



How I Lead as General Relief Society President | An Interview with Julie Beck

November 18, 2018

[00:04:00]

Kurt: Today, I'm in downtown Salt Lake City in a room with sister Julie Beck. How are you?

Julie: I'm doing great. Thank you.

Kurt: Good. Well, this is quite an opportunity. I've seen you on TV a lot but never in person, so this is a great opportunity.

Julie: People look different in person.

Kurt: Right? You're a little more blonde than I think I remember you.

Julie: It's called being outside and sun-bleached hair.

Kurt: Nice, okay. Good. You recently poured your heart and soul into a book project that you recently released called Joy in the Covenant. What was the impetus for this book project?

Julie: The impetus was that I had been preparing messages for a number of events and things, and I wanted to share them with my family. But in today's world, you can't just send out an email, and I decided I needed to protect those messages, and they needed some refinement.

I wanted them for my family and friends, people who have been asking me to share. So I thought, "We'll see if we can collect these into something that would [00:05:00] be a book. And I am quite pleased with it, how it turned out.

Kurt: I was able to read a good amount of it, and there are some engaging stories here, some that I never realized we're part of your past like going to Brazil, and some of those things that obviously had an imprint on your life.

Julie: Well, these are messages prepared after my release as General President. So they're much more autobiographical or personal just because of the places I was able to share each message. They're all standalone messages but they connect with themes running throughout, I guess, because we are who we are. Life brings certain lessons, and we connect the dots here and there.

Kurt: Now, many people may not realize, but your maiden name is Bangerter, which is a very famous name in many aspects in Utah here. And long before you were speaking in general conference, your father who was – did he go by W. Grant Bangerter?

Julie: Yes. People who knew him well called him Grant, but he went by W. Grant a lot. [00:06:00]

Kurt: So Elder Bangerter [00:06:02]. I remember when I was serving as bishop and my daughter was born, I felt like she thought everybody's dad was a bishop and had an office in the church with candy. Were your earliest memories of him in some church capacity?

Julie: He was a stake president when I was born?

Kurt: Wow.

Julie: And a mission president and a regional representative. So yes, he was always out serving in some capacity of leadership.

Kurt: How old were you when he was called as a mission president in Brazil?

Julie: I was four.

Kurt: Wow. So some early memories.

Julie: Early memories. It's really where my conscious life began. I don't know if memory starts much earlier than four years old. But that's where things came into technicolor.

Kurt: I would imagine now that you saw your father and your mother in some capacity leading and serving in certain ways, that probably had a lot of impact on your leadership, right?

Julie: Yes. They were both remarkable leaders. [00:07:00] As I served as Release Society General President and traveled around with other general authorities who knew my parents, they'd say, "You were talking, you sounded just like your father, and then the next sentence I thought you were your mother?"

Kurt: Well, that's a good compliment.

Julie: It was a nice compliment. But they never said, "You sound like yourself." So it was kind of nice that they saw my parents in me. I felt it was an honor.

Kurt: Yeah, for sure. I would imagine that as you started serving at general committees, you know, you first served in the Young Women General Presidency, what type of advice did your father and mother give to you in those moments, on those more official general church calling scheme?

Julie: The first thing my mother told me about being Relief Society president was to enjoy it.

Kurt: Oh, yeah. I love that part of the book that that was their motto on their mission. Right?

Julie: Yes. She says, "You're not enjoying this." Which was true. I wasn't enjoying it. I was just so tied up in the intensity that I wasn't [00:08:00] thinking about enjoying it. But through the years, and as I had other church callings — I was Young Women president, Primary president, and other presidencies, places and had a lot of leadership experience — my father taught some really specific lessons that seem to emerge over and over again that I think became part of my service.

He taught about revelation. He taught a lot as we were children about who God is. I remember home evening lessons where he talked about "I am" and who was the Savior. He loved teaching about the Savior. He taught us about him.

He taught me about whose work this really is. That came up in lessons throughout my life. So I was never tempted to say this was my work or my legacy, or something to do with me. That's not saying that I didn't [00:09:00] get caught up in myself at times just because of the intensity of the work. But the lesson from him as this is the Lord's work, and He will talk to you, He will teach you what He wants you to do.

Another great lesson he taught me is that the Lord builds his church by building people. He said that over and over again. He said, "He doesn't build it by building buildings, He doesn't build it by building programs. He builds his church through building people. So we should focus on building people."

Kurt: That's powerful.

Julie: He did that very well. He was a gifted people builder.

Kurt: And during your time serving in these capacities, do any specific examples come into mind where you thought, “Okay, this is a moment where I need to focus on building people?”

Julie: I think it was more of a pattern, but I’d sometimes get wake up calls just working with board members on different things. I remember once in the Young Women presidency as a counselor; we were given the charge to see what Young Women [00:10:00] web portion of the church website would be – what would our web presence be. This makes it sound like it was the olden days. And I guess it was. Things have progressed a lot in the last 15 years.

But we didn’t have a Young Women web presence. We had a board member that as a presidency we determined would chair the committee to develop what our web content would be. Then we’d meet with her and nothing had happened, and we’d meet with her and her committee, and nothing would happen.

And I just thought, “We need to change the person. She did not believe in this assignment.” She said, “Well, I don’t know anything about the web, and so we haven’t done anything.” Finally, one day, I said, “Do you have a computer?” She’d make excuses. “My son was on the computer. My daughter was on the computer. My husband was on the computer.”

Finally, one day, I said, “Your husband makes a lot of money, and I bet if you went home tonight and asked him to buy you a computer, [00:11:00] he’d go get one for you.” Her eyes just got big. She said, “Yeah, he would. He’s always asking me what I want.” And I said, “Will, you go tell him you want a computer?”

The next time we met, she had this really cute designer computer bag with her own laptop in it, and she was learning her way around her personal computer for the first time in her life. Then I say, “How are you going to be on the web page?” And she didn’t know.

But I said, “You sisters, kneel down and get revelation on how to do this because I’m not going to tell you. They went in somebody’s basement, and they wrote down all the topics they wanted. And they laid it out on the floor on sticky notes. That’s how they built their web page. They came back and said, “Here’s what we should have.” And I said, “Well, that’s exactly what we want.”

But out of those women just grew and grew and grew in their capacity and their understanding of what’s the internet and how do we use our computers [00:12:00] until they were coming up with all kinds of inspired things. I could have asked for somebody else to be on that committee, but I knew they were good women, and I knew the Lord would help and inspire them if we could just key into that.

Kurt: I love that example because I feel like it's so real to what many Relief Society presidents in their local wards are experiencing or bishoprics are experiencing. Well, it's easy to think, "Okay, this person is not measuring up. Who else do we have? Let's put somebody else." Sometimes it's easier to...

Julie: Yeah, we've got people who will do it and who can do it.

Kurt: To maybe step back and create some room, find some options for them to dive in and seek that direction and grow.

Julie: And I still get cool things from her. Now she knows how to put together all kinds of cards and things, but it expanded her world. She laughs about it now saying, "It took that challenge for me to try." That's just one example.

Kurt: If you could talk about your father revelation building people.

Julie: There's one other thing that he taught me, and that was [00:13:00] delegate, delegate, delegate.

Kurt: Oh, nice. That's powerful.

Julie: That's how we grow. I used to whine to him about that all the time that there's no one to delegate to. I remember, as a ward Young Women president, I did not have an advisor the whole time I was ward Young Women president. I didn't have a secretary, I didn't have a sports leader, and I was kind of whiny about not having any help.

And so I said, "This job's too hard. There's just nobody who will help me." And he'd say, "Well, you just got to delegate." I think, "Well, there's nobody else. And the bishop won't call anybody else."

One day I looked at my Laurel president, and I thought, "She's a warm body, I'll delegate to her." So I just gave her the handbook, I said, "New Beginnings is coming up. Here's what it says it is. You're in charge." She did a fabulous job. I just started delegating to the Laurels. They became

the advisors, the athletic committee, the camp advisors, my secretaries. They all have become leaders in their own right. [00:14:00]

Kurt: Yeah. That's a great time for them to grow.

Julie: That was a revelation to me to look a little more outside the box, and it was still good counsel: delegate.

Kurt: That fits perfectly into building people. I mean, that's how other people are built, right?

Julie: Yes.

Kurt: What about in your experience as the Relief Society General President? From an outsider's perspective, it seems like you have all sorts of committees, people to delegate to, but I'm sure there are certain things that you just didn't want to delegate because maybe that's where you felt where your purpose was in that role. Any thoughts as far as delegation in that role?

Julie: As General President, I delegated everything I possibly could because there was so much I could not delegate. You can't delegate an assignment from the prophet or an apostle. I learned something from President Nelson when he was Elder Nelson. One time I was in his office, and well...actually, we were meeting with President Packer. President Packer was his quorum leader. [00:15:00]

President Packer was talking, and I was thinking, "What he's asking us to do is a little bit hard." My mind was kind of swirling around this problem. President Nelson, how you see him lean forward in his chair at conference, he looked President Packer right in the eye, and he said, "President, we would be pleased to respond to your direction."

I thought, "Wow, I'm going to go home and write that on a card." And I did, and I put it right by my phone so that when I got a call from one of my senior leaders, I knew what to say, instead of saying, "Oh, uh, yeah, maybe, or let me think about that." I just read those words. "I would be pleased to respond to your direction." Then that got me started. They had their response; I had my response, then I could go to the Lord and say, "How am I going to do this?"

But [00:16:00] there were a lot of things I couldn't delegate, but I did delegate as much as I could. I hired a housekeeper; I'd never had a housekeeper. I'd send my husband's shirts to the laundry; I'd never done that before. Those are little things.

Kurt: But then that was a big deal then to have those little things taken care of.

Julie: It was a big deal. I learned to use a secretary, and push off everything I could to her. Even my family schedule, I'd say, "If you want us to come to a family event, you've got to call my secretary, because I might forget, but she'll put it on my calendar, and then we'll be there."

Kurt: How would you describe as far as what you understood is your official capacity as Relief Society General President?

Julie: My capacity was to be an agent of the Prophet. I operated under his keys and his direction. I was always provided with an advisor from the Twelve, and others of the Seventy to help. But I always considered myself to be an agent of the Prophet, that [00:17:00] I didn't have a separate legacy from the Prophet. Does that make sense?

Kurt: Yeah. And I appreciate you mentioned that legacy because you mentioned earlier that your father told you it wasn't necessarily about you, but about Heavenly Father and His will, and it's His work. Right?

Julie: Yes.

Kurt: I'm sure it's easy to come and sort of say on your day one, "This is what the Julie Beck administration is going to be about, and this is what we're going to do, and this is how we're going to leave a legacy." Which can be powerful in some settings, but in that context, maybe that wouldn't have been appropriate.

Julie: As you read the history of Relief Society, there is a great legacy, and different presidents did focus on different things depending on the times. So there were people who would say, "Oh,

you're going to have a great legacy if you do this. Or if you take this on, this will be your legacy." And they'd see me learning about something and say, "Oh, that's where she's going to make her contribution." [00:18:00]

But I felt that my job was to learn as much as I could about the church, the prophet presided over, and the callings that he assigned me to be part of — for instance, the welfare committee. I was on the General Welfare Committee and the Executive Committee of welfare with my counselors and the Presiding Bishopric.

I didn't know I was going to be on that committee when I said yes to the prophet. He sent me a letter later saying, "Here's your assignment." But I knew I couldn't be his agent if I didn't know anything about welfare. So I had to start visiting welfare installations and bringing people from the welfare department.

We had our 10-minute orientation every single presidency meeting from somebody in the welfare department and said, "Here are wheelchairs, here's neonatal resuscitation, here's food storage." I just knew I was way behind on learning. So to be an agent, you have to learn what the person you're serving has to do. [00:19:00]

Kurt: Interesting. And I love this concept of being an agent of the Prophet. Is that some encouragement you'd give to a ward Relief Society president, you are the agent to the bishop because of the keys, right?

Julie: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Kurt: And you mentioned keys in the book.

Julie: You serve under the bishop's keys. And what is the bishop? He's the shepherd of the Lord's flock in that ward. He has charge over their temporal well-being and their spiritual wellbeing, and he has the keys to every ordinance for the people in there.

He gets to determine if we can go to the temple, if we can take the sacrament, if we can bless our babies, and if people get baptized. So we're dependent on the bishop. But the bishop can't be in every home. He's not going to have family prayer in every home, and home evening. He can't pay tithing for people. He's dependent on us and our individual faithfulness to help him be a good shepherd of the flock.

Then sometimes... we all take turns being the weak and the strong [00:20:00] depending on our life experience. We might lose a job, or we might get sick, and then we're the needy one, and we need somebody to lift us up. So he apportions that with his keys of where does his asset pool go, the time and talents of the ward so that everybody's strong?

It's like a family. A family is only as strong as its weakest member, really. We're always trying to lift up the neediest one. And the bishop's always worried about the neediest family. The strong ones he knows are there, but the ward Relief Society president is there to provide relief...

Kurt: That's so true.

Julie: ...to a bishop and for a bishop and be his agent in apportioning that aid that goes out throughout the ward.

Kurt: What would you say to a Relief Society president who hears that and thinks, "Well, does that mean I sort of go to the bishop and say, 'All right, what do you need me to next?' [00:21:00] even though that Relief Society president knows that maybe he doesn't have a perspective like the Relief Society president does. You know, that female sister perspective that maybe he's not taking consideration." How do you balance that from following his keys and direction while also interjecting a perspective that he maybe hadn't considered yet?

Julie: Well, he provides the overall vision, and that vision is really the prophetic vision. He has his charge and a handbook, what he's responsible for, and he may have a few personal emphases that he's concerned about because he gets revelation as the bishop. He's maybe worried about certain patterns that are happening and seen in families. He can use the ward council to do that.

But the ward Relief Society president when she's set apart, she has a portion of those keys delegated to her. She has a portion of that revelation that she's supposed to get for him. That's not a passive role. That's an active role. [00:22:00]

We're here getting on your knees and saying, "How can I help the bishop be the best bishop he can be?" It's not by me creating a legacy and good times for all in Relief Society. It's for me to fulfill the purpose. The purpose of Relief Society is to increase faith in the sisters, to strengthen their families, and to provide relief where they see it, to work in unity with sisters to do that. That's a specific purpose that she fulfills for the bishop. That's into the homes. I don't think it's passive at all.

One example is, I like to say that our youngest daughter was my tutor because I'd never been a ward Relief president.

Kurt: Oh, really? Even to this day, you've never been?

Julie: I've never been one.

Kurt: Oh, wow. Nice.

Julie: Maybe I'll be punished, or blessed with that. But as I was General President, she was called to be a ward Relief Society president. And it was in a young growing ward. There were 280 sisters in that ward [00:23:00] when it was finally divided.

They were 60% under the age of 35. That meant she had at least two babies born a week one or two mothers on bed rest. Plus, then she had the other 40% that were the older ladies like me with cancer, and the heart attacks, and other challenges that were happening. Her first PPI with her bishop, she sat down and said, "Here's our statistics."

Kurt: Which is natural to go there.

Julie: Yeah. "This is our percentages I'm visiting and teaching. And he said, "Well, how's this family?" "I don't know." "How is this family?" "I don't know." She said he read off ten names. She went home and called me and just cried and cried. She says, "I had the complete wrong report."

I said, "Well, how are you going to get the right report?" She's said, "I'll have to ask different questions." She taught me [00:24:00] how she received the revelation to minister to people so that her next report was, "These are the people that are okay. These are the people who needed help, and we've helped. These are the people who still need help, and here's why. These are the ones that need ward council support." That had to happen through a lot of ministering and different kinds of questions.

Kurt: And she was able to understand the bishop's vision better, that he had a vision more focused on those people.

Julie: He was worried about people because he was the shepherd of the flock. She thought she was the guardian of the statistics. That wasn't it. Her whole focus then changed in Relief Society. She says, "We're not in the entertainment business anymore. We're in the education business because we have young families who don't know anything."

Kurt: Nice. This is an interesting dynamic, and we get a lot of emails and questions around this dynamic of the relationship between the Relief Society president and the bishop. And I know there are some [00:25:00] Relief Society presidents out there listening, thinking, "Well, my bishop doesn't really have a vision or..."

Julie: "He doesn't talk to me, or I can't get a PPI if I pay for one!"

Kurt: You've heard this, right? You've been around the church a few times, right? I mean, I feel like some Relief Society presidents they're feeling like the bishop is just doing everything that I would like to do. If I need a new teacher, he just calls the teacher. If I need a new counselor, he just calls the counselor and sort of that autonomy is gone. I don't point the finger at the bishop saying that's the problem, but what should a Relief Society president begin to do in that type of situation?

Julie: Well, again, go back to this one leadership lesson. The Lord builds his church by building people. One of those people is the bishop.

Kurt: Amen. Wow.

Julie: And he's learning. He's in a big learning curve. And some bishops are more willing to learn and be taught than others. We know that because they are people. Sometimes even as Relief Society General President, [00:26:00] I'd come in my office and stand in front of my secretary and roll my eyes and say, "This work would be so much easier if we didn't have to deal with people."

But we do have to deal with people, and they all have lessons to learn. So that means we have to step back and say, "What do I need to learn? What does he need to learn? How are we going to teach each other? How are we going to arrive at a place? Is it going to take a miracle, a ram

in a thicket? Is it going to take a process of learning? Is it going to take more charity?" Because the Lord is building us, as a leader too.

When I started out as General President of the Relief Society, I was definitely not a finished product in that calling. I was a true beginner, and I knew a little bit more when I was released.

Kurt: It sounds like you're saying that, I mean, we have to take a step back and realize, "Oh, that the bishop is under construction as well. I mean, we're all developing."

Julie: Yeah. It's not really about the [00:27:00] program you want to have, and he has a different idea, my ideas are better than his or he doesn't have an idea. Then you suggest some ideas. "These are things that I'm concerned about, my counselors and I prayed about and is there anything on here that resonates with you, or that would help you?"

Sometimes it's asking inspired questions of the bishop. "Bishop, I know you care about your calling in this ward. When you can't sleep at night, what are you worried about?"

Kurt: Yeah, that's powerful.

Julie: Think of him as a person. "What keeps you awake at night because I'd like to help you with that? You set me apart to help and let me help with what's worrying you." Then you can say, "These are the things that are keeping me awake at night. Does any of that bother you?" If he says, "That's not a problem," then say, "Okay, I'll worry about something else."

Kurt: I love that. Just the fact of sometimes we go to the bishop – and I remember having a lot of PPIs or whatever we call them with my Relief Society president [00:28:00] as the bishop. It's easy to go to those meetings with like, "Well, what would you like me to do? I'm here ready to take notes."

Julie: "Give me the list."

Kurt: Yeah. But to go there with some thought out questions and push them on those priesthood keys that he holds and says, "What are these keys telling you about this, about that? And help him dig into that what that vision is, that's what I'm learning.

Julie: We're all at different places in understanding that, but our questions have to be more inspired when we're working with each other so that we can do what the Lord wants us to do. I love reading the scriptures with the Lord's questions to us in mind.

I have a little spot in the back of one set of my scriptures, where when Jesus says something, for instance, "Will you also go away?" So I read those, and I go, "Whoa, that's a thought question." Those are the kinds of questions that we need to be thinking on instead of "just give me a list of things to do, [00:29:01] and I'll execute those things, and then I can feel successful."

Kurt: Yeah, right. But to press them on that and bring some questions that are going to give you a deeper purpose and meaning on that.

Julie: In leadership, we need to be careful of our success measurements. Is our success based on how many came to an event, how polished it was, how many people tell us it was great if the flyers were good looking? What is success?

I remember talking to President Eyring once about missionaries and their success measures because they can get caught up in this. How many discussions and how many baptisms? Not every missionary has that kind of a mission. So in Preach My Gospel, it teaches this on pages 10 and 11. I'm giving you the pages. At the bottom of page 10, and top of page 11, [00:30:00] where it says that if you have felt the Spirit in your work and the Lord directing you, then you're a successful missionary.

And I think, "Well, why isn't that the same measure for any leader in the church?" That if I can get on my knees at the end of the day as a Relief Society president and say, "Today, I went here because I felt I should, today, I helped this sister, today, I made this phone call, today I did this. It wasn't what I planned, and I didn't cross off anything on my list...

Kurt: I've been there.

Julie: ...which is so frustrating because now I've still got that list. But today, I went where the Lord wanted me. Thank you, Heavenly Father, I'm successful in this." You should feel that every

day. And President Eyring says it's tragic when a missionary gets to the end of their mission and asks that question: "Was I successful?" That measure should happen every night? And if you weren't so good, correct it.

Kurt: There's tomorrow.

Julie: There's tomorrow. [00:31:00] Tomorrow do a little bit better.

Kurt: Oh, that's powerful advice.

Julie: Try and feel the Spirit of the Lord in your calling. If we had more Relief Society presidents, Young Women presidents doing that, then we'd all feel successful.

Kurt: I think your earlier point about letting go of legacy helps to do that because you're not... it's easy to get in there and be like, "We're going to have the best Relief Society weekday meetings that have ever been seen in the history of the stake, and we're going to come together, and then you obsess over those details.

Julie: Yeah. "And we'll put it on Pinterest, and everybody will copy this."

Kurt: And so, you can become absorbed in those little tasks but to step back and say, "A successful day to day is being more in touch with the Spirit so I can go visit that sister when she's praying for that visit or act on that inspiration.

Julie: And that's successful, then you know who you are working for.

Kurt: Yeah, nice. Wow, that's powerful, powerful advice. Being called as the Relief Society General President, [00:32:00] what's that experience like to you? Is it like being called as the

ward Relief Society president; you get a phone call from an executive secretary and show up in an [00:32:06] office? What do you remember about that experience?

Julie: Brother Don Staheli, President Hinckley's secretary called. He called on a Friday, which I think is really mean, and said, "Can you meet with President Hinckley Monday morning?"

Kurt: So you have all weekend to mull it over.

Julie: All weekend just worry, worry, worry.

Kurt: And at this point, I mean, you were in the Young Women's presidency, and you weren't expecting a release at that point from there.

Julie: And I knew we were expecting a new president.

Kurt: A Relief Society president.

Julie: So I had a sense that was coming my way, and I try and push it off because it's not something you want to seek. But I had a sense that it was coming.

Kurt: And this was a week before the conference?

Julie: It was about two weeks before the conference.

Kurt: Nice. And then you went to your appointment, and the call was extended.

Julie: I met with President Hinckley, and he just gave me some very clear direction. [00:33:00] He shared with me his concerns about the sisters of the church, his vision about them, and I could see he was clearly laying that portion of the work upon me. When I was set apart, I was told that I presided over the great worldwide sisterhood of Relief Society.

Kurt: Wow.

Julie: So to preside means the sort of dominion and leadership. That was under his prophetic keys. So that was a revelation to me, “Oh, it’s not just a task list of meetings to attend, that I preside over a work, a portion of the work.” And you approach it differently when you feel that. A ward president presides over a portion of the work.

Kurt: I think that’s such a helpful context to see it in because you’re not just an additional... You’re my assistant to help with all the women, but no, you’re presiding over this portion.

Julie: It’s not just, “Okay, you girls go over here and do what it is you do.” [00:34:00] But President Hinckley helped me understand that this was a portion of the work.

The other lesson he taught me in that calling, and he said it three times. He said, “Now, after you leave here, you’re going to meet with a couple of the Apostles, and they’re going to help you. You’re going to talk about counselors, and I want you to know that in this church, presidents choose their own counselors.” And then we talked some more.

Then we got about to the end of the interview, and he says, “Now, next, you’re going to want to think about counselors, and I want you to remember — he was a little more clear this time — that in this church, they’ll have some names of wonderful women that people have suggested, but in this church, presidents choose their own counselors.” I said, “Okay, President Hinckley.”

Then we got up to say goodbye. We were at the door. I was leaving, and he said, “Sister Beck!” I turned around, and he said, “Remember, in this church, presidents [00:35:00] choose their own counselors!”

Kurt: Oh, wow. He was really emphasizing this.

Julie: He emphasized it. He almost shouted it. And I said, “Okay, President.”

It was so interesting because the next meeting I got in, there was a lot of pressure to choose counselors that were being suggested. And if he hadn't told me the third time, because all that self-doubt that comes in that the moment and you think, "Oh, these are men that are inspired and they know..."

Kurt: So you went to other meetings where not that people were like trying to influence you, but maybe trying to help you with...

Julie: They were trying to guide me. But I thought as they were talking, and they had specific women. I took that list home, and I prayed about it. I took the work that had been done to prepare me seriously. But I realized that what they were suggesting was a type.

Kurt: A type of person with some demographics, background.

Julie: A type of person. I realized that the Lord had already told me the names [00:36:00] of two women who were that type. They weren't on that list, but they could have been. And so really in this church, presidents choose their own counselors.

Now, I served as Young Women president for five years under a bishop who chose my counselors. I'd already been Primary president for five years. The ward had been reorganized four times, and I had chosen counselors every time. But when I became Young Women president, he said, "I think you're too young and immature to choose counselors, so I've already called them."

Kurt: Oh, wow.

Julie: They were both old enough to be my mother, and they stayed there with me for five years.

Kurt: And you would have appreciated if...

Julie: We were never really a great homogenous group for all we tried, and I think it's because the bishop didn't understand that in this church, presidents choose their own counselors.

Kurt: That's a powerful principle. For a bishop to reiterate that with a newly called Relief Society president it would be powerful.

Julie: It affirms her right and ability to get revelation. The first step [00:37:00] she makes is to be a partner with the Lord in her call. And if you deny that to her, then you have just chopped off the leg on the stool she needs to access the Lord's help. It's what we have to affirm, that we all get revelation.

On the other hand, as a counselor, I was sister Tanner's counselor for five years, almost. And she divided things up so that we had different bodies of work that we supervised. It would have been easy just to say, "This is my part and take off and go."

One day I was talking to brother Mike Neider, who was in the Young Men General Presidency and I said, "So, what's your part of your Young Men presidency?" He said, "My job as a counselor is to help President Dahlquist be the best Young Men President he can be." I thought, "Wow, that is powerful. Why didn't I [00:38:00] think of that?" I knew it, but I hadn't been thinking that.

Kurt: It's not just about your assignments. Right?

Julie: From that moment. I really changed my focus with regard to my president. I accepted the assignments, and I worked, but I was more compassionate toward her. I wanted to lift her burden. I wanted to be an Aaron or Hur to lift up her hands.

I was thinking, "Oh, we're a team, we're a presidency, and this is all fun." But Brother Neider helped me see she's the president. She carries a different weight.

Kurt: Wow. And what did that look like day to day or week to week? Was it just touching base with her, asking her more often?

Julie: Yeah, asking more often and saying, "This is what I'm thinking instead of this is what I'm doing." To ask for her input and feedback and approval. She was always very affirming,

encouraging, and was not a controlling president at all. She had confidence in other people. [00:39:00] But it lifted her up, and it allowed her to get revelation for the whole package.

I learned this again by watching the First Presidency. I was in many meetings with them over the years, with President Hinckley as the prophet and with President Monson as the prophet. And I testify their counselors never once in my presence did one little toe touchy into the purview of the prophet.

They didn't even explore the air of his calling. They were always focused on helping him be the best prophet he could be. As General President, that was one of my big takeaways.

Kurt: So in that context, what would you say? You served in a lot of councils, and we're in meetings with the first presidency and others. I know that there's a lot of Relief Society presidents out there, Primary presidents, who sit in ward council feeling [00:40:00] like...speaking up and sharing an opinion, and then people disagree or the bishop sort of takes a different direction. What best practices would you give for a sister in the church in leadership who sits on a council?

Julie: First of all, remember those first lessons, that we all get revelation towards building people, and this is all about delegation. So really you have to get over yourself. Get over yourself, because it's not about you. It's the Lord's work. You're His agent. You can't correctly do this if you are trying to stand out as a visible voice or a representative.

I sat with President Packer soon after I was called as General President, and he said, "President, which way do you face?" I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "Well, I'm just interested. [00:41:00] Do you stand with the sisters facing the senior brethren and advocating their needs to us, or do you stand with us facing the sisters and advocating the prophetic vision? And I said, "Is there a right answer?" He said, "It's a choice. And whatever you choose will determine how we can work together."

Kurt: Wow. Because there's a balance there, right?

Julie: Yeah, well. But it's a choice, which way do I face. And so I looked at him, and the Spirit just told me. I said, "President, I stand with you, and I face out to the church."

Kurt: I mean, it's so easy probably... regardless what calling, not just Relief Society, but there is probably a good question for a Relief society president or Young Men's president or elders quorum president to stop and say, "Am I trying [00:42:00] to face towards the bishop rather than with the bishop."

Julie: Yeah. I can come every week and advocate a certain cause of action and put pressure on the bishop to act in a certain way. Or I can stand with him and face out to the ward...

Kurt: And have the advocacy go that way.

Julie: And have the advocacy go that way. Does that mean I didn't care about the sisters and their concerns that I didn't see them, that I didn't notice them? No. I knew intimately. But because I was the agent of the First Presidency, then I could say, "Here's what I'm seeing, and this is the way we can think about it." And what that does is it creates a relationship of trust that you can't get when you're all advocating a certain position.

Kurt: It happens so...

Julie: We can all defend our position. That's easy.

Kurt: Right. Right.

Julie: It's really hard to stand together as a unified group as a ward council and say, "We're the Lord's agents, [00:43:00] and we're going to get over ourselves."

Kurt: It makes me think like a typical example of maybe there's certain sister in the ward that sort of this is a passive aggressive tug of war between the Primary Presidency and the Relief Society Presidency. "Well, no, we need her in here." "No, we need her in our auxiliary."

Julie: And who is the most important...? [00:43:18]

Kurt: Right, exactly. "Or the Relief Society president always get the good people." But to just step back and say, "Why don't we be an advocate for the bishop and his keys and think what's best for the ward."

Julie: And how can we allocate the resources in a way that's really going to lift everybody up.

Kurt: That's a powerful and unifying message and a unifying point to be as a ward council to comes together.

Julie: It's a mature 00:43:40] church view, and we're not there yet, but I think we will be.

Kurt: That's powerful. As Relief Society president on your first day, you talked about choosing counselors, and that was such awesome advice. I'm curious about your first day as Relief Society General President. It sounds like you got some new general [00:44:00] direction from President Hinckley and the First Presidency, but touching on this concept about avoiding, you know, not they necessarily build a legacy, a Julie Beck legacy that will build a statue somewhere. So day one, how do you get started?

Julie: Wow. When you're the General President, you sit down, and there's a calendar.

Kurt: You're just handed the calendar.

Julie: "Here's your folder. Go to this meeting, and don't be late."

Kurt: So you make sure you understand what you're over and...?

Julie: Yeah, I take some time to adjust to that because there's a full calendar. The pace of the church does not stop just because you got a new call. It's like changing a tire going 60 miles an hour, and you're losing lug nuts all over the place.

Kurt: That's a good one. Everyone will get it.

Julie: So, it's like, just try and hang on for the ride and do what you think is expected.

Kurt: You just got to jump in it sounds like.

Julie: You just jump in, and you do what you can. [00:45:00] I learned to fake it a lot. It was terrifying. It was discouraging. It was mystifying. It was a bewildering a lot — just the volume of work that was there.

I remember early on, one or two or three of the Twelve would see me somewhere in a hall and stop. They'd say, "How are you doing?" I thought, "Oh, they really care." I thought, "They're so nice. These compassionate men, they really care."

So I start to tell them, and their face would just go blank. I'd say, "It's just overwhelming." Then another one that asked me and "Wow, yeah, I just wish I knew what I was doing." Then, Elder Perry asked me, and when I started to tell him and his face just went blank, and I thought, "You know what? They really don't care."

Kurt: We're all in this together.

Julie: I thought, "Wait a minute, [00:46:00] they're not paying me, so-called, to be bewildered and overwhelmed and uncertain. I'm here to take charge of this and shoulder it the best I can." So after that, when Elder Perry asked me how I was. I said, "Terrific. I'm just doing great." He said, "Oh, I love your positive and optimistic attitude." And I'd say, "Yeah, Elder Perry, I'm optimistic like you are."

Kurt: That's powerful.

Julie: But it was good to assume that that role of just saying, "We know who we're working for. Of course, it's overwhelming."

Kurt: Everybody knows that. We don't have to keep saying that.

Julie: Everybody knows that so you're not here to whine. It actually built my confidence because I thought they expect me to be up here and a grown up. They don't want me to be a girl in the room. They want me to be a voice and a representative and put in the work they're putting in.

Kurt: Yeah. And that didn't mean you didn't have anywhere to take your concerns or questions, but take that moment to own the calling, right? To say, "You know what? [00:47:00] If this is what I'm asked to do, let's do this."

Julie: That's right. That's exactly what it was.

Kurt: That's a powerful principle. Because I think a lot of Relief Society presidents, they can just... it's in our culture. I mean, bishops have things where we have to sort of feel like, "Oh, well, I'm supposed to be overwhelmed. So let me tell you how overwhelming it is."

Julie: And we think we're being humble when we do that.

Kurt: Yeah, exactly right.

Julie: You don't want to be too confident because then people won't think you're humble.

Kurt: It's like, "Oh, this is pretty easy." You don't want to go that way.

Julie: But the reality is that we are doing terrific because we're on the Lord's errand and it's His work. In the end, it's all going to work out. That doesn't ignore that there are challenges, it just means that we're okay.

Kurt: Awesome. Any direction or principle that we didn't hit on that you'd want to mention before we conclude?

Julie: I think something I'd like to mention is the magnitude of this work. I touch on this a little bit in my book, Joy in the Covenant that we're part of the house of Israel. [00:48:00] And when you're in the house of Israel, you're the Lord's covenant family. He has specific things he needs his family to do in the latter days, and He needs it gathered up. He needs it taken care of, and we build that family.

The process of that development is described in Jacob chapter 5, and getting the refinement down to where the Lord can come and say, "This is the most precious fruit that I had in the beginning and what I had in mind." And we're part of that right now. It's easy in a ward and stake level, I think, and sometimes often in a family, to think this is just a mundane, repetitive, unrewarded, unrewarding work.

The closer down you get into families, you realize that the sun shines on the happy and the sad, and you deal with the unpopular and the unattractive, [00:49:00] people and problems. It's not very heroic on a day to day basis.

Young mothers wrestle with the dailiness of what they have to do. You fix a meal; you clean it up. And you've got to fix another meal and clean it up. And it just never ends. Then you wash a load of clothes, and people take off their clothes, and there's another big pile of clothes to do.

If you have to work, you've got to face that. If you're alone, you've got to wake up feeling alone again and do the dailiness of life. But being part of the house of Israel gives us a real identity that is magnificent and glorious and holy.

Just listen to the sealing ordinance of the temple and visualize how the Lord sees us. When a child is sealed to parents in the temple, they become an heir with all other children.

Kurt: Yeah, it's powerful. [00:50:00]

Julie: It's powerful. Our Prophet is talking to us about being part of this work. It is not minuscule. It's not unimportant. It is in the daily tasks. It adds up to be many, many little things, but they all count in the math of the Lord. Work and families count.

Kurt: Awesome.

Julie: All those necessary tasks count. Gathering in people that aren't in the covenant counts. But this is a magnificent and holy and grand [00:50:32] work, and I hope we can find more joy in it.

Kurt: Absolutely. I've got one more question for you. The book is available at any Deseret Book, online, they can order it as well. Is there an audiobook?

Julie: There's an audiobook.

Kurt: Is it your voice?

Julie: I read it myself. It's my voice.

Kurt: Oh, wow. Nice.

Julie: So if you don't like my voice, I'm sorry.

Kurt: I'm sure it's great. But, if there were ever a leadership book written and published by Deseret Book, this would be it. And so, a great [00:51:00] gift for any leader in the church and encourage them to read it for sure.

Last question I have. As you look back at your service as Relief Society General President, any leadership calling you've had, how has that made you better a follower of Jesus Christ?

Julie: The general Relief Society calling is a macro calling, that you have this global scope where you're thinking on big, massive terms of people. I always try to get into homes of people that help me remember about the microwork. But now, taking the lessons I learned from that into my family has been the greatest blessing I've had. Because families are the real crucible.

There's a reason the Book of Mormon is a story about families and their challenges. There's a reason the Lord seals us up into families here because it's the toughest laboratory of learning there is. It would just be easier to get it dug and get on with yourself. [00:52:00] But that's not what He has in mind. It's such a learning growing experience as we discussed.

So I've tried to take the macro work and apply those lessons in the microwork. I care for a 94-year-old mother now.

Kurt: Wow.

Julie: She has dementia. She's got a weak body. She needs help deciding everything. I write the checks and pay all her bills and tend to her farm and have to take care of the hay and get a horse to the vet when it's sick. That's real life things. And fix the truck when it's broken, and then help our daughters when they need help and grandchildren when they need help and all kinds of things.

Help the neighbors on either side of me and sisters that I minister to. And brothers and sisters and their families. Sometimes it just gets weighty because it's a million things that are micro work. And I hope we never [00:53:00] forget that that's what the ministry of the Savior was. He lived his life at three miles an hour. He didn't have a faster vehicle than his own feet. Maybe a donkey but they're not fast either.

And he lived at three miles an hour. We have a speedy time. When we think we've got to pack more in and do more, and multitask and do more to be measured better by the Lord, but his ministry was one-on-one at three miles an hour.

So I have to think of that when I'm tucking my mother into bed when she doesn't want to go to bed and rubbing her feet and singing to her the songs she sang to me when I wouldn't go to sleep as a little girl, and helping her make decisions. It takes time and patience. It's the Lord's work.

Kurt: That concludes our interview with sister Julie Beck. A big shout out to her being so kind to allow me to throw these questions at her [00:54:00] and dig into some of these sticky areas as it is with leadership.

I love the principle she made that presidents in this church choose their counselors. I know there are wards out there... there are bishops out there that sometimes they maybe overreach their hand and think, "I'd rather just pick the counselors for my auxiliary presidents." Step back. Allow them to have that autonomy to choose their counselors, their Primary teachers, those people that are in their auxiliary. Give them that autonomy. And I get it... there's going to be times when there's an arm wrestle over one individual because one auxiliary wants them and another auxiliary wants them. But be patient with it and use your keys to direct those struggles, but give them autonomy. A happy bishop is because they have a happy ward council.