



How I Lead as Relief Society President | An Interview with Melanie Wellman Stroud

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We live in a world plagued by pornography and people are looking for help. When an individual struggles with pornography, they often turn to their church leader for that help. How does a leader help a person overcome the shame of this issue and start seeing positive progress? How can a leader help youth to open up about struggles with pornography? What are some lasting proven tactics that actually make a difference? In order to help leading saints has created the liberating saints library with more than 20 presentations featuring individuals who have a unique perspective or expertise around this topic. Three of those most popular sessions are available to watch now, simply text the word lead to four 747 four 7 to start watching now or visit leading saints dot org slash liberating. Leading saints is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping Latter day Saints be better prepared to lead. And we do that through content creation, much like this podcast. We have articles at leading saints dot org. You should check out a weekly newsletter, you should subscribe to that also has unique content. So let's jump into this week's episode. Today is another segment of how I lead where we're talking with a leader somewhere in this world. And today, that leader is Melanie Stroud, how are you, Melanie? Good. How are you doing, Kurt? Very good. Now you're sort of halfway famous as I tell my kids that I'm halfway famous. You've got to play the Mormon. I'm sure a lot of people are familiar with your voice. You live in surprise, Arizona. And so maybe people aren't as familiar with what you do online. How do you introduce yourself? Okay, my name's Melanie wellman Stroud and I have a podcast called come follow me for us. And I had been married for 23 years and got divorced in well actually like the second week of come follow me for us. The second week of the podcast, my divorce was final. But in the fall of 2018, I was having a really hard time. And, you know, I'd been a stay at home mom for 23 years. I had 5 children. This was my life and now all of a sudden I

was gonna be divorced. And not only just divorce, but not a mom, every other week. You know, every other week my kids were gonna switch, and so things were really hard. I went and got a blessing from my brother in law and in the blessing, it said something to the effect of you have a talent, you know what it is. It's time to share it with the world. And I was like, I don't even know what that, you know, and I got thinking and I thought, well, people like to hear me teach lessons and speak, you know what firesides and stuff. And so then one thing led to another and someone said, well, you should start a podcast and I went and got a microphone and talked in my closet, you know, I love Jesus. It was just really weird talking to nobody. And so I kind of just put that away. And I didn't really have anything to say. And then one of my friends said, well, why don't you do it on come follow me because come follow me starting in none of us really know what to do with it. And so I thought, well, that'll least give me something to talk about. So I recorded one, and I'm not lying hurt. It was like one a.m. on December 31st. I'm Googling how to publish a podcast. I didn't even know, you know? So I publish it and I put it on my face, personal Facebook page, like I started a podcast. I'm gonna do it every week about come follow me and that was it. I really did think that maybe people in my stake and my extended family would listen and just by word of mouth that kind of spread and went crazy and now, you know, I don't know almost two and a half million downloads later, people have just told people that's it. You know, anything advertising or anything, but it's been something that's turned into my whole life and it's been really sweet and it's been a really I mean in answer to my prayers as much as anything else. So that's great. That's cool. So there's lots of options out there for come follow me, you know, supplemental resources or getting others perspectives on the weekly lesson. And so how do you categorize yours like if people come and start listening to your podcast? What kind of flavor should they get? Different. Well, people say I'm real, and so I guess that's the thing, maybe sometimes I think I even put too much of my story out there, you know, like, well, this is a dumb thing I did yesterday or here's where I messed up on this, but I think I'm kind of silly, you know, I sometimes go a little off course and say a funny story or something. And I'm more, you know, I really like the podcast. I mean, the other podcasts that are out there I've listened to Jon, by the way, their podcast, so much information, really good guest speakers. I think mine is more a practical application .

