



What I Learned About Leadership When My 2nd Counselor Left the Church

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Kurt Francom/Leading Saints (LS): This episode is on more of a personal note. We talk with one of my counselors when I was bishop, who is now no longer a member of the church. This is the Leading Saints Podcast, my name is Kurt Francom, I'm your host and one thing you may not know about me is I was the priesthood chorister for 6 years during my youth years. But I digress. If you're new to Leading Saints, I welcome you. This is a podcast video, we also have an online resource, that's where it started. It started as a blog and has grown from there to a vast machine with many leadership resources there upon. So, you can go leadingsaints.org to find other articles that may be related to your leadership calling. It would hopefully help you enhance your leadership because that's what we're trying to do at Leading Saints is enhance the leadership ability in the context of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. You know, one thing I hear on other podcast that I probably should mention more often is that we are not endorsed, nor sustained, nor funded, nor any part of the official Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints but nor have they told me to stop. We strive to be a faith promoting podcast and resource within the context of the church and we hope that faithful members are gaining from the leadership perspectives that we are offering here at Leading Saints and our hope is that across the board the church is becoming a church full of better leaders, more able leaders and leaders that are making a difference in building the kingdom of God. Now this episode is quite a personal episode for me so I encourage you to buckle up, listen closely, this is me interviewing a dear friend who has recently left the church and I won't regurgitate the introduction that we do during the episode but it's definitely a different type of episode than I generally do on Leading Saints but I feel like it articulates a crucial part of leadership and that is relationships between leaders and those that doubt in the church and how we can help them stay. So, here's my interview with Heath. This is Heath, how are you Heath?

Heath: I'm doing great, thanks Kurt.

LS: Yeah, well Heath and I go, I don't know if I'd say way back but in the world of the Lee Ward, we go back. I consider Heath a great friend and he was my last second counselor when I served as bishop. He was one of my counselors when I was released. This episode I'm sort of just wrestling with where to start with it a little bit but I would say, man I mean, we'll just stick with the facts. So, Heath was my second counselor and you are no longer a member of the church.

Heath: Yeah, that's right.

LS: And it isn't because you were excommunicated.

Heath: No.

LS: But it was, man, you can just tell I'm nervous laughing here, you had your name removed from the records of the church.

Heath: Yeah, in June of this year.

LS: 2016.

Heath: Yeah, 2016. My wife and I and our 3 kids. We resigned from the church.

LS: And we're going to get into that a little bit. I first want to make some clarifications upfront is one, this wasn't necessarily my idea though I maybe provoked it a little bit. I didn't go to your house and say Hey, you want to talk and let's have an interview about your experience leaving the church and these things. But obviously there is a friendship there so It's not like because you're relationship with the church ended that our relationship ended. And we weren't just

friends on a bishopric level, I mean our families have gone to Disneyland before with other families that we've served with in our ward and we live practically next door to each other. We see each other. Our kids are similar ages so it's definitely not just that we are in the same calling and you seem like a nice guy. I mean it definitely goes deeper than that. It was my request but we've been talking and you've been helping the Leading Saints world quite a bit that people don't know about is you've been helping us file all of our non-profit 501-C3 paperwork. Right?

Heath: Yeah, you know I'm an attorney and I started a non-profit this year and so I'm kind of helping you with the Leading Saints non-profit paperwork.

LS: Yeah, and you've been a lifesaver. You know, I had another attorney that was helping me. He got busy, you know, no fault to him. He was helping me as much as he could and I was in need of knowing what to do to just get this filed so that we could be recognized as a non-profit and I know that you recently set up your law firm as a non-profit, immigration law firm, and so you were more than happy to walk me through this and help me figure out how to do it and we're getting close to getting all of that paperwork filed and so I can't thank you enough for doing that. During that process, we've gone to lunch a lot together and just talked some things through about your experience and I think you've listened to various podcasts.

Heath: Yeah.

LS: And we've talked about your experience and I think at one point you said Hey, you could interview me, sort of jokingly and I said hey man, I would totally love that because the conversations we have are so insightful especially for me. I think you've benefited from them and just as two friends talking so

Heath: Yeah, you know and I thought this might be a good idea too because you know we left the church about 3 months ago. We stopped going to church, you know a few months before that and it's just we've been completely open about it with like family and friends and stuff and you know we haven't tried to hide anything and it's just but nobody wants to talk to us about it, you know. Like so.

LS: Yeah. It's like the big elephant in the room and is like Hey, let's talk about anything but that, right?

Heath: Yeah, exactly. So, I guess maybe we had the expectation that maybe some people would maybe ask us about it or want to know why or like What's going on? But really, it's like Ok. You resigned. Ok. There's been a few very short conversations about it so I thought maybe this would be a good way to talk about it and then maybe a way for people that know me and my wife and our kids, they could hear this story. It's an awkward conversation and it's something that is difficult to talk about.

LS: And I'm the lucky one that gets to have it. This is great, Heath. No, just kidding. And another point I want to make before we really dig into this is this isn't meant to be a recorded counseling session. I'm not trying to counsel you. You're not necessarily trying to counsel me. We're not trying to fix anything. We're not hoping that by the end of this that we change one another's minds. I think the one unique thing about this is that you're not, at least I haven't felt that much if any bitterness from you as far as towards the church. Some people leave the church and are like alright, let's go burn it down type thing. What they're doing is horrible. I've never felt that. We'll get into the story of that. So one, this isn't something I'm just chasing people down who have resigned from the church and trying to interview them. One, we're friends. Two, I've gained so much from our conversations. I've learned so much about myself as a leader, so if anything, this is not necessarily an analysis of you and your situation but an analysis of my situation as a leader. Obviously Leading Saints being a leadership podcast I hope that individuals that listen to this are obviously mainly leaders and that they walk away from this thinking "I wonder if there's somebody like Heath in my ward and how can I reach out to them and help them?" The thing is, as I think about this, is that I don't necessarily feel like I'm a horrible leader. Again, it's not my fault. It's not that I should have done this and you would have never left and I should have done that and I could have set you in a different direction but none the less, I've learned things as far as how I perceive individuals in my ward, what they're struggling with and so forth. So let's just go back and maybe build some context around your story, because you have sort of a unique story as it is, you weren't raised in the traditional Mormon family. Maybe give us, in 5 minutes, that background of your upbringing.

Heath: Yeah. My family are LDS going back a long ways, well, at least on my mom's side but I was raised kind of half time with my mom, half time with my grandparents. I spend 8 years living with my grandparents. They were LDS.

LS: This was in Missouri, right?

Heath: Yeah. I grew up in Missouri. My mom pretty much the entire time I was growing up, I think she didn't go to church. She started going to church when I was on my mission. But my grandparents were pretty active and me, personally, I started going to church, consistently, on a regular basis when I was a junior in high school. I was living with my grandparents and I started dating an LDS girl and I started going to church and then I started going to early morning Seminary and hanging out with the missionaries a lot and it was a great support network and great friends and it made me want to serve a mission and I served a mission after high school and I went to Ecuador.

LS: Obviously, you learned Spanish and that Spanish has blessed you in your career as an immigration attorney you use it every day.

Heath: Yeah, absolutely. exactly. You know Mormonism has definitely shaped my life and who I am and my family. I went to undergrad at BYU Idaho and I went to law school at BYU Law School.

LS: As you were serving as my counselor, near the end of being released we had some conversations that sort of brought this to the surface that you had been struggling for a while as far as the testimony goes and I'm going to use all the clichés that maybe don't...I don't mean to out you in a certain box or whatever but there are some concerns with the history of the church would you say? That categorizes it well, broadly enough. And that started in law school, right?

Heath: Well, really it started when I was an undergrad about 10 years ago, I think. Like around 2006. My father-in-law gave me the book *Rough Stone Rolling* and I read probably more than half of it and I just closed it and I had to not look at it anymore because it was just bringing up so many things that...it wasn't the narrative that I knew about church history. But then I kind of, they say 'the shelf' so I kind of just put it on the shelf and in law school I took a class. Since I went to BYU law school there was a class on Joseph Smith and the law and kind of like his legal battles with the Kirtland Safety Society and some things touching on polygamy and some other things so I took a whole class on Joseph Smith and lawsuits, trials, it all kind of related back to the law but yeah, there were some things that were discussed in that class that I just had never heard before and to me were shocking. And so those were other things that I kind of put on the shelf and tried not to think about.

LS: And those listening that may not be familiar with *Rough Stone Rolling*, it is a biography about Joseph Smith written by Richard Bushman who is probably the scholar on Joseph Smith.

He's a patriarch, this isn't some outlier, third party book that is written by somebody bitter towards the church. This is a historic book that is very historic and so you do go into some of those details of Joseph Smith that weren't taught in primary or young mens/young womens.

Heath: Yeah and it's written by an active, faithful, believing member of the church so it's not like anti-Mormon literature.

LS: Yeah. And so it's not that you got engulfed in this literature that just wasn't seeing things right or they were twisting the truth. It's a strong historic book that I would have no hesitation recommending to individuals and I'm sure that a lot of listeners have read it and found it faith promoting as helping you reanalyze your faith as well as far as how you built your faith and testimony.

Heath: Yeah, other people that have read it have told me that it strengthened their testimony.

LS: And would you say that was sort of the beginning of these questions and reanalyzing your testimony?

Heath: Yeah, absolutely. Before I read that book, I don't think I'd ever doubted, ever, about Joseph Smith or the church or the church leaders.

LS: So you go through that class and then you graduate law school.

Heath: December 2011

LS: And at this point you were married before law school, right?

Heath: Yeah, I got married 2004.

LS: Ok. And so you graduated law school and then you go off and start your career in law and after that point, you put it on the shelf at that point.

Heath: Yeah, exactly. I mean it never crossed my mind like 'stop going to church or anything' it was kind of one of those things where it was like 'well, I guess we'll find out after this life what those answers are.'

LS: So from there it's on the shelf and then when did that shelf start to break down? What was the next, I mean, you really had to reanalyze and take a hard look at things.

Heath: So after law school I got a job in Salt Lake City at a non-profit as an immigration attorney and I moved into the Lee Ward and after maybe a year or so I was called as the Elders Quorum President. I guess that was a leadership calling.

LS: That was really your first official leadership calling.

Heath: Yeah, absolutely. I taught in Sunday School or priesthood lessons before but now, like a leader, and so I felt like a leader needs to have a strong testimony, I can't have doubts and so really it became my goal to extinguish all doubts and just have, I don't know how to describe it, an unbreakable testimony kind of thing, like strengthen my testimony. Get rid of any lingering doubts or anything that I had in my mind and so that was my mission.

LS: It seemed like it's that call, and I remember I submitted your name to the Stake Presidency to be the Elders Quorum president. So that for you, you just sort of had to go back to the shelf and you had to say if I'm going to be a leader in this church, I'm going to have to get rid of this shelf, right?

Heath: Yeah.

LS: Whether that was right or wrong and as we go through this, again, we're just telling the story. Whether I'm right or wrong, whether you're right or wrong, doesn't matter. This is your story.

Heath: And I would say, even today, I don't claim to know any of the answers. I still don't know what the answers are.

LS: And this is the part, and maybe we'll get to it, as we talked after you resigned from the church, that really surprised me is that it wasn't that you had now arrived to a determination, you now have the answers and it's not in the church, it's out of the church.

Heath: And I don't know if we're jumping too far ahead here but really, the decision to resign was because it just, I don't know, maybe we need to talk more about the back story but I was Elders Quorum President, really trying to figure out...grow my testimony. Every prayer, every day became part of it, like "Help me to not doubt and help me to strengthen my testimony and to know without a doubt that the church is true." And it never crossed my mind that the church wasn't true, it's just I knew that I didn't have this super unwavering, know without a shadow of a doubt testimony, that I wanted to have. But I never thought that it wasn't true.

LS: Because in your mind, being a leader in the church, leaders in the church don't have that shelf.

Heath: Yeah.

LS: And if they do, it's empty. And so now I'm a leader in the church and so I need to get rid of this shelf in order to be an effective leader.

Heath: Yeah. And really, when I got called into the bishopric as the 2nd counselor, it was basically the same thing but just intensified. Because you've got to, on a regular basis, kind of like direct sacrament meeting. You have to bear your testimony in sacrament meeting.

LS: And during Fast and Testimony Meeting, right?

Heath: Yeah. Exactly. When you're conducting those meetings...and then, more than that, when you go to Sunday School or you're attending the priesthood meeting, people will look to you when there is questions in the class, like "Oh, well what do you think Brother Beker?" You're a member of the bishopric. You're supposed to know the answers. You're supposed to be a spiritual leader and have real insightful things to say and it just, I just...I got to the point when I was in the bishopric, and I wasn't in the bishopric for more than a year I think. Total it was maybe...about a year? Ok. It just got increasingly where I didn't think the church wasn't true, I got to the point where I couldn't say that I knew that Joseph Smith was a prophet.

LS: And in your mind that just didn't line up with how a leader is supposed to lead in the church.

Heath: Exactly. So when I would bear my testimony it would only be Christ I thought, ah man, people are going to be like...it was just these unfounded fears, I think. People are going to think. That's a weak testimony. But I just, I don't know, I just couldn't say that I believe Joseph Smith was a prophet.

LS: And this is such an interesting concept of church culture that comes up because we're coming upon General Conference and we're going to hear some incredible talks, some incredible testimonies. Man, you look at somebody like Elder Holland or President Uctdorf and you just know that they know. Not once have I felt like 'come on, you're kind of going overboard there.' They always seem sincere and we idolize these individuals, which we should, they're incredible leaders, right? I mean not idolize in the wrong fashion, but you know what I mean. We want to be that leader that can stand and testify but sometimes if we create a culture that only effective leaders are the ones with the testimony that can do that, I think we're sort of hurting ourselves or making the tent even smaller.

Heath: Yeah. And I don't think you were creating that culture but as your mentioning that, I'm having this flashback to one of our bishopric meetings and you had played a clip, and it was a great clip, it was Elder Holland giving a talk about testimony and how we shouldn't have a weak testimony but it should be a testimony where people could warm their hands by the fire of our testimony. I wanted that. I thought I needed to have that. If I'm going to be a leader, I need to have that testimony that Elder Holland was talking about. And I've told you this but I fasted, on a regular basis, to increase my testimony. To know that Joseph Smith was a prophet. I went to the temple. I prayed in the temple. I read my scriptures. It became my quest to know. And part of

that too was the Book of Mormon because they go hand in hand. Cuz' if the Book of Mormon is true, Joseph Smith must have been a prophet. And so it was just a lot of prayer to find out that that was true.

LS: And just to create some context for those listening, I want individuals to know that as I saw you serve, Heath is an incredible individual when it comes to just purly serving and he's looking very uncomfortable right now as I say this but the reality is is I don't think you every really enjoyed the administrative side of these callings. Like I've got to collect your home teaching numbers or I've got to meet but when it came to visiting...I think of Lance in the ward and I'd see you invite him over for dinner and things like that. I just always idolized that and I always thought I want to be that type of saint that does that and so the reason I say that is one misconception that many individuals, and I think it only takes about a few months in leadership when you can get rid of this misconception, but its individuals that have doubts, it's not because they're sinning or they're doing something wrong or theyjust really want to sin and so these doubts are just sort of a smoke screen to that. What breaks my heart is that you were really striving to be better. You were fasting, you were going to the temple and you were just craving that certainty but for whatever reason it didn't come in the way that you expected it to or if it came at all.

Heath: Yeah.

LS: Right?

Heath: That's the thing. I look back on it and, I don't know, maybe God was trying to give me an answer and I just couldn't hear it or I wouldn't hear it, I don't know. That's the thing. I still, I just don't know.

LS: Yeah. As we've had these conversations in your office and such, at one point you said that you don't think you would have left if you weren't put in the bishopric. And I'm like "Great Heath, thanks for blaming it on me." But what you mean by that is that it just turned up the dial on that pressure to be that leader who could stand and say "I know, I know, I know."

Heath: Exactly.

LS: During that time when we served together, before you even let me know you were struggling with something, you seemed like there was a struggle going on. You aren't the type that necessarily is going to open up and let these things pour out and I think a lot of people are like that but looking back, with hindsight, it's more obvious that this was going on. That you were struggling with this.

Heath: Yeah.

LS: So, let's just kind of finish up the timeline here. Basically, I was called to the stake presidency and so a release was coming. We called the first counselor as the new bishop and I remember that, and this...would you say, near the end there this was sort of the pinnacle of what you were going through.

Heath: Yeah. The bishopric got dissolved, like you said, because you got called into the stake presidency, but probably just a few weeks before that, yeah, things just...I don't know, do you want me to talk about it?

LS: Yeah, let's do it. I mean if you're comfortable with it.

Heath: I just, it was such a struggle with me. I wanted so bad, that burning in the bosom or however you want to describe it. I just wanted it so bad like that undeniable answer when you pray, to know about the Book of Mormon or Joseph Smith and I just couldn't get it. Or, I couldn't recognize it or whatever the answer is but I became increasingly just depressed and just incredibly depressed, is the word for it.

LS: And how did that manifest itself? Did you take days off work? Would you sleep in?

Heath: Yeah. It was like I was consumed by this, is this true or is this not true? I was consumed with getting the answer and I couldn't get the answer and is the problem me? Am I just not good enough? I don't know. It was hard. And the thing is, so it was a Sunday, and this was just a few weeks before the big change, the bishopric. It was a Sunday. I'd taken a late nap and I woke up from my nap and for the first time in my life I had thought, "It's not true." It was just like, you'd have to understand where I was at and the depression I was feeling and struggling so hard to

get the answer, I felt relieved. I felt like this incredible relief because if it's not true then that kind of answers it. That's why there's all these things that don't make sense. And I remember that I woke up from the nap and I had that thought and I remember telling my wife, "Yeah. I think the answer might be that it's not true." But then I felt relief for a little bit, right? But after, it wasn't long, but the relief kind of replaced itself with thoughts that were like, "Well shoot, if the church isn't true what's the point?" I told you I felt relieved to have an answer but then I thought, "Well if it's not true there's no point." So the Sunday where they changed the bishopric I just couldn't bring myself to go to church and Rachel and I, my wife, we tried to come up with something to do that day, like an excuse to be out of town. We just stayed at home. And I stayed in bed. And we didn't go to church to be released but it was because I couldn't bring myself to stand in front of the ward and I don't know.

LS: And going on from my perspective, I was there and I remember sitting in that sacrament Meeting like, "Now, where's Heath?"

Heath: I didn't tell anyone.

LS: Yeah. And at this point we'd had some of these conversations. I knew you were sort of going through this process but I was just like "Man, he's my friend. I want him here. We've sort of been in the ditches together. We've been in this bishopric and it's ending" and it's kind of a reflective meeting as they generally are, as those changes are happening. Now, knowing what I know now, we would have had you stand, with your wife, and share your testimony and so I can understand going through that why you wouldn't want to be there. So let's just pause for a minute here and, again, man, this is a tough episode because it's a little personal for me I guess, but none the less I've been so blessed from our interactions that I've got to share this. I don't want this to seem like, "OK, I've brought this guy on the podcast and he has received this answer that the church isn't true."

Heath: Yeah, and I'm not trying to make it sound like that either.

LS: Right. And I want to just make sure that people listening that is just what your experience where you were going through, you were in such a race to get that confirmation, to gain that certitude that when the thought, that I would claim where the thought would come from may be different where you would claim the thought would maybe come from, when that thought came across your mind 'well maybe it just isn't true' and suddenly that stress lifts, nobody can blame

you for entertaining that. Right? I mean you were depressed. You had been fasting, you'd been going to the temple, you'd been begging for this answer, right?

Heath: Yeah.

LS: And way back in primary we've had those lessons of ok, you just read Moroni then you pray and the answers come and absolutely that's a very simplified experience of what my experience had been. I have received that witness and I'm giving my life to this church through this service I mean the time, the things I've given, I really feel like I've received that but my heart just breaks that when you're going through that I wish, again, this isn't about what I could have done or couldn't have, but I wish I could have done something. You know?

Heath: Yeah.

LS: And I don't know if we'll discover through this interaction what that thing is but again, this comes to the purpose of this interview, as leaders are listening, they need to stop and just ask themselves 'do I have any Heaths in my ward?' and what are you going to do about it, right? Now, going back to when we were still serving. We had these interactions where you just said, 'you know, I'm struggling with this' and we had some good discussions and I validated what you're saying. I didn't say 'oh, Heath. Come on. Forget about it.' I really tried to validate and to be honest I walked away from those interactions feeling like 'you know, Heath is OK.' He's struggling and that's cool but I wasn't worried about you. I thought you were sort of coming out of it.

Heath: Yeah. Just to say something on what you said, I've never claimed that that thought that the church wasn't true, I've never claimed that that was revelation. But the thought was there. It was the first time I'd ever thought it and I did feel relief. But I don't know, yeah.

LS: And that's where I go back to nobody can blame you if in that moment that you entertained that idea and the stress went away. To me I look back to how can I raise my kid to believe in these principles and understand the process of getting a testimony without building that stress as they go through that process, right?

Heath: Yeah. Absolutely.

LS: And as we interact with members how can we interact with these members and encourage them towards testimony without building that stress.

Heath: Yeah. Cuz' me and you had talked. I'd told you that I was struggling with doubts and with my testimony. I remember that you had made the comment, not that you were going to release me, but that maybe you should release me from the bishopric. This was before we knew you were going to get called into the Stake Presidency. It's hard to know what I was thinking back then but I was probably trying to act like things were better than they actually were. I didn't want to be released. I didn't think I needed to be released.

LS: Just to clarify, I wasn't necessarily saying maybe we should release you because we can't have somebody with doubts in the bishopric but more, I was just like, listen. You were starting your law practice at this time. You had a lot coming at you. You were sleeping in your office some nights.

Heath: That's right, I was.

LS: You were just very stressed there so I kind of approached this like 'Heath, listen. If we need to release you it's not because you failed.

Heath: And you're absolutely right and that's the way I remember it too. You were defiantly coming from a place of love and we're friends and that's the way I took it to but I honestly thought that it was a struggle and I was going to come out of the other end with this perfect knowledge that it was all true. I really thought that.

LS: And you were in this struggle and the struggle is going to be worth it, right?

Heath: Yeah. I guess.

LS: So let's kind of finish this story to bring us up to, 'cuz this was a year ago that the change happened. I remember soon after we were released, you met with the new bishop and said 'listen. I'm out.' Not out but I'm just going to step away from being involved in the church.

Heath: At that point, so when they called the new bishopric, at that point I'd completely lost my testimony of Joseph Smith or the Book of Mormon and stuff and so my brother-in-law was getting married around that same time and my temple recommend was expired so I renewed my temple recommend and I felt guilty for it because I think the question is like 'do you have a testimony of, which is very vague' so I think I kind of justified it. At this point I could go either way, right? I really wanted to go to that wedding. I didn't want to be excluded from my brother-in-law's wedding.

LS: And that family knew nothing of what you were going through.

Heath: Exactly. I hadn't shared anything with them or anybody about my doubts.

LS: And not going would mean 'Come on, man. You let your temple recommend expire? Get the temple recommend so you can come to my wedding.'

Heath: Exactly. I ended up not going to the wedding anyway but it's because I had a client come to my office that had a very urgent case and I slept in my office for 3 days and worked around the clock to do that case and I missed my brother-in-law's wedding anyways but then right after the wedding I came into the new bishop's office and I gave him my temple recommend because I felt like it would be dishonest for me to have it because I couldn't say I believed, you know?

LS: What transpired, because from there your family wasn't really at church regularly after that. What transpired between that and then the resignation.

Heath: We just stopped coming to church. We have a good mutual friend that was in the ward and it was like their last Sunday and I think that was the only time that we had gone to church in like the last...I think that's the only time I've come to the Lee Ward in the last year. So really, we

just stopped coming to church. I started listening to a lot of podcasts that deal with Mormon LDS topics. I was searching for something that kind of talked about all these issues with church history and that recognize that maybe there are some problems there and kind of validated it. I think that if I would have found something like that early on, I don't know. It's hard to know what I would have done but I think I've come to a place where I'm at currently where I feel like I could start going to church again but my testimony. I don't know that it will be what it was before. I don't know if any of this makes sense.

LS: Sure. Actually the bishop that replaced me was only in for 6 months and had to move because of family situations and then a new bishop was called and I remember coming to church one Sunday and the bishop mentioning to me that they had gotten these resignation letters from your family and I was blown away, like ah, and to be honest it completely broke my heart because I had served with you for so long and I knew your family and it's fine that they separate but I hope they don't feel like they have to resign and it almost made me think man, maybe they're more bitter than I thought. And you've mentioned that you just found that letter that is online and it says all the right legal things and sent it in and that letter sounds pretty bitter I mean if anyone read it it's like 'man, what's this guy's problem?'

Heath: Yeah, I told you that there's a website and I kind of told you it's almost as easy as buying something on Amazon like 'oops, I didn't mean to take it that far.' The thing is the decision, to resign, there's a website. You don't have to write up anything.

LS: You hit print and fill your names in.

Heath: Yeah, exactly. So it's just putting your name on a form letter that gets sent to the church from this website so I mean it only takes a couple of minutes and then it's done. And it was kind of a rash decision but I just, the thing is, with me, I've always kind of been all or nothing like no half efforts. I wasn't going to church and I didn't want to be a jack Mormon or if I was going to have a religion I didn't want to half live it. And plus, I had this thought that this doesn't mean this is forever it just means that this is where I'm at right now, as far as resigning. Plus, I don't want to pretend to be somebody that I'm not and I get asked at work if I'm LDS. We live in Salt Lake, it's Utah. It's a common question 'oh, are you LDS?' For those months that we weren't going to church and that I stopped believing in Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon it was so hard to answer that question because I felt like if I said yes, I was being not honest but what other answer was there? So, I don't know. Part of me thought it would just make it be easier 'cuz then I could just truthfully tell people, no, I'm not LDS. But honestly, it hasn't gotten any easier. It's still, probably even just more awkward. Probably once a week I maybe a little bit regret resigning and think it was, I don't know, was that the right things to do?

Heath: Yeah. So how would you describe, where are you at right now with it all, I mean emotionally with your perspective on it all?

Heath: So here's the good part. I feel like I'm happier than I've been in a really long time and it's not just like the ups and downs and I'm just on an up. I really feel like overall I just feel more at peace. I just feel like I don't have this inner turmoil inside of me, killing me, that I have to find out that it's all true 'cuz I guess I've just kind of let that go. I told you that the thing is when I was going through all of this I did what I thought I was supposed to. I stayed away from anything like websites or podcasts or anything that would be considered against the church and it wasn't until we stopped going, like a few months later, that I started listening to some of that stuff but honestly I feel like some of that stuff has helped me because I didn't know that there was people like me that doubted and honestly people at church don't talk about that they have doubts so I just thought that maybe everybody had these strong testimonies. I didn't know anyone that was in my position and so I think that now that I've kind of found these podcasts and listened to some people and I've listened to some things where people have issues about church history yet they still believe in the church or come to church and they still serve in the church. Honestly, I feel like I could find my place in the church that way where it's like there's so many good things about the church but for some reason in my mind at least it all kind of came down to Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon but I feel like I'm at a place in my life now where I could just say 'you know, I don't care about church history anymore.' It's just like it is what it is. But there's still good things about church and I think I could come to church. I'm at a point in my life, I guess, where I could just kind of let that stuff go. But I wasn't before.

LS: And when you said that initially in our conversations off the recording here, as a leader and as a bishop I ask myself, 'People that are struggling with this, how can I get them to that point before the resignation. You'd agree that the resignation didn't help you get there it was just sort of a part of that time line, right? It wasn't like 'oh, I needed to resign so I could step back and look' but you said it was done sort of hastily.

Heath: Yeah.

LS: And then you decompressed a little bit and were able to look back and think 'you know what?' and you've discovered others like you, like Bill Reel's podcast through some of these others and thought 'wow, other people are doing it. I'm not the only person in the world to have this concern.'

Heath: Yeah.

LS: And so what would you say to a bishop like how, if we could turn back time a little bit is there anything that could have been done to help you have that decompression.

Heath: I don't know, cuz I was in a bad spot. I was in the darkest point of my life. I don't know. Yeah. That's a good question.

LS: These are the things I love to ponder over and think about because this is such a crucial turning point. Because though you're not a member on paper you're being the truest to yourself then many members are. Right? I think many people get caught up in the culture of the church and they think well, everybody goes to church but in their private lives they're not reading the scriptures and they're not really focused there but it fits into their day to day culture, right? And I don't mean to make a general statement about the membership of the church but you recognized what you believed and where you were at and you took a decision and now maybe some of those decisions were more hasty?

Heath: Yeah. And I'm just thinking about your question. Maybe it would have been a good thing to be released from the bishopric. But then again, there's such a stigma. Like "oh, what did he do?" But that's the thing, I don't know that there was anything that could have taken that pressure off once it built up but I don't know. Honestly, stepping away for a few months, I feel better.

LS: And stepping away you don't mean resigning. I don't want people to think resigning helped because it helped me step away but it's been a way that has forced you to step away.

Heath: Yeah, exactly. When you're struggling with doubts and you're in the bishopric, I don't know what other wards are like but in the Lee Ward you're getting called multiple times a week during the week to give blessings.

LS: To give rides.

Heath: To give rides, there's just a lot of needs.

LS: We're in the inner city, there's a lot going on.

Heath: Yeah, and so you're giving blessings or you're going over to people's homes that are really struggling and you're like 'man, I'm struggling too.' But you're trying to build them up and help people and that was difficult for me because I didn't want to be inauthentic. I didn't want to pretend. It was important to be to not pretend that I was a strong believer if I wasn't so.

LS: There's this book, and I haven't read it, it's above my pay grade, called Antifragile. And it's this concept of being antifragile you have to tear your muscle in order to build muscle and it all goes back to this balance where I feel like sometimes we try to be so strong, we try to be so convinced of the gospel that we kind of go down the path you do. I'm going to fast more, I'm going to pray more, I'm going to go to the temple more, and in reality, pushing that way, rather than stepping back actually man, and I'm not trying to sound controversial, saying like 'maybe you should just go out and tell people to stop coming to church whatever' but as leaders, how can we get members that are in this state to just step back and take a break for a minute. And that doesn't mean that you ask them 'ok, we need you to not come to church for 6 weeks.'

Heath: Yeah.

LS: But if I was to go back, again, this is more an analysis of me and my leadership style and how I approached it because hopefully leaders listening can analyze this but how can we approach these members that are going through this doubt and just saying I just want you to stop praying about it for a minute. Give certitude a rest.

Heath: Yeah.

LS: And just come to church. Do nothing else but just come to church. Sit in the back. and just take it in. Right? Don't try to be 100% home teacher. If you don't want to go to the second hour don't go to the second hour. If you don't want to go to the third hour, don't go to the third hour.

Heath: Yeah.

LS: Just come to church. Take in what you can. Go home and just love your family.

Heath: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I mean because I was driving myself crazy and I was making myself incredibly depressed just trying. I have to get the answer and I need it now.

LS: And you're pushing, pushing, pushing and then the thought came through your mind 'well maybe it isn't true.' And that was suddenly the easier path and that was the only answer coming at that point so I'm going to take it.

Heath: I was not comfortable at all then with uncertainty.

LS: Man, that's such a powerful statement, Heath. Listen to that! I was not comfortable with uncertainty.

Heath: Yeah.

LS: And I think if members cannot say that, there's a problem. Cuz Health, I promise right now I'm pretty certain I've had such remarkable experiences as a leader and when I stand up in stake conference and I bear my testimony there's some statements of certitude there or hyperbole.

Heath: Yeah.

LS: But that doesn't mean that everybody's experience has to be that or everybody's path to certitude needs to be there nor is the goal certitude.

Heath: Yeah.

LS: And I feel so much that we blind ourselves by thinking I need to be able to stand up in sacrament meeting and say I know, I know, I know and then I get a star on my forehead and I sit down and I say I'm one of you.

Heath: Yeah.

LS: And so going back, what was it, what was the statement?

Heath: I wasn't comfortable with uncertainty.

LS: We have to be comfortable with uncertainty. We have to be that. As leaders, we have to be comfortable with a gospel doctrine teacher that stands up that is uncertain about things. We have to be comfortable with a counselor in the bishopric that is uncertain about things.

Heath: Yeah. I've told you one of the podcasts I listen to is Secular Buddhism and the guy that does the podcast was actually an AP in my mission.

LS: Is he still a member of the church?

Heath: He says he is. He put on a workshop here in Salt Lake and I went to it like last December and honestly, it was amazing and it brought so much peace to me. After the workshop, for a couple of days, I couldn't talk about anything else, with my wife. One thing that I've learned from the secular Buddhism is what's important is the here and the now. This life. Because I think, I don't know anything about Buddhism but I've listened to this podcast and I've tried to learn and one of my clients is a Buddhist temple and so I've spent hours and hours talking with my client about Buddhism and stuff and one of the things I've taken away from Buddhism, and not that this is like their core teaching but they're ok with uncertainty. They're not

so worried about, at least from my point of view, having all the answers. It's just like you can't control what the truth is, you can't control what is after this life and what isn't after this life. You can't control any of it so kind of like and that's ok. All you know is this is what you have. Cherish the present moment and don't get yourself so worked up about what's coming next. And that really helped me. I think that it's about its ok to not have all the answer.

LS: Yeah. In the culture of the church I feel like we sometimes almost brag about that certitude.

Heath: Yeah. Well, the one true church.

LS: Right. And again, I'm not trying to make this a controversial podcast, I'm here to truly believe that this is the one true church but how do we define that? Sometimes we define that in a way that that means nobody else's church is true at all and so and it's these statements as leaders that are similar to the article I wrote about 'Your without a shadow of doubt testimony is hurting your leadership' and this is what I'm talking about is when we stand there and we talk with such conviction and certitude, those without such conviction and certitude think that they have done something wrong and that they haven't arrived. But if we stand there and let the ward members know that we're ok with our own uncertainty, they'll be ok with their uncertainty and then they'll come back and I would be foolish to say that I'm certain about every last principle of the gospel, every last part of history that has happened because I'm not. I'm not a scholar, I'm not an intellectual. I can't talk myself out of any question. But, none the less, something is calling me to this church, to this gospel, to Joseph Smith and who he was. But sometimes that posture of the one true church sometimes hurts other individuals trying to arrive there. I hope I'm making sense.

Heath: Yeah. No, you are. I've told you I haven't forgotten about the spiritual experiences I've had in the church. My mission was amazing. It really was the best 2 years. There's so many good memories of the church that I hold on to. You feel good going to church. There's a good feeling there, for sure. They're good people. I love members of the church. That's the thing, I miss it. At times in the last few months when I've really regretted resigning is because somebody that I really respect or a peer has invited me to dinner and they're LDS and nobody knows I resigned, I just don't talk about it, and I'm not trying to hide it but I've gone to dinner with people I really respect and they're leaders in their wards and stakes. I'm not trying to hide the fact that I resigned and I'd be totally open and tell them that I resigned if they asked me 'oh, what's your calling now.' I would not try to hide it at all but I'm just kind of secretly hoping it doesn't come up because I think if they found out, their opinion of me would change and I'd lose that relationship and I miss those relationships. I miss coming to church. I miss being with people and having that connection.

LS: Yeah. That's awesome. I remember during one of our lunches, you said something that really stood out to me. You've sort of gotten to a better place. You've been struggling still with some of these historical facts that still bother you and things but you've kind of discovered other people have put them aside and are still believing and you said to me 'what if it's just about Christ?' When you said that, I kind of stopped you and I said 'Heath, it IS just about Christ. Sure, the Lord has His pattern through prophets and by saying that doesn't diminish Joseph Smith's role or Brigham Young's role but it truly is about Christ and His grace and that I'm not further along the path than you are. Though on paper I have some ordinances and those ordinances are helping me progress but we're all in this together, we're all learning in our different paths and I think, right now, that some of these decisions you've made that they've been done in haste but I think we can always go back to Christ is still there and His Atonement still works for you. You always have that option of coming back or returning to the church, right?

Heath: Honestly, like I told you when we were out to lunch that I read this story of someone that had resigned and came back and it was a 2 1/2 year process and I was like 'oh, man. I didn't know that's what it was.'

LS: Did you expect it to be shorter or longer or what?

Heath: I thought when I was ready to come back I'd just come talk to you or my bishop, like alright.

LS: Let's do this. Fill the font.

Heath: Yeah. Yep, you're ready to go, lets baptize you. But it's not. Honestly, all I did was I read one person's story and I don't know if it's really how it is or if it's changed or what not but from what I understand it takes a year, you've got to come to church for like a year and follow the commandments and everything and then confess to all your sins, why you resigned and everything and then after a year you can get re-baptized and then after another year you can get your temple blessings restored. What I read was that it involves some letters to church headquarters and the First Presidency of all your sins and stuff and they make a determination for whether you can come back. That's pretty serious. I didn't know that's what it was.

LS: When you said that to me I'm just so happy you're thinking about it. And again, not that you're thinking about it every day or whatever but you know it's an option, man and like we talked about at our lunch is that man, you're always welcome here and I don't think that anybody is especially our ward, turns over every 6 months so nobody really knows either of us anymore. But um, man, I hope you do just be that person that just sits there and absorbs what comes and don't worry about the stress of the pressure of being that perfect member, alright?

Heath: Yeah. It's already been mentioned but really, it sticks out in my mind that there's a person that has a blog and they said that really, they don't care about church history. They just care about the good parts of the church. I really feel like after hearing that, and of course I just recently heard that, I'm already resigned, but I was like I can do that now. I could be that Mormon but then I think man, a few years ago...if I came back to church I might be the type of Mormon I would have hated a couple of years ago. But, I don't know.

LS: But that's Ok. Because that's the thing. We've got to be ok with those Mormons. There's not a Mormon nobody has to fit in a box when they come to church. Anybody's welcome here, right?

Heath: Yeah. When people have certain attitudes or things. They have problems with the church people are like 'go find another church.' That was my attitude a couple of years ago, but I would have a different attitude now. I think it's good to invite people to have different perspectives and that's ok. I don't know, I don't have any of the answers.

LS: K. My last question is a tough one.

Heath: K. Yeah.

LS: Will you just share with us your testimony, where it's at. You can say whatever you want. Even if it's something I would disagree with.

Heath: Yeah. Absolutely. So, I still pray. I can't not pray. And I pray like somebody's listening even though now I'm not sure somebody is or not. And that's the thing. I hope there's a God. I hope he loves us. I hope that families are forever. I hope that there is something after this life, I really want there to be but I just don't know anymore but I've come to a point where I'm ok. I'm

ok not knowing. I love my family. I love my job. I really care about being a good person and raising my kids to be good people and to just love others and so I don't know. It's pretty weak but I just hope God exists. I hope Christ is there. I hope He's listening to my prayers and I hope I can be with my friends and family after this life, I really want that to be true.

LS: That concludes my interview with Heath. I hope many of you that have sat here and listened to this episode have thought of an individual in your ward or maybe the counselors in your presidency or maybe you've been inspired to reassess your perspectives on individuals who you think have the strongest testimony of certitude and just to conclude this episode, I just want to expound a little bit on what I've learned through my relationship with Heath and as you can listen I'm encouraged by how he talks about things. I'm encouraged that he's actually interested in the process of what it takes to become again a member of The Church of Jesus Christ and I hope in the future there can be a second part to this episode talking about his return and if he doesn't, you know I'll still love Heath and his family always. It's obvious that membership in the church is not what defines love for anybody and I feel that most members of the church would feel the same way. Consider this quest for certitude that we encourage in the church and it's a good quest. I feel like I've gone through my own version of that quest for certitude and I've had remarkable experiences. I've had spiritual experiences. I've stood at the lecterns of the church and testified in my own way about things that I feel pretty certain about. Now I've never seen an angel. I've never heard a voice from Heaven tell me these things but I've had experiences that in my own way, testified to my heart that Joseph Smith was in fact a prophet and that what he did and translated was the word of God. I'm aware of the sticky history, the messy facts that for some make that more difficult to believe even when they've had a spiritual witness in some form in some way, whether strong or weak. I don't think any leader in the church as they stand and testify boldly are meaning to diminish others. When in fact those words of power sometimes build up others and testify to others. For me to personally I've sort of just discovered through this relationship with Heath this paradox that happens with a bold testimony. It can build some but at the same time alienate others. In no way am I calling that across the board we water down testimonies so they don't alienate any but yet I think they defiantly do more good than the bad. It's not about testimony prese but it's about being aware of individuals who hear those testimonies and crave to own one themselves. That crave the certitude that people like myself experience and I'd be foolish to say that I'm 100% certain but boy am I certainly convinced. So consider the individuals that are doubting in your ward or in your group. Consider the relationship you have with them and when they're begging from their knees for a spiritual witness above all other witnesses that will convince their heart of the truthfulness of this gospel and for some reason it hasn't come in the way that they have thought. Maybe it has come but not in the way they expected and so they're not ready to accept those messages, those spiritual witnesses that come or maybe it hasn't come yet for some reason. How can we help them just step back for a minute and give their quest for certitude a break. Because that very quest for certitude is what is leading them to uncertainty. This is the great paradox of leadership is to encourage and challenge and push, push, push. Become greater, become more and to accomplish things above our capacity but at the same time, not diminishing them and discouraging them and giving them more and more examples of why they don't measure up. I

don't have the answer to that and I don't think this episode was meant to give that answer. But maybe spend some time pondering over how can we encourage individuals to try the quest for certainty without discouraging them and putting too much stress on them to get there today. I'd love your feedback. I'd love your thoughts and perspectives that you've had during this interview. I know I've been blessed by my relationship with Heath and his family and understanding what they're going through and I hope, now that you've heard his story, you've been blessed as well. I hope that this episode has been an example of maybe a difference that we're making with Leading Saints. Obviously, there's other ways to make differences, there's other ways to build the kingdom but this has just been the way that I have felt most inspired to contribute to the world, to the church. Some days are more discouraging than others but I can't do this without your help. All we ask at Leading Saints is a dollar a month that will provide resources, free up some time so that myself and the team can do more episodes like this one. I hate sounding like a telethon at the end of every episode but I truly challenge you to consider today, if you go to leadingsaints.org/help in contributing a dollar a month. If you don't want to, at least email me and tell me how we can increase the quality of content, the quality of resource at Leading Saints so that you do feel confident and don't lose any sleep in contributing that dollar a month. Until next time, be a leader and not a calling.