



Being an Essentialism Bishop | An Interview with Greg McKeown

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Kurt Francom (LS): Today I'm very excited to welcome an author that I've been following his last few books and been following the content he puts online and it's really been life changing and impactful for me and that person is Greg McKeown.. How are you Greg?

Greg McKeown (Greg): I'm just doing wonderful. Thanks for having me.

LS: Yeah for sure. Now you are in Menlo Park area in California?

Greg: That's it.

LS: Now you don't sound like your accent doesn't sound too Menlo Parkian.

Greg: I love how that sounded like you said accident. Referring to my accent.

LS: No there's nothing accidental about your accent.

Greg: I'm from London, England originally and grew up in Leeds and Yorkshire in the north of England.

LS: Great so I know there's a long story behind it but generally speaking how did you land all the way in California from London.

Greg: Well, it really started right when I came home from my mission and enrolled in law school and I just was so hungry to feel the sense of mission and to maintain the sense of mission I've felt for 2 years. I just couldn't seem to feel it fully in law and there's nothing wrong with law and lots of important work to be done there but I just could not sense my complete mission there but I was still in it. I was actually, actually this story that's interesting I was reflecting on recently was I went back to visit somebody in the church office building and they said something just curious and in passing said look if

you do decide to stay in America you should come and help us with this event and it wasn't so much what they wanted me to do as that question and the assumption of if you didn't have to do what you are doing if you could do something different what would it be? And so I went down the foyer of the church office building and wrote down on a piece of paper, "What would you do if you could do anything?" and I brainstormed the answers for the next 20 minutes. And when I was finished was what I was struck by not what was on the list but what was not on the list. Law school was not on the list. It was not the thing. So what do you do? And really what I think that moment came down to is are you going to do what is good or you going to do what you said in the past you were going to do or are you going to do the Lord's will and the Lord's work in the Lord's time and that's a different challenge. It's a much different criteria for making a decision and finally as I was grappling with that I thought well I better call my parents. And so I called the 15 digit number back to England and then my mother answered fortunately. And she said I think you better talk to dad. And so he comes on the phone, what are you going to say? After all of that time, money, effort... Your son is halfway around the world and has a hair brained idea to not do what he's been doing and so actually what happened is that he listened which is not entirely like him and then because all Englishmen quote Shakespeare over tea and crumpets over breakfast in the morning, he pulls out this line from Hamlet. He says, "Son, you what I always told you. To thine own self; be true." And incidentally he had never said that to me his whole life. And then he added this and I'm sure you'll recognize this he said, "Do what is right, let the consequence follow." And so that was it! I never went back to law school.

LS: Wow! And in hindsight I'm guessing you don't regret that decision?

Greg: I've never regretted it in short, medium or the long run. Not even for a moment. But I don't think we do regret decisions where we just have those moments of clarity of this is the right direction. This is what we're supposed to do. This is where were supposed to go from here. And of course that doesn't mean you have all the answers forever going forward. Of course you don't in face that little story is really sort of the work of life. Mind you, it's not that we get an answer then were' done it's not focus as a noun. It's focus as a verb. It's this continual perpetual effort of what to figure out what is the Lord's will for me. What is the timing he has in mind for me and to seek that so constantly, to admit often that we don't have the answers. I mean, I only half-jokingly would share it this way that there are only 2 kinds of people in the world. The first are people who are lost and the second type kind of person is someone who knows they are lost. And it's that second category, if we can get ourselves into that place that when I'm staring into that piece of paper that I know I'm lost, what am I to do? What is the right path? And if we can get ourselves into that mindset, if we can get our heart condition into that place of really humility, broken heart, contrite spirit that's the idea isn't it? But if you can get into that place then you know what to do. In a sense if you're lost

and you know you are lost you're not lost anymore. And there comes this continual perpetual journey that I feel like I'm still on. And that is sort of how it all began.

LS: Well, that's great. Well, I'm curious about your background a little bit. Being LDS in London did you come from a long history of members in the church? Or are you a first generation Mormon, second generation? How did that?

Greg: On my mother's side she was a convert at 17 and so a couple of her friends invited her to an activity and just a few weeks after that she joined the church and it transformed her whole life her sense of who she was and compared to how she understood herself before so it was a massive transformational experience. And on my father's side my grandparents through 2 missionaries who were exhausted tired out and decided to knock on 3 more doors in London and they knocked into my grandparents and that equally transformational but in a different way. They were in turn to be the first non US temple president and matron in the world serving in London several years. They've both passed away now. Who they are and the tradeoffs they made and what they represent their example thunders down to me. So that's the longer story.

LS: Yeah so, how would you describe your upbringing being raised in an LDS home? How would you describe the development of your personal testimony?

Greg: I mean, when I think about Joseph Smith as the master asker. I feel like there was a lot of that in my home. There was not a sense of, for me, not a sense of this is how it is. It was you need to; you always need to go to God to figure this out. It was a testimony; it was clear there was no ambiguity around that growing up. But it was also clear as that, that I had to be the one praying. I had to be the one writing in my journal. I had to be the one reading my scriptures. I had to be going to church. I had to be seeking the Lord myself. And so, there was no sense for me of theirs' never been this shocking moment of what did my, what do we really believe, or that happened in our history or none of that. There's never been any of that because I was reading all about that from right the beginning. There was no sense of, I never had a sense that the leaders in the church were perfect, that's not our doctrine. They do carry keys and they do represent Christ. These things have not, have been with me from very young and I do, I know to this moment with clarity, with clarity beyond words that Joseph Smith saw we he said he saw. That this is the stone cut out of the mountain without hammers. I know as well as I know anything in my life that it will continue on in its destiny. That it will grow and break forward with or without me, with or without any of us, individually so I want to be a part of it. I want to fulfill my own mission in that broader mission.

LS: That's fantastic. So that testimony led you to a mission. Where did you serve your mission?

Greg: I served in Toronto, Canada. The Canada Toronto east mission

LS: Great! Did you use any French up there or was it all English.

Greg: There were no missionaries that spoke French in the mission. But we did have a whole a zone of Chinese speaking missionaries and a whole zone of Spanish speaking

missionaries. Toronto's most multiplicity in the world and so we taught people from over a hundred countries. It was extraordinary a crash course in the world. By the time we were done we taught people from everywhere—people from Ethiopia, of course all of the countries of Europe, from Iran, from Iraq, from all over Asia. An amazing experience....Somalia....wonderful

LS: So you came home from your mission and pursued your studies, if I remember right you got your undergrad in journalism? Is that right?

Greg: Yeah, that's right. I was the, that was after the law school period, I went to BYU to do my undergraduate in pre-journalism and that was because of 2 reasons really— 1 because I wanted to write, that was what was on the piece of paper was to teach, to write. I wanted to choose a degree that was, and it was either that or English literature, both of them would have been good options but journalism took the edge for me because I loved the idea of asking the right questions. And that being critical fact, we spend a lot of our energy and life being taught how to give the right answers to existing questions but a deeper spiritual capability and gift I think is the ability to ask the right questions. That precedes getting the right answers. So journalism was one of the few, very few undergrad programs that had the emphasis in questioning and asking questions.

LS: Well, I definitely have no journalism background. We'll see how I hack through these questions nonetheless but definitely learning as I do these interviews. Now where did you meet your wife? Did you meet at BYU? The typical BYU story? Or where did you meet your wife?

Greg: The very first part of how we met, the very beginning is that having quit law school to come to BYU now and I'm trying to teach right I had been asked to write a column, a Daily Universe, the newspaper on campus and I wrote a whole set of those in advance, 200 of them in fact. They did a cover story in the newspaper and introduced the very first column. It was a cover story and then the column. As it turns out, there was never a second column. It was canceled by someone further up the chain, not personal to what I had written, but they just were saying, "No, no, no we don't do columnist for a variety of reasons." So here there's all this work suddenly just burned and I remember complaining about it the day it happened to a friend and the spirit just said, "Don't you complain. Don't worry about this. It will work for your good, It will work out" It was just in day s of that, maybe the next day. Certainly within a couple of days of that, Anna who is the most amazing person in my life and my wife was reading the article and had more of a connection more of a sensation of who is this person and maybe there's something of a trigger, a spark of some kind, she's not here to defend herself. I'll just continue down this path....I like this marriage. And then it turned out we were both teaching in the MTC and so we met you know, moments after this. Actually I had lost my scriptures and she had found them. She knew who I was because of the article and she sent me a note and that was the beginning.

LS: Awesome!

Greg: Yeah, it was.

LS: The love story that continues I'm sure

Greg: That's right

LS: Great, great so after your career progressed and then you came in contact with Liz Weisman. We've had Liz on a number of times. She has been so so generous to me and to leading LDS from somebody who is a bestselling author to be approached by a cute little podcast like I'm doing but she's been so wonderful. So how did you first begin working with Liz?

Greg: I was at Stanford doing my graduate work and so somebody, we were in the same stake and somebody made the introduction. So I became involved in the early research for what would go into Multipliers. Then worked with Liz on every aspect of that book— prepublication, through publication and afterwards. It was a terrific set of learning, of experiences. That's that story.

LS: Gotcha. And I've recommended obviously that book at nauseam on the podcast. It's impacted my leadership and I've served as a bishop, and in councils and it's helped me come to terms with some of those diminishing characteristics I hold. Fantastic book! So you were a co-author of that book, is that the best way to describe that there?

Greg: Yeah, I think that's trite, there's lots of ways to communicate that I was just part of the research, the writing, the selection of language, the stories, interviewing people, one of the people who I reached out to during that journey was Larry Gelwix, who you'll know from Forever Strong.

LS: Yeah, we've had him on the podcast.

Greg: He's a good friend of mine and it has been amazing what he has, how he has, you know, how he has led, how he has approached things. It's interesting because he's a leader who has bridged both the multipliers work, he is a multiplier. But he's also an essentialist and that's so normal that somebody epitomizes both of those principals and so it's been fun to study his approach from both angles. I've learned a lot through that journey

LS: Awesome! We could do hundreds of podcast episodes related around the principles of multipliers and we've done a few and I hope to do some in the future but I definitely want to pivot towards your church leadership and also talking about in the context of essentialism, your other book you've written. But first let's talk about your church service. You're currently serving as a bishop is that right?

Greg: Yes.

LS: And how did that come to be? Obviously no one expects that, obviously nobody expects that, there's no application one fills out nor would we want to fill out such application. How long how you've been bishop? What do you remember about being called?

Greg: I was called just a bit less than 2 1/2 years ago. I'd served in a variety of capacities in the ward before that. I don't know if I'd say....one of the things that stood out to me....actually I'll tell you a funny story. So, my counselor, he's Rob Mains. His father is Elder Mains. I hadn't really expected this but he just...he flew in for his setting apart. And after his setting apart he came over to me, well I only really have one piece of advice. Just make sure that you don't do anything that requires us to add another paragraph to the handbook.

LS: Sound advice right there.

Greg: So that was my great mission statement for the experience. It's been an amazing experience. It's full of learning. It's full of discovery into the human condition. I mean, among them is a sense of the universal struggle of people. Everybody no matter how successful they are. No matter how they appear. There are real struggles and challenges in their lives and I will summarize this as nobody gets out without a mortal experience.

That has been one of many continual insights as I've served. It's just, you've got home teachers and visiting teachers in that role people think that this doesn't matter very much whether I go or not. You just know that it matters. You know why it matters. And so anyway, lots of experiences from it.

LS: Well, awesome. And I want to continue that theme obviously of talking from the perspective of your calling since this is a leadership podcast and the contents of LDS leadership and as I read essentialism, which those of you that aren't familiar that are listening essentialism subtitle is the discipline pursuit of less. As I've got a hold of this book, I've actually have the audio book I've read 3 or 4 times, or listened to obviously. I recommended it to my business partner and he came to me and we both had this ah hah moment as a business and we really went back to the drawing board with a lot of things that were, the way were approaching things in our business and it really impacted us dramatically so I thank you for that for the way it has impacted my life that way and I continue to revisit it when I just need to reconnect to that disciplined pursuit of less because there is so much power in that concept. So maybe tell us how did you come to decide that this was your next book project, or this is what you wanted to invest your life in is this concept of essentialism?

Greg: Looking back, it really all started with a moment when my boss at the time emailed me and said Friday would be a very bad time for your wife to have a baby.

LS: And your wife was pregnant at the time.

Greg: It would be even stranger if she wasn't but Friday was in fact the day she went into labor and so I'm in the hospital and my daughter is born and everybody's healthy, everybody's well but instead of being focused on this essential moment I felt pulled "How can I do both? How can I keep both people happy? How can I navigate this? And to my shame I went to the meeting. And afterwards my boss said to me, "The client will respect you for the choice you just made." And I don't know that they did but even if

they did surely I had made a fool's bargain and that was when I really learned the simple lesson in hindsight, if you don't prioritize your life someone else will. And see you've got to make sure that you are really figuring this out each day. Do what is right let the consequence follow. Figure out what the priority is. Eliminate what's not. And so that was definitely a defining moment as I look back. I left that experience, left that job ultimately and said, "Look, why is that people make the choices they make." Surely I'm not the only person who has been pulled in many different directions. That has felt this tension and not living in a neutral world where people have these opinions of how about things should be. In fact in England we don't just live in an age of information overload, we live in an age of opinion overload. So in that kind of environment it's not just how it was in my case an individualized situation it's also a societal cultural situation now for people. People feel pulled. They feel stretched too thin at work and at home most of the time. People feel busy but not productive. People feel this pressure to say yes even when they're overcommitted already. They feel overworked and underutilized. This is the undisciplined pursuit of more that we're in right now and the name for it finally was Non-essentialism. This is the culture that we're in and so that was what I found the question was, "What can you do about it." And the antidote is the undisciplined pursuit of more is the disciplined pursuit of less but better.

LS: Alright. And that's definitely like you mentioned the default mode we're in is the undisciplined of more. Where so many people wake up of so many years of going to the office or pursuing something that they just get in this going through the motions they realize they're pursuing more but they don't know why. There's so much technology. You talk about this concept of nobody is really at least in your adult years, nobody is really bored anymore as we have that smart phone ready to be flipped through Facebook or check that email. There's always to engage your brain in something of that undisciplined pursuit

Greg: Yeah, I have a friend that has studied what it takes have technology hook people. And he finds that there are some conditions for being hooked for addiction. Of all kinds. One is that sometimes a certain behavior will produce a real sense of pleasure, success, and then sometimes the same behavior will produce feelings of real disappointment and then the 3rd condition is that the first 2 conditions are randomly assigned so when you think about somebody who is in Las Vegas on the slot machines. Those are the conditions. Sometimes something great is going to happen. Sometimes something terrible is going to happen. That's what keeps them in there. That's what keep them playing. The next one could be bad. The next one could be great. You don't know. Now that is email. That is the, you know, having email on our phones. Having it with us all the time that is addiction. That's the environment we're in. I used to think of that as a metaphorical addiction. The source of addiction. It's addiction. That's what it is. 50 percent of youth believe that they are addicted to their phones. It's just barely research came out about that. This week I was reading that. On average check their

phone 150 times a day. The highest level in 900 times a day. So that is, that's not, we're just using this as one example. It's a literal example. It also serves as metaphor for the environment we're in today. I believe that we are today in a busyness bubble and life of a bubble before it hits. This bubble has an overvalued sense that leads to irrational exuberance in the culture. So then people behave in ways in hindsight will look really ridiculous, will look foolish. Just like the real estate bubble right? People were doing things that in hindsight were really foolish. Lots of people. Not just bankers, yes they did too they were primarily responsible, but lots of good people made those kind of decisions that now we feel of course you shouldn't have done that. Now, the same check test exists now— can we get out of this busyness? Can we act in a way that will look wise in hindsight? Even amidst the busyness bubble? That's the challenge. Can we operate that later people will say, "Oh yeah, you got it right. You were smart. You worked through that correctly. And the answer the only way to do that is to use the language essentialism is to be an essentialist is to take on a particular approach to your personal leadership and also to your professional leadership and that's really what the cases are making in this world. That's what I feel has the power or relevance now— is to live and to lead as an essentialist.

LS: Right and after reading the book I get the impression that this is your addressing, you talk about your relationship with technology or whatever but this is really addressing where our culture is taking us, whether on purpose or not through technology or not but we are all living, you can ask most people in our society, "How's work going? How's life going?" And they generally say, "Busy." Tell about this analogy of the closet. I forget exactly how you term it in the book. Could you tell us about that closet analogy? I think that's important for Church leaders to hear and understand.

Greg: The challenge is clear in the closet we tend to put too much in there. We tend to pursue an undisciplined pursuit of more. That is that we add things from time to time and we rarely go through it all so in the end it becomes cluttered it become too full you can't find anything despite there being lots of things in there, we can't seem to find things we really love to wear, or won't wear. That's the undisciplined pursuit of more. What's the discipline the pursuit of less look like? It says, instead of taking an eye to mop the shelf. Looking at it and then saying, "Well, maybe it will come back into fashion again someday?" "Maybe it will fit me again in the future somehow?" or "I could possible be invited to an event where I need just that kind of tie so instead of asking those questions, those questions are such broad questions meaning the answers to those questions are inventively "yes you might need that again and of course you might be able to use that again sometime in future maybe". That's so broad what we will need to do to clear out the closet. The discipline pursuit of less would be to continually have a process for carefully selecting just the right few things so we might ask "Do I love it?" "Do I wear it often?" "Do I look great in this?" or we can use what Marie Condo says, "Does it spark joy?" Now, if you ask those questions what you have left, I know from

experience is a lot less. But what you have are just the right things. You have less but better. Now, of course as you already suggested this is a metaphor for our lives. We are not really talking about our closets although it is literally true. We're talking about the metaphor for our lives in which are people are stuffing things into our closets all day long. And so of course it's overwhelming. Of course it's overloaded. Of course we can have the get into the closet of our lives. It's just stuff in there all the time. And so this is the environment that any church leader is operating in today. The people they are serving are going to be feeling this in their own lives. Sometimes we ourselves have created this, the traditions of our ward, quorum we're in can add to this burden intentionally. And so our job as church leaders is really to strip away all of the nonessentials. To strip away all those things that may be good, this is Elder Oaks, the whole Church know this phrase now right?— good, better, best. There's a reason everybody knows that because it names something that's a real challenge. We have to be careful about it. We have to be thoughtful. Now I'm not saying that we should sometimes we can apply essentialism in the wrong way. They might say well I'm not going to go to church today because I'm going to spend time with my family and that's the right trade off. Sometimes nonessentialism can be down in a disciplined way. What we need is a disciplined that has the same root word as disciple. Discipled, approach, pursuit of what the heart really wants and when he wants it. That's the obligation. The obligation isn't to our traditions. Even good traditions. Our obligation isn't to the past. The obligation isn't what to everyone else is doing or what every other ward is doing. It's not. Our obligation is much more singular than that. The priority of our lives. Singular. Is the Lord and his agenda and my job is to figure that out. My job is to figure that out if that's popular or not. My job is to figure that out whether it's what I want or not. So this is really the celestial version of the idea of essentialism is can we figure that out. Can we get discernment clear enough? And not just get pulled into the busyness of whatever qualm we have but to really hear his voice. So we're doing his will in his kingdom. Not just everything popular now. Which is I think the default position

LS: Yeah, and I love that phrase how you tweak your subtitle better that the discipled pursuit of less because that' so powerful to hear. As I was reading the book, that was the thought that kept coming to me over and over is obviously I'm knowing you're a bishop and you're talking about these concepts and so I'm thinking about the context of the Church. Just to use a concept you talk about in the book about the power of saying no to goings and we've all, in the professional world, anybody working there has been in this situation, your supervisor or manager has come to you and said, guess what here's a whole hairy gorilla project that I'm going to now lay on your plate and you talk about some examples in there individuals of saying if you want me to work on that which task that you've already give me would you like me to neglect. That's a powerful conversation to have with a manager or supervisor but it seems like to me that the thought that came back to me is the culture of the church sort of lays a whole other

layer on the culture of in general. the undisciplined pursuit of more. When we have a... there are so many programs in the Church, we have home teaching, we have family history, we have....I got back from visiting at girls camp last night. So many of these different programs and then when a priesthood leader or a leader in general comes to you, it's a lot I guess it's a little more awkward saying no to those things when we feel like that direction is coming through inspired direction. Do you kind of get what I'm getting at?

Greg: Absolutely! We've got to tread wisely through this. We've got to navigate this. We've got to navigate this in a sensible way. Let's begin with the idea that we didn't write this book called Knowism and the difference really matters. It's about what's essential. We ought to give thought and consideration to all of the requests in our lives. Including the requests that are made in a church environment. I remember my mother as a young convert going to church with young children, I don't know who were 5 at the time, but certainly little children but for that to be useful, whatever anybody asks her to do she would simply say yes immediately no matter what it was. Because it was the church I should be doing whatever I've being asked to do by anyone. She would realize I've just got 5 more things...I'm just overwhelmed by this. To do so she learned something actually I wrote it in the book although I don't give it that much context. She just used that phrase ever since in her life is let me check my calendar and get back to you. So that means she just a pause to think to be sure not to try to make sure that worldliness wins out over church requirements that's the wrong trade off to make sure that the Lord's voice wins out over any other voice. That's vitally important. That's to have the pause matters. In my own experience I remember serving in a calling, on the high council. I'd been asked on to work on one big area, missionary work and then oh but here's another thing, and here's another thing and I was now working on 3 different assignments. Then they came with 2 more assignments. And that's perfectly reasonable that they should come to try making certain things happen. It's perfectly reasonable for me to ask as I did ask, "Look I'm very happy to do all of these 5 projects. I'm happy to do those. But I think I'll just do them averagely well maybe I can do them I can be good at them all. I can't go big in them all. I just can't. Would you prefer I sort of did good at 5 different things or would you prefer I went really big on one of them? I think that's a very respectful thing to ask. There's nothing inappropriate about that. That is part of counseling together wisely. And the response was almost immediate, "Oh, we definitely want you to work on this one big area. We want you on mission work. That's what we want you on. So for the next year I was able to completely focus my energy on that. It made a big difference. It was the difference between sort of a bit of everything verses one main thing. And everything, we had 400 families in the stake create family mission plans. Baptisms went up higher than they had in several years. That's because we were able to focus on fewer things. And that was inspired. That's part of...that's what I think essentialism looks like. It doesn't look like somebody saying, "I just don't do callings". It

doesn't look like somebody saying, "I just opt out of everything to do with the church because I think other things... community is more important. It's not that. But it is perpetual approach to what the Lord wants us to do. I tell you that even though this is a doctrinal path less travelled by. It doesn't make it less doctrinal. If you read the scriptures end to end with an essentialist lense. You would be amazed at how continual this this runs like a golden thread through almost their entire standard works. The divine tradeoffs are a requirement of our lives. There's no point in talking about agency unless there are tradeoffs were going to have to make. Unless were going to have to make hard tradeoffs to make. This is key to coming here is that we can't do it all. We can't do all of the good things. We can't even do all of the great things. So what are we to do? Well, we could either really not use our agency and just react to it all, let these things act upon us. We can be acted upon even by good things. Or we have to go to the Lord; work things out in our own mind, find out what the essential things are, go to the Lord for confirmation, seek his revelations, seek His will and ultimately arrive at what is essential. Not what's good not what's great, what is essential? And that to me is... you know....that is far from being...I don't know what's the word I'm looking for....unsustaining position or an unhelpful position. That is the exact position we're supposed to be. That's the exact position the Lord was in. He didn't feel the obligation. Or didn't at least allow it make him do it. When he's on the Earth he didn't feel this obligation to do everything the Law of Moses teaching him to do. He didn't feel the obligation to fulfill all the expectations of society. All the expectations of the Aristocracy of his time. The religious leadership. He even when that made it unpopular he didn't feel that obligation. He felt the obligation to keep coming back to what really was essential. His Father's will for Him. I mean.... think about it. All the things Jesus didn't do. And it's a breathtaking thing to consider.

LS: Yeah, that's powerful. We focus so much, even that old time phrase, what would Jesus do? But to really step back and read the scriptures from a point of view of what would Jesus not do?

Greg: What did he not do? And not just the sin, which of course is a big deal. The big sins. Yes, we know he didn't do that. But neither did you know...sin has one of the root definition of sin is its original meaning is to miss the mark. There are all sorts of ways we can miss the mark by pursuing good things. There are all sorts of good missions he did not pursue. There were all sorts of problems going on in Israel that he didn't touch. There were all sorts of people that needed to hear the gospel outside of Israel that he didn't go to. So I think it's striking...I said it already breathtaking to think about it from that lense. And to realize we do not have the obligation to do everything perfect now. We do not have that obligation. That is an undoctrinal position. And yet somehow because of the culture out of the Church. And because how culture affects all organizations so it's even true within the church. I'm not suggestion we take worldly ideas and bring them into the Church. I'm suggesting we need to take worldly ideas out

of the church in our experience there. We have to make sure that we don't create that sense of— you've got to do it all and you've got to do it all now. That's something we can....that essentialism can give people permission not to do. Give people permission to go a different way.

LS: So from our perspective as bishop with so many callings, so many programs, so many lines in the handbook. How do you create that culture of essentialism within your ward?

Greg: Look, I don't feel like I have all the answers for this. It's a challenge because for a lot of reasons. Because we have done things a certain way in the past. Because working out what's essential is self-hard and continual work. But I will say this that one of the things is to... I can give you an example of what we've done that works. Every week in ward council instead of spending...we don't have an hour; we do it tighter than that. It keeps us essentialists. But out of the normal meeting that we do, that people do in ward council it would be very easy to imagine using up a lot of time on a policy matter or on activities that need to be planned or a whole variety of things that are secondary and so one of the things we've done to address this is we just we go through priority names. So each auxiliary each week reports on their priority names from last week and what their action was. Then we talk about what the priority name is for within each auxiliary for this coming week. And that means that we what it helps us to do is it helps us focus on individuals you know, as Elder Bednar talks about the one. It helps us make sure that we're dealing with people and serving individuals instead of programs. I have found that it took me awhile to come to that to understand that. But that has proven to be a way that you can't walk out of that meeting, of course people could, but I don't walk out that meeting, I don't think other people do feeling like, "Ugh. Well, we just had another meeting." You walk out going "we have spent time talking about individuals who we can do something about together as a council or individually and we have this week to go and do those things." so that has been one concrete thing that we've done to apply essentialism inside the ward.

LS: So when you say priority name, that's a name of an actual individual in your ward that that auxiliary is going to focus on.

Greg: That's correct. It's a name of an individual that an auxiliary is raising that we may all be able to support in some way. But it's certainly, yes, that's what it is.

LS: Gotcha. Now I'm intrigued by, you said you generally don't have an hour for ward council, is that right?

Greg: That's right, yes.

LS: How do you stay disciplined and discipline everybody in the ward council to stay on that time frame? Or do you set a time frame to say we're only going to be here for a half hour? How does that happen?

Greg: Well, we meet before church so that's a force in function. So we meet at 8 and we go until 8:45. For a long time it was just half an hour. I just felt we needed a little

more buffer to be able to get through that exercise of priority names for the week. What we've done from the week before and then what the priority name is and what we're going to do going forward for the next week. So that's how that force in function works.

LS: Gotcha. Any other thoughts in relation to essentialism, related to meetings?

Because we've discussed this on Leading Saints quite a bit and I put out an article about a year ago that said that the seven unbreakable rules of a meeting and it was maybe it was more strongly titled than I meant it to be but one of those rules is that no meeting is worth going over an hour. Especially these administrative meetings. What I want to mention there is that individuals came back and said "well, by doing that, by setting yourself, by compressing the meeting into a certain time frame your limiting the spirit of revelation that can happen there." I don't agree with that but what would your thoughts be in regards, I mean do you feel like those meetings are so full of the Spirit, so full of inspiration and progress?

Greg: Well, I think that I wouldn't, I don't prefer the idea of having ward council have a broader, OK, so we're going to, sometimes it could be two hours, sometimes it could be three hours, sometimes it's an hour and a half. I like that it's tight. I like that it just challenges us to be disciplined, that it challenges us to stay focused to do it. That's why we do it every week so that there's a, you're having a small connection, a smaller footprint, more often. I think there's cumulative advantage to that approach even to the revelation. It's impactful to me that the Council of the Twelve meets every Thursday together to talk. So I do think that there's value to be said to have a disciplined time to have a disciplined schedule. As to whether, do I think does it have to be a rule, one hour? No I don't think I would necessarily buy that. But I do think that I think that having singular purpose, as I read somewhere once to have a tight purpose and a loose agenda rather than a tight agenda and a loose purpose, seems to be the essentialist approach that certainly I have a preference for. So to say ok as sometimes as a bishopric we meet, and instead of saying ok well were going to just talk about everything we could talk about in the ward, which is really an endless set of potential issues. We'll say ok we're going to meet and it's a callings meeting. The whole time we're going to work is just going to be figuring out the callings that need to be assigned and that are the whole purpose of the meeting. So that again is one way to apply essentialism in a way that creates a force in function. Helps you not be just going all over the place and just talking about the problem. This is what makes meetings exhausting for people in the church, or elsewhere, is where you just, you know, if you take on too many subjects, if you just bounce around on all sorts of subjects, then you know you've not done anything. You know you're just sort of, you're just trying to drink in the ocean and it can't be done.

LS: I'm curious, as you, obviously when you wrote this book, I would imagine you were called as bishop after sort of the main book was written. Is that accurate?

Greg: It was I was called a month or two months before the book came out. In an act of cosmic significance. Maybe a cosmic joke.

LS: Nice. Is there anything as you've been serving as bishop, any unique characteristics of this calling that has caused you to struggle with certain essentialism principles that you may not have struggled with in your professional life?

Greg: Everything about the calling is a tension with essentialism. Literally everything. Because at the heart of essentialism is an idea that one can disagree with this is the challenge right? Is it true that everything is essential or is it true that everything is nonessential and only a few things are essential? A nonessentialist believes everything is important. It all has to be done. And essentialist believes that almost is everything is nonessential and a few things are incredibly valuable. I maintain the second category. I believe that. I believe that's what the doctrine teaches. I believe that's what we can be demonstrated in almost every field of human endeavor. So then you say okay, now you're called as a bishop. What are the essential things? The whole game is taken to the next level. Game is the wrong word but the whole challenge is taken to the next level because there are so many good things you can do. It's like somebody playing soccer in high school and then suddenly going to play in the world cup. You're playing at such a higher challenge level. That's the challenge. Now I give considerable energy, time, and resources to my calling and I believe that's appropriate, I believe that's right, I believe that's essential. But within that there's still far far more need and challenge and opportunity. Far more than I could possibly do. I don't mean like a factor of twice as much. It's not like if I added 10 more hours to the calling each week. But 20 more hours I could suddenly just do it all. It's nowhere close. It's like if I had 300 hours more, I still maybe wouldn't be close. So what that means is that one's discernment must increase. One must go the Lord more continually more purposefully than ever before. Who is the person I can serve today? Who is the one? As all of these different people, with all of their different needs, all their different challenges. Who is the one I can serve the best and start there? And so that's the continual challenge. I don't mean that I resent the challenge it's just inheritably part of being called as a bishop. I don't believe it would be a counterfeit of essentialism to say that I should simply just do less. That's not what the book is about. It's not what I believe at all. But I do think the obligation is for me to gain greater discernment than I've ever had before. To use that mantle. To seek for more of it. To seek for the charity to discern the very best thing to and the best way to serve and who I can respond to now. President Monson when he was a bishop with exactly the same thing. The struggle is important. The scriptural term is the wrestle. We're supposed to be engaged. We're supposed to engage in the wrestle. You remember this story? He's in a stake meeting. He is on the stand. The stake president is speaking. He's a bishop at the time. He doesn't want to seem disrespectful. He's struggling with the social obligation at that moment. He's feeling like he should go to the hospital to the person he knows that is sick there. And he leaves finally, he can't wait any longer. In the

closing hymn he runs off the stand and runs to the hospital and gets there and the person has already died. The nurse says, "Are you bishop Monson? He was calling to you before he passed." He wept from that experience! He learned that is a quintessentially essentialist moment. Where he said, "I'm not going to just going to do the social obligations of my calling ever again. That's not what the focus will be. I am going to seek the voice of the Lord and let that essential be in tuned to that essential voice and obey it." Now the way of the essentialist that he's describing isn't an easier way. But it's a more meaningful way. It's his highest point of contribution. And he's pursued that for the rest of his life so it's been typical that even being president of the church that as he's going to some conference with 10,000 people waiting for him to speak and that he'll still be waiting at the back and they will wait to start that meeting. It will be late because on the way walking into the room he sees somebody who he feels prompted to talk to. And the repetition of that experience, that is the story of his life. That's why he has all these stories. It's not because he's done everything. It's not because he's been undisciplined into whatever anything happened around him, any need from anyone. It's because he's been constantly on errand of the Lord's errand. That's the title of his biography On the Lord's Errand. That's the difference. Essentialism is about finding the errand from the Lord not just doing what the social environment is requiring. Even the social environment within our ward, within our quorum. And it's totally necessary isn't it? Because if we want to break through the next level. In any endeavor including in our callings we simply will have to make different tradeoffs than people have made previously. And that takes courage. It takes leadership. I don't think that's easy. I don't think that's easier, not in the short term. But in the long run there's no breakthrough story of any kind that didn't require that kind of sacrifice. Think of how easily we use the word sacrifice in an unthinking way. Sacrifice, the literal sacrifice, if I sacrificed a lamb you'd remember that for the rest of your life. You'd think it was the strangest thing you've ever had happen. You'd think Greg McKeown is a crazy man. You would! I'm not exaggerating.

LS: Sure!

Greg: Kill this animal right here! The blood! Everything! And yet that what sacrifice was for thousands of years. It was a very distinct reminder of what sacrifice is and what it means. Sacrifice is the same idea as to decide to cut or to kill. It means to eliminate. It means to make a trade off. President Monson in that moment, in that hospital story, wasn't making a tradeoff. He was trying to do both. It comes full circle to the story I told you earlier. In that moment when I was in the hospital and I went to that meeting. I wasn't making a trade off. I was trying to do both. That's counter to the whole plan of salvation. The whole plan of salvation is that we must make tradeoffs. We are not permitted not to. We can't escape them. So the position that I have is that we can either respond to that challenge in a reactive undisciplined, undisciplined way. Well intentioned,

but undisciplined or we can pursue it with a disciplined intention and it's the Lord's will or bust! And that's what I think it means to be an essentialist and to lead as an essentialist.