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Here's how these scriptures work for me. Here's how I apply this lesson to my life and how you can apply it to your life. So I guess I'm just more like, this is for the everyday Joe who's not a script orian who's not, you know, whatever. This is how this can bless our lives. Yeah. So if you want the PhDs or the deep historians, there's other options for that, but for a real, just every day, mom, individual person who's trying to apply the gospel, that's a good option. That's it. Real life that's ever since like, I love you 'cause you're real. I don't know what so, yeah. Awesome. That's great. Any fast tips as far as come follow me goes like or any mistakes you see people make or frustrations. They run into that maybe you could help us with? Yeah, so one of the things in the manual, it says, it says use this resource in whatever way is beneficial to you. And I think sometimes people have taken it like, oh, we have one hour less of church so we have to do one hour of come follow me or we have to study it every night with our families or and then people

see other people like, oh, I made this mobile that's, you know, Joseph Smith and living in jail. And our kids, like acted all out, and I think people look at each other and go, oh, you know, cred, I'm not doing all that. I'm not doing enough. And so then they get burned out and then they don't like it. And I've had a lot of people race me lately like my kids are sick of it. You know, we're sick of it. And I think it's because they were trying to do too much. And I think that it's a great way to study at home. It's a great way to supplement it, but we don't have to go crazy and I think Satan is really good at taking something amazing like come follow me and making us not want to do it because we feel like we have to do it too much. Yeah, no, I think that's a great advice. And we sort of, I think it's just a human thing. And we assume like to have there's a right way and a wrong way to do things. We got to do the right way and sometimes there's not a right way so we make up the right way and we hurt ourselves, right? Right. And we compare ourselves to other people. Because I know, especially women, like, oh, we really do that. And there's a lot of resources out there to do a little family home evenings and to do all the things. And I think Satan wants us to burn out and he wants us to be too busy. And I think that we can do come follow me in a way that benefits our family that doesn't put us in the loony bin and make our kids hate it. Yeah, yeah, for sure. I love that. Very good. So let's transition. I'm curious to understand more about your leadership experience. You've been a relief study president and the stake, young women's president. Anything like memorable come to mind as far as when you were asked to serve in those callings is their story that's behind any of those? Well, I guess when I was called to be the relief society president, my ex-husband was in his second year of dental school and I had a baby who was 6 weeks old and a two year old. And my baby had been born 6 weeks early, so he was basically like zero. And I was young. How old was I like 26 or 27 and it was a brand new ward. Like not a calling in place, not a visiting teaching route, nothing. It was a brand new ward and the bishop came over and asked me and I had been feeling it like during the week and I thought why this can't be me. So he came over and he was talking to my husband and something that Opus for him and he turned to me and said, I want you to be the release I president and I was super overwhelmed. I was young. I didn't know what I was doing. And it made it especially hard that it was a new ward because that was like an extra burden of putting all the callings in place. Plus, we were from Arizona, and we were in Virginia. So we only knew the dental students. And when the ward got split to make this new word, I didn't know anybody. So I had to call counselors and everything in a word of people I didn't know. And so it was a real immersion by fire because I really had to rely on the lord. And that's what was awesome about it because I was so clueless, I had to get help. And I had some cool things happen. If you want to hear stories like some cool stories where the lord just jumped in and helped. Cool. Yeah. And how would you describe the demographics of that ward or that relief society at that time? It was a family ward. It was not a student ward. And we did have quite a few students. I think we had like ten couples, ten around ten couples in the ward that were actual demo students, but then it was a regular family board. We had older people. We had younger people, it was a regular family ward. Nice. So as we do on these, how I lead interviews, I had you write just a simple list of maybe some leadership principles that either helped you in the moment or you maybe if you could go back in time, hopefully use these a little bit more.

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But the first one is a big buzzword that we hear a lot in church leadership. And that is delegate. So how did you go about delegating? Well, I realized a couple months in I was sitting in segment meeting and everyone was getting up and burying their testimony and they're like, I know Melanie wellman is true. She's the best. And you know, people were getting up like one after another, and I was like, something's wrong here. And I realized I had been running around taking care of everything. Like, okay, okay. I'll do this. I'll do this. Because I think sometimes as women, we don't delegate because we don't want to put anybody out. We don't want to make anybody do too much, you know, so I'll just do it. And I realized in that sacrament meeting like something's not right here. This isn't the Melanie show, and it needs to be everybody, you know? And so I got better at that point and I had super capable counselors and an amazing secretary. And I learned that when the calls came to me, then they should filter out. You know? And I've since worked in a really safe presidency with another release society president, who was the most amazing person, but she would never let it filter out. And it almost burned her to the ground because she just felt like she had to take it all on herself. And so one of the things that I really liked and got serious about was visiting teaching or ministry, you know? If somebody's having a problem in the world, I'm going to call their ministering sister first because we're given special keys to take care of each other. And my dad was one that was like, I think at the end of my life, the lord's not gonna ask me like what kind of a bishop or whatever. He's gonna look at what kind of a visiting teacher was I, you know? And I think that's where I felt like I want to use visiting teachers, but I also want to use it in my life. It's always been an important thing to me. To delegate, especially straight to the visiting teachers and home teachers. And administering angels, I don't even know how to say it. Right. The terminologies is all over the map now. So, you know, you mentioned people standing up saying, I know that Melanie's true. I mean, we sort of we almost see this figurehead of for appreciation. And sometimes that defaults to the release say president of the bishop or whatever. So delegating maybe helps defuse that necessity of that figurehead, right? Right, right. And I'm somebody that likes praise. I'm like, I'm gonna do more, you know? And so it wasn't that it was bad, but I realized that it was wrong. You know? And I wouldn't have been able to maintain it. There's no way that and it shouldn't be like that because we're taking blessings away from other people if we're running around doing it all ourselves. Yeah, yeah, for sure. The next one is ditch the fluff. You can tell, I can just sense the real flavor here, even in these principles. So that's great. You ditch the fluff. Well, I think, you know, this is talking to women a lot too, 'cause I don't think men sit down at the beginning of their planning meetings and say, what colors are a tablecloth be? But I feel like sometimes in serving in the young women's and in relief society, I would sit down and before a meeting, we would say how can we bring our sisters or these young women to Christ? And that was the main focus, and then we built out from there. And I found a steak young women's president that young women sometimes fluffy stuff so bad and they start on like, what notebooks are we gonna make? And like, what tablecloths? And how has the curtains in the cabins and stuff? And then they don't get to the meat of what we're supposed to be doing with these groups that were in charge of and that's bringing them to Christ. And so, and I also thought a lot about the poor family in my ward who just paid not poor everyone who just paid this special tithing funds, if I'm going to take that and go buy a bunch of stickers and garbage. I almost felt like wasting the lord's money, you know? And so I think that you can do very good activities and meetings with

less fluff, but less decorations and stuff. And more focus on the meat of the matter. Yeah, yeah, for sure. Thanks for the materials you are given. And this may be long the same vein, right? Right . Well, this actually is so funny. I got an Instagram message from somebody like three days ago that said, I just want to tell you one of the things I really like about your podcast is you stick to the manual.

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And I do. I go through the first section, says 76. You know, one through 5. We can blah blah blah. And I don't sometimes I'll find a scripture in there that I really like that's not mentioned in the outline. And I rarely go there. Because I really believe that the manuals are inspired by heavenly father. And it would drive me crazy sometimes as a relief study. You know, in Sunday school or relief society or something where the lesson would be on like tithing and the person teaching would go off and give a thousand quotes from other places and scriptures and not get to what was in the manual. And I think that we're lucky. We're so fortunate that we've been given these great tools. And I think often as teachers and leaders, a lot of times we don't use them, or we don't think it's interesting enough. And if you even read the questions in the manual, they're good questions. And so I just think it's unfortunate. Sometimes when people get a topic and run off on their own and don't stick with the script, especially with come follow me because there's a reason they've picked the scriptures that they have in there. Yeah, yeah, and it makes it makes preparation and delivery a lot easier when you just stick with what's there and right. Yeah. Thanks for that. And maybe sometimes people don't feel like it says interesting, but I feel like the question, especially the questions asked, the church really wants us thinking about that. Because all the questions in the manuals really have a lot to do with how this applies to our life. And sometimes I think people will get into a lesson and they want to talk about how far Jerusalem is from this place or the custom of the time and spend way too much time on things that aren't going to get me to heaven. You know, that aren't going to bring me closer to Christ. And I think that the things in the manual and the questions that they ask are meant to bring us to Christ. And some of the other background stuff while it's nice, at least in our lessons at church, especially, I think we need to stick with what's in the manuals because it's inspired. Yeah. And I think it's pretty typical. I assume you're your words the same for relief side, they typically go through some conference talks. Yeah. Just from your come follow me experience any tips or ideas about teaching a general conference talk in the setting of relief society. Right. Well, one of the things that I lack in the podcast is being able to ask questions. And I love hearing what people have to say, you know? And so I think in all of us can go home and read those lessons by yourself. And all of us can watch him a million times. But getting a conversation going and really just asking, has anybody had an experience where they've applied this principle in their life? Tell me how this is working for you. Tell me what you did after you heard this talk. How did this change you? How is it helping you? Because that's what we want to know. And I find when I do the podcast, even when you listen to general conference, what do you like? You like the stories, you know? So when we get together and we discuss things in the manual, we're telling the stories of how we're living it. And I think that's what's interesting is just to really get in and have other people bear their testimonies about how the principal helps them. Yeah. And I love

that emphasis on story. And oftentimes I see the mistake where, you know, maybe a general authority or somebody tells a great story, right? This may be funny or it's really inspiring. And so we try and retell it. But then if we can pull the stories out of those people in the room of how these doctrines and principles have really inspired their lives, those are the stories that one, we haven't heard them before, most likely. And two, it's going to sort of Bond everybody in the group, right? Right. It bonds us in and motivates us. Like, oh, you know, like, if Kim did that, then so can I, you know, because sometimes even general conferences far away. You know, like those people are step away from us. So, you know, well, yeah, if Bonnie, you know, whatever does this, she's still amazing and I'm just this normal human, but one of my ward is living in having these experiences than I can too, you know? Yeah. Yeah, that's awesome. Any other tips as far as teaching from general conference or is that a good question? No, I just say get the discussion going and that's the hard part for me. In my closet by myself, but I do think that that's important just to let people talk. Yeah. And then going back to this principle of use what materials are given, again, this is an opportunity to really simplify everything not just through teaching manuals or teaching instruction, but I'll throw him because I go back to the basics and sometimes we assume that every society has does this thing that you've been doing for years in reality is just sort of happened, right? Right, right.

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Yeah. All right. The fourth principle is maybe use the book of Mormon as often as you can. Maybe in there because through that out, use the book of Mormon as much as you can. I am the biggest fan of the book of Mormon. It is the thing that's going to keep our testimonies in place. It's going to keep us locked into the gospel when the early saints went out to spread the gospel. All they had was the book of Mormon. They didn't have fancy anything. That's it. They didn't even have missionary guides. They had the book of Mormon, and that's where everybody was converted. And I had an experience one time where we were out to dinner and we learned of another family that had left the church and I came home and I was mad. We were talking about it and I was like, how come everybody is leaving that church, you know, and I was kind of slamming my stuff around getting ready for bed and I had a thought come into my mind and it was so clear it could have been a voice that said, if you don't read the book of Mormon every day, you'll follow them out. And I was like, what are you talking about? I love the church. I would never leave, but it was a scary warning to me. And I think the fact that the book of Mormon is has such power to keep the adversary out of our life to straighten out when we get confused. It's powerful. And so I think if we can bring it up in our lessons, if we can really, really encourage people. And whatever area we're in to read it every day, right now we're in the doctor and covenants in for come follow me. And I tell people all the time. You better be reading the book of Mormon every day. Don't let come follow me. Take the place of the book of Mormon, because it shouldn't. We should be studying the book of Mormon every day, even before we're studying come follow me. And because the book of Mormon is the Keystone of our religion. And there's such a power in it. I just, I don't know. I carry extra ones in the plane. I give them out to people all the time. I even have a thing on my phone now where you can just take a picture of it the code and it just puts the book a Mormon on people's phones. And I just, I dig it. I love the book

of Mormon, and I really do think it's what kept me and my testimony grounded when my ex-husband left family members everybody. And I think I've had one thing after another kind of just cameras out of it. Thrown at me and I think I stayed strong because of my faithfulness in reading the book of Mormon and turning to it when I had questions. Yeah. And that's sort of answer the question I was going to ask as far as we have this tradition of going through the standard works and come follow me and focus on different books of scripture. Is it mainly just making sure you always make some time for the book of Mormon or are you constantly trying to integrate the book of Mormon into the come follow me lesson or outline? I'm not always trying to integrate it. I talk about it. Put your face in the book of Mormon or I'll tell experiences a lot, like, well, when this happened to me, and I'll bring up versus, you know, because it's just in my brain. I mean, that's just what happens because a lot of times when I'm studying the lesson, thoughts will come in. Well, that scripture from the book of Mormon or whatever, you know, but I just encourage people all the time to read it. I'm writing a book right now about studying it the way my mission president taught us to study it. And I just so I think I encourage people more to do that and people write in on the reviews, a lot of the reviews on the Apple podcasts are she taught me how to read the book of Mormon so that I could hear the voice of the lord. And I love the book of Mormon because of this podcast. And that's what I love. Hands down. I hope you learned some history about the doctor and covenants. And I think the doctor and covenants obviously is inspired and there's great things in there. But the book of Mormon is where the power is to change our lives. Yeah, yeah, for sure. So just pivoting more towards your time as a stake in women's president. I assume that was a bit of time after being the wardrobe study president. Yeah. Do you feel maybe you weren't as young or unprepared for that or maybe you always built? Yeah, maybe a little bit more, but I had three out of my 5 kids in that calling. I was in there for 8 years and you know, I'm throwing up on the back camp a track and in the bathrooms that girls camp, you know, and I did spend a lot of hard years. I went through postpartum depression in that calling, you know, so I felt like maybe I was a little overwhelmed because my family needed more from me. But I had learned to delegate a little bit better. And being a stake in women's presence much easier than being the ward young woman's president.

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Yeah. Like ward is every week. You know, and stuff. We had camp and camp was another thing that I loved because I think maybe that my podcast is like this too. I like to laugh and have a good time and then feel the spirit and then laugh and feel the spirit. And that's what we did at camp. We ran around how to great time and then had really spiritual nights. And I have girls now. I mean, it was 20 years ago that are writing to me and saying that was one of the best times of my life. I loved that camp. The things you taught me at camp. I remember your stories, you know, whatever. So I think with that it was relating with the girls and having fun. I think sometimes people think the gospel is so strict and we're not fairies counting steps every Sunday, you know? I think heavenly father Jay Goldman Kimball said something once about we need to get people in a mood to take what we have to get them like, you know, we just need to be happy and have a good time. And that's what we did in the stake with the young women's and it was money, man. Just to have a fun time and laugh. And tell the stories. I think that's one

of the things about the podcast that people like is the stories. And I just would tell these girls, here's how the gospel works for me. And I think and then I would always share scriptures. I was always back my stories with scriptures. And it locks it in your brain. Yeah, yeah, that's awesome. If someone like a youth leader is ask you for advice on how to connect with the youth or just being because that dynamic of a youth leader in the youth, there's some kind of to be a large divide there. And it's hard to overcome and really connect any device there. You know, I thought about that as people wrote me and said, oh, you know, we loved when you were sequenced women's president and stuff, and even now when they do, and I thought, I don't remember my steak young women's presidents when I was young. And I think because they were behind the scenes. You know, like, doing the work, and I think maybe it was get in the trenches with them, like find out what they love. And be silly. I think the fact that I could run around. I would claim up their windows and hold the flashlight under my face, you know, and then jump down and run out, you know? And so I had that friendship with them, even as a steak later, I was kind of running crazy with them in the evenings and stuff and I think but then when it was get serious time, like I wasn't just a spaz leader, but then once I had had fun with them and then we sat down and had the good spiritual discussions and the stories. You know? Because then we're bonded through fun, but then we're bounded by the spirit. And that was fun. And in the ward situation, 'cause I was awarded young women's president here for about a year until I married someone who lives in Georgia and now every other week I'm back and forth. And so I think when I became a ward young woman's president, I really found the value and letting the girls do it. And that's hard because we want to have the best young women's in excellence, right? And we want to have it all fluffy and all the things. And I was like, you do it. You guys, you plan it. You carried out. You let me know what you need me to help buy or go get all help, but it's on you. And I think that was really good to have some confidence in them and to let them fail. Guess what? That was a bomb. You guys, do you have to bring the food? You didn't get there early and said anything up, you know, like, that was a mess. But luckily, it was a mess in our ward setting with just your Friends, you know? So let them fail there so that when they get to be the relief study present or they get to be leaders later in life, they will have already made the mistakes in an easier setting to make them, you know? I just think these kids are smarter and they know what they want. We plan dances for them. All the time, guess what? Kids don't dance. They don't, like, why are we still having state dances? Because they don't go, they don't want to like, what do we have like steaks sit in the room and be on your phone? 'cause that's all they do. But you know, I just think we really need to ask them what they want and let them go. Yeah. Yeah, perfect. Love that. Before we wrap up, I want to make sure people know clearly where to find junior podcast. So I got one more question for you, but where would you send them to find out more about you and your team just Google come follow me for us? There's come tell me for us dot com. It's a website, but any way you listen to podcasts. It's on Apple. It's on iTunes. It's on Spotify stitcher, all of those things. And I actually took three weeks off. I've never taken any time off in these two and a half years.

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And I took the last three weeks off because my we were vacationing. So people are gonna go, wait, there's no podcast, but it starts again on Monday and we'll continue on. For however long. But that's great. That's great. Well, you're definitely in my subscription Q of podcasts. So I appreciate the work you're doing and hopefully more people check it out. Last question I have for you, Melanie, is your flight back on your time as a leader serving in various capacities as we've talked about. How has being a leader helped you become a better follower of Jesus Christ? I think it's helped me to look for the one. You know, to look out for the one. I love this scene where, you know, Christ has got that woman who has taken an adultery, and he gets down in the dirt right by her. You know? And he's drawing in the dirt and I think it's so he can be right there with her on the ground. He's not standing above her, you know, telling her anything he's right there with her. And I find even with the podcast, I get a lot of people that write me and for some reason they want to tell me their whole life story. And I really try to help to connect to write to them to, you know, whatever. And I just think it's helped me grow closer to Christ because I've learned to be more forgiving to be less judgmental. To be trying to just be more like him. And that concludes this how I lead interview, I hope you enjoyed it and I would ask you, could you take a minute and drop this link in an email on social media in a text? Wherever it makes most sense and share it with somebody who could relate to this experience. And this is how we develop as leaders just hearing what the other guys doing, trying something out, testing, adjusting for your area and that's where great leadership's discovered, right? So we would love to have you share this with somebody in this calling or a related calling, and that would be great and also if you know somebody any type of leader who would be a fantastic guest on how I lead segment, reach out to us go to leading saint dot org slash contact, maybe send this individual an email, letting them know that you're going to be suggesting their name for this interview will reach out to them and see if we can line them up. So again, go to leading saints dot org slash contact and there you can submit all the information and let us know. And maybe they will be on a feature how I lead segment on the leading saints podcast. And remember, text the word lead to four 747 four 7 in order to access the three most popular sessions of the liberating saints library. 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. And when the declaration was made, concerning the all and 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 can not shrink nor run away. And to which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability