:09 - 00:30:27

KF: And so and we've sort of touched on some of these, but let's go through make sure we're not missing any details. The first one being, "show up and answer their questions." Maybe expound on that.

JC: Yes I will because that is the that is, so as leaders, we all have our own personalities. We all have our own past experiences. And there's those of us

who have been in difficult situations are more comfortable with difficult situations and there's those of us that are more fearful of difficult situations. And so showing up maybe super easy for one person, and that's great but, there's those of us who are called the lead, that showing up is hard. Its just hard.

KF: Yeah. Showing up when tragedy is happened or a big loss, right.

JC: Exactly just like it's, it's hard. It's like I don't know what I'm walking into. I don't know what to say. I don't know what to do and so it just becomes extremely uncomfortable and we could talk ourselves out of showing up. We can you know, as a bishop or a Relief Society president or whatever we can, we can talk ourselves into not showing up. We can say oh well, their family is visiting and, and we have like even as society, we have this idea that to leave the griever alone. Like that's just kind of a societal thing, is this they need space and in reality, not showing up is hardest part. For people is that people didn't show up. And even though yeah, so, it's just being proactive. It's showing up and it's instead of, one of the things I think that really creates a lot of problems for us around showing up is that we get really overwhelmed with trying to say just the right thing. Which is one of the points we're gonna talk about. When we get so overwhelmed with trying to say just the right thing that's when we get shutdown. We're like oh I can't even because I have no idea what I'm going to say and just like what you said at the very beginning, I can't imagine. I mean, that's what we say. I can't imagine. And I'm so sorry, and we're just human and even though we're leaders we don't have to have just the right words because there are no words that are gonna solve the problem.

KF: Right, right, anything else as far as showing up and answering their questions? With what type of questions would be typical for someone to, to have in these circumstances?

JC: Well. I remember a few years ago, we had, I was in the Relief Society presidency and we had a member of our ward who experienced a really painful loss and the death of a child. And we, there was one of there was a crucial leader in the, the situation that really needed to be there and their absence was really felt. And, and that's where I really became, I became very aware of how important is for leaders to show up. Because there's, there's, there's guidance that's wanted, there's support that's wanted. There's this, just

this feeling that, I'm, I think when we show up we, just our presence just says I love you and I care about you.

KF: Yeah.

JC: Regardless of what we say or do our presence says I love you I care about you.

KF: Yeah and really, that's just so, takes a lot away from that burden as a leader to you know, I, you sorta wanna be the guy that shows up, shares right scripture, brings hope and healing, and everybody's like not crying anymore by the time you leave. But really, that's not, that would be helpful nor would you ever have ability to do that. But just saying you know what your role is. You're just going to be present and you're not gonna worry about if you're staying too long or like you know you can communicate that if they want alone time or whatever but you're just gonna go and be there right and that's, that's doable.

JC: Yeah it's very doable. And it, you know, I was reflecting on as we were, as I was thinking about talking to you today. This image of the Savior when he came to the Land Bountiful after his, his crucifixion. And He was with the people and, and He was filled with compassion. And He, you know He told them. It's time for me to leave. And He was filled with compassion. And what did He say, I'll stay a little longer. I'll stay longer. And I think that's really like, that's the ultimate compassion, is, I'm here for you. And then there's, there's logistics of a funeral and a viewing and all those things have to be worked out and, and as leaders we can take, we can't take the full burden from the family but, we can certainly help with that burden by finding out what the funeral home needs and, and being able to answer their questions about whether or not they can have the funeral on Friday or they need to do it on Monday or you know, when the building is available.

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JC: All those things that takes someone who knows what's going on with the building, what's going on with, you know, right now we're we, we have restrictions across the country because of a pandemic and so even more important to just be there and to answer questions and really to answer spiritual questions as well as logistical questions. And not to try to feed spiritual answers because they're not gonna hear what they haven't asked. You really that, that example has been given to us. It's you know our, our heavenly father answers our prayers. He gives us the answers that we ask.

And so I think as leaders we would be wise to do the same thing. You know, not to say to a person, is there anything that you're wondering about right now that I can help with? Do you have a question? You lingering question that I can then I might be able to hear, I might not have the answer. But I'm here to listen and hear you and hear your questions.

KF: Yeah, I love that just feeling that that space of you know, of the responder like if you have a question I'm here to either answer it or go find you answer right and again, just being present there is really helpful. The next point you put is over avoid overreacting to their emotions and concerns. Maybe paint us that picture, what is what does that typically look like?

JC: So everybody has a different way of grieving. Everybody has a different response to grief and while one person you show up, they might be completely overcome with emotions where we're just watching them more. You know, mourning is the physical response is the action of grief and so they're crying they may even be screaming. They may be whatever that looks like for that person and then there might be another person who just shows up with that empty stare with that stoic, you know, that that parent who's lost a child as just like they're just in shock. And I think as people watching that that a lot of times we have judgments about the way that people are expressing their grief and we don't mean to, but we do because we want to go, "are they okay?" You know, we're, we're putting up our little imaginary meter and we're going okay. Wait this person is here. They need to be here or this person is you know, you can't see my hand motions if you're listening, but imagine my meter and you know one person is showing like a high, high emotion and we feel like oh, they're like out of control or another person is not showing any emotions and were like you know, they're, they're so numb. There's something wrong, right, and especially, you know, in those early days it's really important that we kind of put aside our own meter and how we have seen grief and how we have expressed grief, put that aside and just think everything is normal right now. The anything is normal. Now I say that, but at the same time I want to be really, really careful that I say that if you're concerned about their wellbeing, if you're concerned about them harming themselves, if you're concerned about any aspect that around that then by all means bring in a therapist, bring in somebody that can intervene and can be that specialist that knows how to react and respond and to really assess the situation. And know who those people are like, you need to have those people in your area, you

know, emergency situations where you feel like you can call on someone. But that is not the role of a church leader.

KF: Yeah, and this may spill over to our next point as well but often times we can see individuals, maybe they have very expressive emotional reaction to the trauma that they're going through and we may think, "wow you know they're, maybe they don't understand. Maybe their testimony of the eternal plan isn't as clear in their mind is that it is my mind," and you know that's concerning as well so it's almost like it's not even an emotional or a mental health concern as it is like, oh no like there's some spiritual concerns here too, and that's where I need to step in and maybe help out there but just to step back and say no, this is like a process if they need a scream. They're going to scream.

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KF: We're gonna make sure they're safe and that they're, you know, they have the resources they need but just allow them to express that even if it's on the other scale where maybe they're just numb, numbed out. It's almost like why aren't you crying like I'd be a mess right now. And you're not even shedding a tear in you know.

JC: Yeah and I love the you brought that up. Because I think that, that can trip up a little bit as leaders, is that when we, because we do feel, because of our empathy, because we care about people and because of our concern and we know the dangers of this world and we know the dangers of losing a testimony, and we can really feel that, like we can feel that concern and that worry and at the very beginning is not the time to address that. And, I think in asking them what questions they have, that's where we get to address that. But to go in and say, hey let me draw out the plan of salvation for you is, it's just not the right time, like they and you know, you're you know your people and you know whether or not what their level of testimony is to some extent or another. But when they ask questions that's when we get to answer those questions. You know like when a child dies, when children die, when I say child, I'm talking about a newborn to a forty year olds. You know, they're still our child a fifty year old, whatever. They're still our child. So, when we see an adult son or daughter die, a lot of times, the parents will question, are they really okay. Because they know that they've made mistakes. If so they may be asking, are they really okay. And that's where we get to express God's love. God loves us so much He just, He's going, He's we just don't even understand

His depth of love, right, so we have an opportunity to feel the Spirit guide us in answering questions, rather than asserting information that may bring up more questions than answers.

KF: Yeah, yeah. And so leads into our next point is Don't be overwhelmed trying to say the right thing. And we've touched on this a little bit. But what else are we missing? As far as because there's always this pressure of the leader, you gotta say something and even like, even to the moment of them opening the door, maybe go to their home and they open the door, and you're just like, I want to say sorry a million times, you wanna say, I can't imagine just like I said, right like. We don't and they almost feel too cliché because there's just nothing you can really say in that moment. So what else are we missing as far as not being, avoiding being overwhelmed by what to say?

JC: Well and, and what you said right there which is so important, cause you said there really isn't anything that you say. I think the overwhelm comes from thinking that somehow we can make it better. That's what really gets us overwhelmed, is that we think there's the perfect thing to say. That's when we really get to that place of there's something perfect I'm supposed to say, and, and then we're searching and searching and the reason it's so overwhelming is because there isn't the perfect thing to say. And when we can't find it, then we're like, I've not done my job I, I must not be inspired. I'm not a good leader. I don't know how to be a Relief Society president. I don't know how to be a Bishop. You know, all the doubt comes in, but really there is nothing that we can say that is going to change the situation. The most difficult thing is if we don't show up. That's the most difficult thing for the people. It's not that we showed up and said the wrong thing or said the right thing. It's that we showed up. That's the most important piece and that's been shown in study after study. The most important thing is that we show up. And this idea that we can say just the right thing just puts way too much pressure on ourselves because we're not going to change the dynamic of the situation with the right words. And it's just letting go of that idea that there is just a right thing to say. And I would also say that I've been so many situations I can't even tell you, I'll tell you real quickly, years ago, we went down, we flew down to this little town to visit my husband at the time, his grandmother who was dying in the hospital. And we flew on this silly little plane that had no business being in the sky and we were tossed all over the place and when we landed I thought oh my gosh, I feel lucky to be alive right now. So we get to the hospital and like one of the

first things I say when I get in hospital room in everyone's gathered around, but I'm young but twenty-two, twenty-three year old, I don't know, and we're gathered around in this hospital room and and this precious woman is laying in the bed dying and I say, "I feel like I was gonna die," and the minute came out of my mouth I regretted it and I felt like all that shame come in about how can you talk about that when this woman is actually dying and you just had a scary experience. That's all it was. And so, just know we're going to say the wrong thing and that it's okay we, what happens though is when we say the wrong thing just like in the hospital I said the wrong thing and then I shut up.

00:40:44 - 00:45:03

JC: I didn't say another word as I was so afraid of saying the wrong thing. If we just stay with it we're gonna say the wrong thing. I, a year and a half ago, I went to a friend's husband's funeral and I walked up and I immediately said the wrong thing like in my mind I was like, why did I say that. If these are stressful situations we're, it's just going to happen. We're just gonna say the wrong thing but as long as we stay with it and we stayed there we are showing that we care and that we love them and that were willing to show up and say the wrong thing and we're willing to feel uncomfortable. We're willing to be in that awkward situation and, it does become more comfortable as we're willing to be uncomfortable.

KF: Yeah, I love that advice, just this, you know it's not necessarily about what you say right or what you say wrong but the point is that you're staying with it, right. You don't maybe retreat from the experience or the situation or make an excuse to leave because you feel like I'm just making it worse here cause I keep saying mindless things, you know, but just to stay with and I think in the long run, that'll go much further than saying anything right.

JC: Absolutely absolutely. I'm glad that's what you got out of that.

KF: We're learning here Julie. This great. Alright, our next one is set up a support structure. And then that's something that, you know, man, a bishop, a Elders Quorum president a Relief Society, I mean they can get to work and they can set up a support structure. What, what's the best way to go about that?

JC: We are uniquely qualified to do that, aren't we? Because of the structure of the church because of the structure or our organizations, we just, we have the ability to do that. And it's, it's fantastic at and it can be such a support for families. I'll just share my own experience when, when my kids died. My, you

know, my ward basically set up a point person because there were there were people from my neighborhood that wanted to help, there were people from, you know, I played tennis at the time, there was people from my tennis team that wanted to help, there were people from this organization, and that, my husband's work that wanted to help, there were people from the church that wanted to help. There were, we home schooled there were people from the home school, I mean there were all these different people that weren't necessarily all connected. And so they really established a structure in order to and because I was in the middle of it, you know, I can't tell you exactly what that looked like. But I know that they, they really established kind of a point person to coordinate, like, they had a point person for each of these groups that then coordinated with one person that coordinated meals that coordinated service that was needed and that was just a huge support for us. For them to take that, that opportunity to create some order around the chaos that can be a situation like this. And it is really the coordinating of the funeral and the, the meals and the funeral home and all of those logistics that happen, but what we're really get about sometimes is identifying those physical needs and creating that structure around meals and around, you know, getting the, the funeral arranged and sometimes we don't think as much about the emotional needs. And really coordinating, do we have somebody that's going to be going in and checking on the family. Somebody that's closed that can, that can report and help us to ascertain in that process ongoing emotional and physical needs. And really just there to, to support, again to support. I think that is part of the support structure that we need to look closer at is the emotional support which really leads us into that continuing grief support because we're really good at the emergency situation.

KF: Right.

JC: You know, we're really good at like, okay, this has happened. We need to do this. You know, we go into action. We make assignments and we volun-told, volun-tell everyone what to do.

00:45:03 - 00:50:08

JC: We have all these people you know asking for, what can I do? And we, we make assignments. But sometimes it's the ongoing support that needs to happen. That may be is over lunch.

KF: Yeah, no, that's a great point. Cause, you know, there's a family that needs dinner tonight in an hour, like I guarantee you any ward in the church

can make that happen. Right. But instead, ongoing where it's very nuanced what does even support look like and we'll maybe their over and so maybe we shouldn't even, let's just pretend that never happened in those children never existed. Almost like let's not even go there, and maybe that's what they need, right, but it's very difficult.

JC: Well, doesn't it go back to that kind of the quadrant? So we think about important urgent and then and then as it goes on it becomes less urgent but it's still important but then we have new things that are urgent, that maybe aren't as important, that kinda take the place of those. Anyway, yeah.

KF: So any tips, as far as the, you know, being sensitive the to the ongoing impact of grief and things to be aware of or do or how to approach that?

JC: So like we just talked about there's the emergency aspect of a situation like this and then there's the, the ongoing impact. In the emergency situation, you know, that's like we said, that's where we say, what questions do you have and what can I answer? We don't necessarily go in and draw the, the Plan of Salvation, right. But in the ongoing grief that's where, that's really where they need the spiritual support. In the early days, it's like, you know, Heavenly Father has set up protections for us. Even the way that we grieve is set as protection for us. Even the numbness we feel is a protection for us. Because, our emotions and our physical bodies can't really take that impact all at once and so it kind of, like, it comes on slowly, and we really are very, very protected and we, we have the sense that our loved one is there and we feel their presence and we feel that love, but as things go on we feel that less and less and that's where we as leaders and we're concerned about the spiritual impact of a situation for a person. That's where we lose people. We lose people in the days in the weeks that follow. When they start to feel so lonely and when people are grieving their emotions are so impacted and they're so overflowing. It's very hard to feel the spirit. And this is different for everybody. You know everyone's going to have their own unique experience with this, but my experience with my own situation and with talking with other people and with them seeing this, is that it's very difficult to feel the spirit and so it's important for us to set up a way to stay connected. To. to continue to show our love and our patience and to provide that support that says, "hey I know this is impacting you emotionally and spiritually. And I'm here to help. And I know that you love our Heavenly Father and I know that you have a testimony of the Plan of Salvation but I know right now you have questions and it's super hard."

And to just stay engaged with them so that they have a place to go with their questions because if we don't stay engaged if they don't feel like there's someone that's in their corner that's willing to just listen and be there and answer their questions. Where are they going to go with this questions if they don't feel the spirit?

KF: Yeah, yeah. That's interesting dynamic. Because I would imagine with such dramatic trauma that one person can experience, I mean obviously there's individuals can be very upset at God, right, and feel betrayed by God. And then it's almost like in those instances where maybe the, the trauma of the situation sort of gets them disconnected from those sensitive spiritual promptings or they've just sort of detached from it because that's, they're in survival mode at the moment. And so this support of individuals, people in their life sort of step in for that comfort. They think well, I know that God's not here but, you know, Julie's here, and so least Julie's with me, right. And then later on down the line maybe as things subside or normalcy surfaces somehow, then they can be like, oh God was here the whole time but God, Julie was just there for God in that moment, right.

JC: I love the way you articulated that because exactly right. You know when, when we're having this and this goes for all types of losses I've seen this with a lot of different losses.

00:50:09 - 00:55:04

JC: Is that people show up in that emergency situation but there's not like a long term plan for supporting them and then somehow they start feeling like because, again, society tells us, "leave them alone," which is not accurate. And so we back off and all of the sudden they feel abandoned. And what we wanna do is to eliminate as much as possible, that feeling of abandonment. And this is tough because like you were saying you know when you're overwhelmed with grief it's, sometimes people who are grieving will kind of push people away because they're emotionally they're full and so people, it's just like, "oh it's just one more thing." So this is tough because sometimes we'll feel them pushing away and not necessarily welcoming the support, but recognizing that we're just going to be in that place. You know, we're gonna stand in the place, we're going to be there. We're going to show them in some way that we're there. And I, I want to, you know, issue a little caution here, is that bishops, don't feel like they have to be that person. The Relief Society president doesn't have to feel like they're that person. It's really just

establishing that there is a structure in place to continue to support them. Does that makes sense? So you really, really super aware of who you're putting with them for a ministering sister or ministering brother, like you're super aware that this person is someone that needs an additional level of support and that you're communicating as a leadership with them about what that's looking like. And really asking, so in my mind, I'm just going to kind of walk through a scenario with you. If that's okay. In my mind the way I see that working is, is we have, let's say it's a Relief Society president who's trying to support a sister who's grieving the loss of a child. And they have a ministering sister that's assigned to that person. And they're just being super prayerful and intentional about that assignment in choosing someone that can be sensitive to the situation and yet doesn't back down from the situation. And so then that Relief Society president, she may be involved with the sister as well, like you might need a layer of support, right. But so she might be directly involved with the sister but she's also intentionally keeping up with the sister that's assigned as the the minister for her, because she's asking questions. Like what are the current needs? What are the needs this week? How often is she are you visiting? Are you, when you visit is she receptive? It's just like really being involved in the situation and doing the, the structure and the love. You know, it's the structure and the spirit. Sometimes we rely too much on one or the other and we don't do both. You know, it's head and hearts it's the structure and the and the spirit. And those things when, when we do that together that's where we have so much strength, like that's where, that's where God's love and God's plan and God's hope for our situation is just really becomes, it becomes very, very strengthened, when we do that together.

KF: No, I love that. It reminds me of a discussion I had a few weeks ago on the podcasts with Janice Spangler as far as the dynamic between service and solidarity and oftentimes we default to service. You know, we wanna to do, do, do so much for whomever that were serving. But we never create that space of the spirit of love of just, like, being present the individual in solidarity. 'cause there's a lot of healing that does there, because if you just focus on the structure and the service at some point you run out of things to do. The funerals over, the yard is clean, the houses painted, you know, it's like at some point you run out of things to do and then you that's sort of slowly fade away. But, the solidarity of that experience is ever present and there's always something to be present for.

JC: Yeah. Yeah beautiful.

KF: So the last point you've put here is beware that attending church is triggering. We sort of touched on this a little bit with just recognizing that sometimes the spirit, maybe their interaction with the spirit, their sensitivity towards the spirit is gone and then normal activities like attending church or doing church stuff is, could be triggering as well.

00:55:05 - 01:00:41

JC: Yeah there's so much that goes into this that, that we aren't always aware of. Church is triggering for a lot of different reasons. One is our emotions are heightened when we're in grief, you know, we've experienced the loss of a child. Our emotions are extremely heightened and spiritual things are emotional. They're very tied together. So, it's very hard when you already feel extremely vulnerable to emotions, and not feeling like you're even in control of your own emotions, because you just don't know if you're gonna be crying one minute or you're gonna be okay. Well, then you go to church, in church is this spiritual and by, you know, because it spiritual, it's also emotional. It triggers the emotional and it just, it just makes you feel that much more vulnerable. And there's this feeling like, how do I show up? It's this weird thing. If I'm emotional, I'm embarrassed because I'm emotional. If I'm non-emotional or if I don't show up sad or even if I dare to laugh at something that somebody says is somebody gonna think didn't love my child. Now, this doesn't make sense, you know, to person that that hasn't gone through this, it's like of course you loved your child, you're just laughing but in mind of a person who's grieving like, this is a real thing. It is a real thing, like if I laugh am I forgetting them? These are all things that we have to work out through our healing, but in the moment those are the experiences that are happening. It's this, you know, church can be very emotional, you're, we're vulnerable. We see that, I'm trying to remember, I think it was a year, a year and a half after my kids died that they asked me to play the piano for primary. And I accepted. And I sat behind the piano and cried for two weeks. I just couldn't do it. I could not do it. I could not be in that room with all those children that were the age of my children who died and, and so I had to go to my, you know, I had to go to them and say, "I just don't think I can do this." This is so painful. And, you know, now I could do it all day long, it's one of my favorite things to do. Go into primary and play the piano, but at the time it was just so triggering and if you think about losing a child and then sitting in church, in that reverent, sacred place where

we feel so strongly the bond between families, and we don't have them there. It's just hard. It's so important that they keep going to church and yet it so hard. And that's why they just need that. Because if we back off, if we take our foot off the pedal and we don't and we stop going to church or we start, you know, it's tricky right now because of the pandemic, what does that look like, but when we take our foot off and we're not, I mean, imagine the danger of this is if we're not feeling the spirit because we're emotionally overwhelmed and then we take our foot off the pedal of going to church. We really leave ourselves in a very spiritually precarious position. Where it's super easy to lose that testimony. Which in a lot of ways as a leader doesn't make a lot of sense because we wanted, cause as a leader we're thinking, of course this is the place where we learned that families are forever. This is the place where we grow that hope. This is the place where we understand that, that they're gone but they're not, you know, that we're going to be reunited them. But the pain of the reality of it is so great that when all these little pieces come together where we, we don't feel the spirit like we did before, just the, the way it speaks to us is so different, we're trying to figure that out. And then we, we stop the habit, the structure of church attendance and then before you know it the devil has his way and he comes in and he tells us all kinds of stories that creates a disconnect from the testimony that we once had and that could really be such a comfort to us.

KF: Yeah, yeah, that's, that's really helpful and this because it can be from church leaders perspective you, you misinterpret maybe their actions at times. Like, they haven't been to church in six weeks like maybe this is pushing away and they'll never come back to church or, you know, but we maybe overlooked that actually this experience quite triggering for them they just need to maybe get through some other, get further down the path of their journey of grief until they can find purpose in coming to church without it being overly triggering or participating in the Relief Society or service projects or whatever it is and that'll come it just takes time.

JC: And, and I would just recommend that we, that we help them to figure out how they can stay engaged at the level that they felt comfortable. So, for example, instead of shaming somebody for showing up for sacrament meeting and then leaving right after, we recognize that.

01:00:42 - 01:05:05

JC: We're just aware and then we call them and go, hey just checking you, is everything okay? Is there anything that, how, we just, we're just there to say, hey I love you, I noticed that you left. Like, just the noticing is in a way that's not "why did you leave? what's going on? what's wrong with you?" Don't you know it's, it's not from the place of judgment but it's from a place of awareness and love and compassion. Like, really that is the key is a place of love, compassion and, and encouraging them to continue to stay engaged at whatever level. So I would caution as to be too, too relax too much on. You know, if somebody's not showing up for church, we need to be aware and we need to be aware of that each week and show with compassion. Instead of letting it draw out and going oh they're not showing up, hopefully they'll come back, but we're aware and we're, we're compassionate and we're like how can I help this situation be more comfortable for you? Or helping them recognize that it's okay if they show up two minutes after the meeting starts in order to slip into the back row. And it's okay if they leave to minutes before it ends to slip out because that's what they need to do right now. But it's just great that they were there and we just love them and we'd care. And you know, I had an experience where I was in a meeting and I was, it was really emotional for me, and I just felt myself falling apart and it and I felt it's funny how we do, we always think everybody is noticing, I don't know that people are noticing as, as much as we think they are, but you know when we're vulnerable and we're falling apart and we're sobbing in church like, it feels like all eyes are, as nobody's paying attention to the speaker, everyone's looking at you. And I just sat in the pew while the whole chapel emptied out and I thought I, I've got to leave. I can't pull it together. And this dear friend came and sat next to me on the bench as she just said you're doing so good. You're doing so good. And in that moment, and I said I am not and she said no you are here and you're doing so good. And she just encouraged me. And I think that's really what it's all about, is like, keeping that hand in their hand and encouraging all along the way and helping them find the resources that are going to help them to heal. And I again, I go back to the talk by Elder Scott, Elder Richard G. Scott about "To Be Healed," so, so informative about the way that he instructed people on how to continue to have that effort and showing up for church is just part of the effort.

KF: Yeah. That's powerful. Julie, this has been so helpful and insightful and of course you know we'll never, we'll never adequately address this topic in a, in

an hour-long podcast interview, but hopefully gives people place to start and my hope is that maybe you know, something tragic does happen a leader can maybe grab this episode, quickly listen to it and at least have some basic resources to draw upon as they begin this journey of leading someone who, who loses a child and goes through something even just in general going through something so traumatic.

KF: Anything we're missing? Any point or concept or do we did we hit it all the best we could this, this round?

JC: Well I would just add maybe just a couple of quick things. One is just, you know, we hear this, this thing about we have two ears and one mouth, you know, I would add that we have eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to feel, hands to heal, and our one mouth to comfort, and just be from that place of compassion and really focusing on compassion. And then, from a structural standpoint from an administrative standpoint is having that emergency plan and really kind of talking about what is our emergency plan and then what we have to implement that plan, that we really start asking ourselves what worked what didn't so that we can continue to improve as leaders and as a counsel. I think that those are the two thoughts that I have in closing.

01:05:05 - 01:09:34

KF: Love it. Well, I got one more question for you, but before I ask that if people do want to get in touch with you whether your, your resources, your book, your coaching, where would you send them to learn more about you?

JC: So my website is buildalifeafterloss.com. It's a mouthful, so I'm going to say it again. buildalifeafterloss.com. I have a podcast by the same name. So that's a free resource for people who are looking know trying to figure out grief and how to rebuild. And I, like you said I do one-on-one coaching and yeah, I'm just at my email address is Julie@buildalifeafterloss.com. Reach out, if you have questions. I this is what I do. This is my calling. This is, this is my mission and so, I appreciate the opportunity to share.

KF: Yeah. So, my last question is related to that, as you've sorta discovered your purpose and mission in assisting other people through loss, how has that form of leadership made you a better follower of Jesus Christ?

JC: I love that question. Wow, how much time you have? You know it's so different. When we, you know, as a leader in the church we have manuals that say do this, do this and then we're instructed then to, to take that and to add the insight of the spirit of the Lord, the revelation that we receive. When we as

individuals, we that same opportunity in our life. To take the things that we learned as a leader in the church and to apply that to her personal life. And we don't always have a manual. We don't ever have a manual let's just say. The scriptures are a manual of sorts, but it's like Heavenly Father says okay, this is what you've gotta do but now you've got to gather the tools and you've got to gather the, the things that are going to work and you've got to put it all together with my help. And I think for me, that's, that's the beauty of just living life and not separating that what we do from day to day from church and it's like our life is a testament to our faith in Jesus Christ and how we choose to go about our day every day and how we choose to call on Him in every aspect of our life. And so I, yeah I don't, I don't know if I could adequately answer that question in two minutes but that's the thoughts that are coming to me right now.

KF: That concludes my interview with Julie Cluff. I sure appreciate her sharing from her life experience from her coaching experience. Just some solid nuggets in there to hopefully help you as a leader, as a loved one, as somebody who's ministering to individual who gone through something so tragic, right, and reflect upon this. Hopefully this is, maybe, this isn't something you're dealing with right now in your life but file this away and in the future do need, come back to this episode and listen again. What a phenomenal resource. Go check out Julie's resources if you are looking for more in depth resources at buildalifeafterloss.com. And I'd be curious to know, obviously, we didn't cover this issue completely, just in one episode so there's any other angle or topic or individual or expert that we could reach out to and talk to about this concept or something related, go LeadingSaints.org/contact and let us know.

KF: And I remind you once again to text the word lead to 474747 in order to subscribe to the Leading Saints weekly newsletter.

Gordon B. Hinkley (Audio Clip): "It 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. When the declaration was made concerning the only true and living church upon the face of the earth. We were immediately put in a position of loneliness, the loneliness of leadership from which we cannot shrink nor runaway, and which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability."