



Replacing Worry with Pondering | An Interview with Dan Duckworth

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In modern times, one of the most difficult issues leaders are faced with is helping those who struggle with mental health. No longer can we simply encourage a good measure of scripture study and prayer and expect everyone's life to stabilize. This is why leading saints felt it was so important to organize the mentally healthy saints library. There, one can find 25 plus presentations all about ministering to those who struggle with mental health. We cover topics like depression, anxiety, screw velocity, or OCD, we even cover how to effectively refer individuals to professional therapists and make sure they are getting the help they need. This and so much more. If you'd like to review all of these sessions, we would love to have you do so at no cost. You can visit leading-saints.org/14 and get access to the full library for 14 days. You'll also receive access to all our virtual libraries where we cover additional leadership related topics. So click the link in the show notes or simply visit leading-saints.org/14. The following episode is a throwback episode one that was published previously and was extremely popular. To see the details of when this was originally published, see the show notes. Enjoy this throwback episode. Hey everyone, this is the leading saints podcast, my name is Kurt frankel. This is a podcast where we discuss all things leadership in the context of being a Latter day Saints because we are a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping Latter day Saints be better prepared to lead. Okay, that sounded redundant. But anyways, if you're new to leading, saying that's just what we do. And it's important that if you stumbled across this podcast or somebody shared it with you, you're probably confused. Like, what's this about? What are we talking about here? And now you know, leadership folks as the latter day saint. And in this interview, I talk with Dan deck worth. Now, many of you are probably familiar with Dan

Duckworth. He's been on the podcast several times before. He is a member of our board of directors at leading saints. We have some powerhouse players on the board of directors that I'm just, man, I can't believe I get to sit amongst these people and interview them occasionally, it's awesome. And Dan helped me out with a survey that I sent out. On the newsletter, which you can subscribe to it leading saints dot org slash subscribe. I sent out a newsletter to the thousands of people that subscribe there. And just ask them, especially during this time of the pandemic and home church, what is it as a leader that you're struggling with the most? And it was interesting. There was a lot to learn, as far as what we got back from that survey and Dan, I sent him the results, and he sat with them and spent some time with the results there in order to see what sort of content or ideas or principles that we could bring to the podcast that leaders would find encouraging. And the episode, it's a phenomenal discussion. I think it's one that you'll maybe want to listen to a couple of times. Maybe if you listen at three times speed or two times speed on the podcast, you may want to slow down a little bit because there's some concepts here that you might find that you want to pause and sit with for a little bit. As far as being a pondering person and we talked about that idea of pondering. And our hope is, you know, as you're a leader, especially during this time, but all these principles, that's the beauty I love about leadership principles is they are timeless, right? Whether we are in the middle of a pandemic or we're not. These principles can still benefit your leadership ability and efforts. And so I hope that you sit with these consider them and that they bring you encouragement, especially during this time, especially if you are a leader. I hope you're not beating yourself up too much or feel like you're not doing enough for or constantly worrying about maybe worries that aren't even there. And this episode should help you with that. Today, I have the opportunity to sit down through the power of the Internet with fellow board member of leading saints Dan Duckworth, how are you, Dan? I'm gray Kurt, good to be with you. Yeah, well, I think you're to the point where you've been on the podcast so many times. We don't need to delve into the vast experience and your deep resume that you have that makes you makes you helpful when it comes to talking about leadership. So if people want to know more about you, Dan, they can go to our about page and read all about Dan Duckworth, our board members. So how's COVID life for you? It's actually it's actually great in a lot of ways. I work from home a lot when I'm not with clients and I've been doing a lot of writing and strategizing about some of the future things that we're working on some online workshops and stuff.

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And so I've been home anyway and it's been great to have the kids home and I've got 6 kids under the age of 16. So I really like not having to run around to spring baseball games every night of the week or spring league basketball games on Saturday. So I've enjoyed that quite a bit. That's awesome. And how about a home church? How's that going with the routine down for sacrament and everything? You know, I don't know if you want to talk about this, but that just

opens up a flood of thoughts. It's a typical conversation with Dan. But I've been thinking a lot about what I call the life cycle of a crisis and how when we get into this crisis mode, we're in problem solving mode. And so we kind of get this thrill and this excitement of trying new things and having my son bless and pass the sacrament or participating with him and trying to figure out how the home or the ministering family is getting the sacrament and then we've kind of settled into what people call the new normal. I know a lot of people chafe with that that phrase, but what I don't mean is life is always going to be like this. I mean, there's some kind of trough, right? Like the intensity of the experience has come down and we're kind of settling into a way of life for a period. And as we went through home at church, our church at home, I'm sorry. As we got into that, I started to think about were past the survival stage. We now can do this, right? The expectations are set. People kind of know what to expect. Are we thinking about doing this better this week than we were doing it last week? And frankly, the quality of our sacrament meeting started to nosedive in our House. We weren't coming prepared. We were just kind of winging it. The kids were kind of checked out, thinking about other things. We weren't and one of the things we noticed is that the sacrament takes like two minutes, right? When you got to say a prayer and pass it to even our family, which is a larger family of 8 people. That's not the normal sacrament experience that you're used to having of thinking and pondering all the things that we talk about some of the benefits of that ordinance. So this past week, we decided to hit the reset button. And a week in advance, we made assignments around my kids all play the piano and some at some level or another. And so we assigned each kid to learn a new song for opening sacrament him intermediate him and a closing him. And then we assigned our 6 year old who doesn't play the piano to give a talk that related to the come follow me discussion to talk on baptism with the people of Alma getting baptized in the waters of Mormon. And so when we came and we had church, we were just in a different mindset this last week. And we enjoyed it. The kids even commented, wow, that was so much better. And we got so much more out of it. So how is church at home going? I'd say we're going through the process, right? We know these dived after kind of getting too comfortable. And now we're looking at it saying, how do we get better at it? And I was almost disappointed when I saw the announcement this week from the brethren that we might be restarting church at church back up again. Because I was like, man, we haven't gotten great yet at church at home. I want to keep practicing. I want to keep trying this, but obviously we'll follow the brethren's lead. Yeah. Well, that's cool. And it's encouraging here that other families are experiencing a nosedive in quality at times because yeah, there's been weeks in our home where it's been like, oh, that was rough, but hey, with an 8 year old and a 5 year old and four week old, we're just going to count it good and move on. But I like the encouragement of hitting the reset button. I mean, these are like practical leadership principles, even in any organization, even outside of a family that is helpful. Sometimes you just have to hit the reset button, reassess, reproach, and see what you learn, right? And how you can improve. Well, I think you're right, and we'll probably talk some more about this on the call today. But leaders of every organization are going through this life cycle of the crisis. And if the folks who like to solve problems, the folks who are the firefighters who get that kind of that buzz in that rush of dealing with crises as they are unfolding. And even the folks who don't love it, but still kind of flourish in that environment. They've had their day, right? The first two or three months of this pandemic was just like drinking from a fire hose trying to figure out how are we going to keep our businesses online? How are we going to keep our congregations going? How are we

going to keep the balls in the air that we want to keep in the air? Well, now that we've settled in to this trough, right? The question becomes, what do I do with myself now? I don't really have the crisis, the problems to solve anymore. And so there's a lot of leaders out there in business and in church who aren't really sure what to do with their time and more importantly what to do with their mental energy with their attention. And that's some of the things we'll get into today. That's a good lead into our general discussion. So what happened kind of a different way to approach this conversation is a few weeks ago.

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I sent out a newsletter every Tuesday ish to those that have subscribed to the email newsletter. And if you're not subscribed, you can go to leading saints dot org slash subscribe and put your email in there and you'll be part of that general newsletter. It's definitely one of the more popular items that we produce at leading saint. So I sent out in the newsletter. I put a link to a survey. And my general intent of doing this was I was wanting to just understand what leaders are experiencing and really what they're struggling with. What concerns do they have and where they just sort of aren't sure what to do with. Which in the hope that that would help us look into different forms of content that would help leaders. So we put this survey together and you've probably poured over the results a lot more than I have, but it was interesting to see that so as far as the breakdown as far as where the location of respondents, a 65% of the respondents are in the United States but not in Utah, which is the majority portion of that, obviously. Which surprised me because usually you kind of assumed Utah would be the majority there, but it was not. Utah was 27% of the respondents and then 8% were individuals who are outside the United States. And then the calling breakdown, bishops were definitely the highest of respondents and then youth advisers, relief society, presidents, other presidency members and elder scorn presidents. So and then various callings from Sunday school teacher to stake primary president to eligor and counselor, right? So that's sort of the breakdown win. As you went over this survey, how would you introduce this or what can we learn just from the onset of understanding the survey then? Well, I was thrilled that you sent this out because when I do leadership work, the thing that I like to do first is just to learn to learn what kind of experience people are having. And to learn how they're interpreting their experience. And so it's something that's been on my mind for the leading saints audience. And so when I saw that you sent this out, I was curious. And I said, can I get a hold of this data? Because I want to spend some time with it. When I first looked at it, there was about a 120 responses. And I thought, okay, I can go through a 120 responses. And then when I finally got around to going through with it, there was 318. I was like, wow, okay, so this is going to be a fair amount of work to go through 318 responses, but they were obviously degrees of quality in terms of how much information people put in. And it was one open ended question was the bulk of the information. What's the biggest leadership challenge that you're facing right now? And with an open ended question and survey data, it's

hard to make conclusions out of that. So we'll get into my biggest conclusion in a minute. But like you, I was kind of I was happily surprised to see that so many of the respondents don't come from Utah because I have talked to people and they do take the assumption that the majority of the leading saints audience resides in Utah and obviously this doesn't reflect the audience per se, but it does reflect a certain level of engagement. So we've got high engagement for the audience outside the state of Utah. And I'll just note that the 8%, the 26 people that responded from outside the U.S., countries like Australia, heavily represented Germany, England, Canada, and then there's a couple other ones as well. So a good cross section of the church, leadership, being shown in this survey. And then I was actually a little bit surprised. I don't know how you feel about this, but to see that 71 bishops responded and that that was the largest audience. And then the next largest audience really was relief society presidents and they were about 52, I think, of them. And then youth adviser is kind of a bucket category that was in between those two, but that includes not only young women, presidents, and counselors, but also young men advisers who might have previously held young men presidency callings. And frankly, a lot of the bishop comments were focused on the youth or the bishopric counselors too. So those two are almost like the same bucket. But it was cool to see how engaged the bishops are in the leading saints audience and looking to expand their leadership potential as they're leading their congregations. And going back to just the idea of surveying those that you lead or interact with, you know, nobody would claim that this is some scientific survey, right? I mean, we just put out a survey and got some information and again, it's more difficult to maybe draw some absolute conclusions from it all. But at least I know I discover some things of like, wow, I hadn't considered this perspective. And then others, it kind of confirmed that just seeing how many of these leaders are really struggling with connection and stimulating connection in the ward, stimulating belonging in the rewards. And so then it just sort of confirmed like, okay, that's maybe a direction we need to go into to develop some content. But so what's the one takeaway that surprised you the most, Dan? That you put you're working on an article that may be addressed some of these things.

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That's where you started. Well, so like I said, it was hard to make some definitive conclusions. So as I was kind of cutting the data and thinking through it and trying to develop themes and what was really going on here, I had this desire to learn more. And so you and I had an interview with a bishop who lives in Alberta, Canada, and then separately I had an interview with the bishop who lives in Michigan in the United States. And I just wanted to ask them some questions and put some color around some of the answers that were in the survey. And it really helped crystallize some of the feelings that I was having. And so I would say the key thing, the key takeaway that I walk away from the survey with is bishops, I already knew this. Bishops loved to worry, okay? And that makes them normal because most of the leaders that I work with,

they worry, incessantly. That's how they occupy their mind. They're constantly running through what might go wrong. And what should I be doing that I'm not doing? And bishops, they fit this mindset. And so if there's one thing that I can take conclusively out of this survey, is confirmation that bishops tend to generally fall into a transactional what we call a transactional leadership mindset. But that didn't surprise me. That was just confirming. It's human nature, right? And so that's the work that I do with my clients is trying to shift them from that transactional mindset to a transformational mindset. So not surprised. But here's what kind of took me back a little bit. In this new environment of church at home, when bishops can't be in a room with the word counsel or they can't sit on the pew and look into the people's eyes or bump shoulders with sister so and so in the hallway or brother so and so after church, they don't know what to worry about. And so now sitting at home, they still worry, it's not like they're saying, oh, I don't have to worry at all because I don't know what the problems are. It creates a vacuum, right? Yeah, they're worried that there's a vacuum, they're saying, I'm worried that I don't know what to worry about. And that's a theme that really kind of comes through as I look through the data, and as I talk to these bishops on the phone, is they don't like not knowing. And the assumption, the fundamental assumption that they all make is that there are problems, that things are worse than I know. And so they put themselves into a problem solving mindset what we call the transactional mindset. Yeah. And not only are they in that problem solving mindset, that transactional mindset. They don't have anything to feed it that mindset with, right? Because they don't know what the gap is, right? Right. And naturally, when we get that space, when we have that vacuum, our brain is wired to feel that whole and say, well, let me give you a few things. Have you thought about the widows? Have you thought about this family that family? And then you start worrying about these people when in reality, you really don't know if there's anything there to worry about, but naturally you begin to worry about things that maybe don't even exist. Right, so and actually the psychologist, they bucket worry into two types of worry. There's what they call real event worry and hypothetical event worry. And so I think that a bishop when there's church at church and he has full information or lots of information, he tends to engage more in real event worry, which by nature is going to be more productive because you're actually thinking about problems that exist. But without information, what we're seeing in the survey and through the phone calls is that not only bishops, but all leaders of every stripe are falling into hypothetical event worry, which is they're worrying about things that may happen or may be happening, but which they don't know are happening. And so I did a little bit of research as I was preparing for this article that we're going to put out on leading saints. And I found a study at Penn State where they actually documented the worries that people experienced throughout the day. And then they later analyzed whether or not those worries actually happened. A worry is thinking about the future in a way that causes anxiety and usually so it's a negative event or a negative outcome that you think might happen. And what they found in the study was that 91% of the things that people worried about never happened. 91%, right? And the 9% that did happen, they were less severe than the people had anticipated them being. What we're noticing with the survey here and with the stay at home church is bishops are shifting from real event worry to hypothetical events and that's not very productive, right? That's not a good use of time and energy because number one, you're worrying about things that are most likely never going to happen. And number two, when you worry, what it actually is doing is organizing your mind because your mind is kind of cluttered and disorganized. So it gives you a

way to kind of organize your thoughts, right? And that is utilizing your psychic energy and what I mean by that is your attention. And you can only do work on things you give attention to.

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So if you're giving your attention to problems that don't exist, right? It means you're not giving your attention to problems that might exist. Or to alternatives that may not even be need to be described as problems. And so it's really kind of a wasteful activity to worry, especially about hypothetical events. Yeah. Now, I love that. Again, I love the point that when we worry about things that are hypothetical, we really don't know what's real to worry about or to focus on, right? It's that focus component where we put our effort in and work is on the problems that exist, but if we are creating hypothetical problems, we're just spinning our wheels, even though it feels like we're doing something. And I've gotten that sense from a lot of leaders that they're doing the Zoom meeting, they're doing the phone calls or whatever, and they feel like, okay, I think I'm doing something. And it can only almost have this counterfeit feeling of, yeah, I'm an effective leader, because look what I'm doing. And it feels like I'm doing something. When in reality, you may not be moving that mission or vision of your organization forward. Yeah, I think that's the other big takeaway from the survey is the bishops have a desire to do something. And the relief society presidents, especially. And in fact, I might even go so far as to say that sense is stronger with the release society presidents than with the bishops. Is I feel like I need to be doing something. And actually one of the, one of the quotes I'm going to look it up real quick. They said, it's a struggle to understand the best way to help people right now without just doing things to make us feel like we are doing something, right? And so again, doing is another way to organize the mind. It's actually a little bit different than worrying, which is just kind of sitting there and not doing something, but worrying about future events. I'm going to go do something because that makes me feel like I'm being productive, right? Without actually knowing whether or not that's being productive. And I'll give you the example of one of the bishops that we talked to on the phone. He heard that a bishop had done a virtual activity virtual scavenger hunt in his area. And he said, well, if they're doing a virtual scavenger hunt for the youth, we should do a virtual scavenger hunt for the youth. And it had apparently received a claim that had gone really well. We said, how did it go? And he said, it was terrible. It fell flat. It didn't do anything, right? So here's this desire in this need to feel like I'm doing something. And so I just do something. And yet it's not delivering any value because it's not solving a real problem from a problem solvers mindset, or it's not leading the congregation leading the flock to a new level, which would be a transformational mindset. Yeah. And I'm just thinking about when you hear when you are one leader, you hear another leader is doing something, and it's sort of it's not just like effective like, oh, yeah, and everybody really enjoyed it. The scavenger fund was fun. Everybody really enjoyed it. But you may hear something like, oh, this word is doing such and such activity through zoom or another way to help with missionary work, then you think, like not

only am I not serving my word by entertaining them spiritually or whatever, but what if we're losing souls because we're not doing something. So therefore we need to do something, right? In order to so that we don't fall short or that someone's sins aren't over our head type of mindset, which isn't helpful either. Yeah, and actually the element that was most prevalent in the survey in terms of feeling like we need to do something is with the youth activities. And it kind of takes this form. We have this new youth program, and we've done a lot of work in getting it launched in 2020. The early part of 2020. And then all of a sudden, the plug got pulled on church. And we don't want to lose the ground that we've gained. We don't want the program to fall backwards. And so there's this sense among the respondents that we have to do this over Zoom, not because we've been told to, not even because we think it's an effective way to do things, but because we can't let the youth disengage. We have to keep this program going for the program's sake, right? And as I was thinking about that, we had a little bit of a conversation on this, and then I was thinking about it while I was on a run the other day. And my thought was this, Kurt, do we think that the lord was unaware that church was going to get canceled when he decided to implement a new youth program, a sweeping change in his church, just a few months before this quarantine, this pandemic thing came about. Do we think that that was something that caught him by surprise? The answer obviously is no. And so now you have to ask yourself, was it on purpose? At least that's what I ask myself. Why would the lord do that? Why would he not wait until 2021, right? Well, I think about it like this. What if the lord knew that this new program he was going to roll out through his profits? What if he knew that we include myself in this? We, the small minded people of the earth, we're going to botch it.

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We were going to get it wrong. We were going to start walking down a path that was so much like the old path that it wasn't what he wanted. And it wasn't what he needs in preparing his church for the second coming of Jesus Christ, right? So what if he intentionally implements it knowing that church is going to be canceled in a few months and people are going to be forced into different patterns. Now, one approach then as a leader who works with the youth is to say, we have to keep this going. We have to keep the program going. And I sort of get my leadership buzz by doing something and keeping the program going. But what if the alternative approach that the lord actually wanted was for us to just take a really long halftime or a timeout and to just say, let's think deeply about what's gone well about what we like about the new program about what's not working about how hard it is to shift from the old way to the new way about why are youth aren't showing up about the degree of involvement from the parents and what our right role is as leaders. What if that's actually what God wants us to do is to stop, take our hands off the program and just think for a couple months before we restart the program. Yeah. And you mentioned this in other conversations we've had and we'll talk about it. I hope I'm not jumping too far ahead in the outline here, but just the power of reflection and we get in this state of mind

where we feel like, okay, we're obviously limited on what we can do or the machine that we use before as far as going to church and activities, that's not available to us. So what can we do right now? When in reality, we're in a different mindset to take that as like, let's not necessarily worry about what we're going to do right now to keep the program going. But what can we reflect on, ponder over a strategize together, brainstorm together about in order to make this program even more exceptional when we do return back to some level of normalcy in these in the future. But it's so easy to get focused on the now. We need to do something in the future in this goes back. But what about right now? What if we lose them right now? And it's easy to get anchored in the now when in reality we've been given a gift to look forward and consider the future. Now, more effective it could be. Yeah, so as I was thinking about this in my own personal studies and my family actually had a discussion on this topic. We came to doctor and covenants 11 hiram Smith and to put hiram smith's experience into the words that we're using today. He wanted to solve a problem that didn't exist in the lord's mind. Hiram felt like the gospel has been restored. The lord has been visited. The book of Mormon was not yet published, and he was saying, I want to go preach. I want to go tell the world what's happening here. And so in his mind, he wanted to do. And he was worried that he wasn't doing. And in that section, the lord is very clear with hiram. He says multiple times, holds your peace. Be patient, in essence, he's saying, I'm not asking you to do that. So stop, hold on for a second, okay? But what's instructive in that chapter in that section for me isn't just that the lord tells him no, don't go out and do. He doesn't say chill out and take a vacation. He doesn't say kick your feet up and relax. He says, I have a different kind of work for you to do. And it's the work of pondering, okay? So I'm going to come back to D and C 11 in a second, but I want to just kind of highlight one of the things that the bishops said to us on the phone. Because in one comment, he said, I've got a great board paraphrasing. I've got a great ward. We've got no problems. In fact, his exact words were we have very few underperformers. And in the very next sentence, he said something to the effect of, I'm worried that I'm not doing enough. And I'm worried that what I am doing isn't reaching the people who need it, right? And that's a total non sequitur. You just said you have no evidence of problems, and now you're saying that you're not being effective solving the problems that don't even exist, right? But that's that mindset that says, well, there must be problems, even though he's done a lot, this is not a bishop that's hiding in a closet. He's very engaged with his people. He's doing surveys. He's doing all kinds of things, and he's saying I have no evidence of problems and yet I can't stop worrying about problems. And so I pointed out that I pointed that out to him on the phone and very humbly and meekly. He said, you're right. And he said, you know, I've been thinking recently about the distinction between worrying and pondering. And one of the things that really stuck out to me is he said, right now, all I have is my worry when I'm in my bed, I'm worrying when I'm getting ready for the day, I'm worrying what's going on with the ward. And in fact, I put in the article, the 5 things that bishops are worrying most about, which all relate to not knowing what to worry about. The first one is are the ward members doing what they're supposed to be doing at home. In other words, can I trust them to manage their own home centered worship? Number two, are the ward leaders and ministers doing what they're supposed to be doing.

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In other words, can I really trust the leaders and ministers to be out doing what I want them to be doing? Number three, am I doing what I'm supposed to be doing? There is a strong theme in the comments of bishops wondering if someone's going to call him out and say, hey, you're not being a good bishop, right? You should have been doing it differently. In fact, I'm going to pause on this one and just say, I was fascinated by one of the comments that came from a bishop's wife. And the gist of her comments were we love not having church. Because we get our husband and father and he's not stressed to the max. And we feel like everybody's being taken care of. And he feels confident that everyone's being taken care of. And so it was like this zen comment, and then all of a sudden she says, but we feel really guilty because we're worried that we're not doing enough in the eyes of the people. We're worried that the people think my husband is a bad bishop because he's not holding weekly Zoom calls weekly for church and for youth activities and whatever there's so many things going on out there. I mean, honestly, as we mentioned earlier, it's become bishop Pinterest, right? It's like ward Pinterest. It's like, well, what's your word doing? What's every conversation I'm in, Kurt, people want to know what your ward is doing. And there's sort of this sense of comparing. Oh, who's doing more? Who's doing this? It's how I started this conversation, Dan. I said, how's things going in your home, right? And there's a little bit of me thinking like taking notes like, oh yeah, that's not a bad idea. I'm not living up to that. And there's nothing wrong with learning from each other, right? Right. But when you take the transactional mindset that says, I have to be solving problems. All of a sudden, problems that don't exist in your awards suddenly exist in your mind. Because they must have existed for somebody else's ward, that's why they held the activity they did or they do the Sunday school calls that they do, right? But they don't exist for your ward. So there's a local YSA bishop here. And our particular word, we're not we're having a couple of missionary homecoming type things on Zoom that the youth are going to. But we're not really doing a lot in terms of Sunday meetings or anything like that. Which seems to suit my family well. I don't know how it's suiting everybody else. But then we see a YSA bishop in the area. And he says, we're having a weekly ward prayer. Zoom meeting on Sunday nights, right? And the very first temptation is to go, oh, should we be doing that? Well, listen, there's a very distinct need for a YSA ward, and this bishop has tuned into that need, right? And so he's doing that because it meets a need that's real, right? Versus a need that's hypothetical. And so that's key there. So this bishop's wife, anyway, she says, I feel we feel so guilty about this, even though we feel confident that we're doing the right thing. Okay, so that's what we're worried about what we should be worried about. Number four, what's on the bishop's minds is who needs help, and are they getting the help they need? I ranked at number four because it's the fourth strongest theme. It's not the first strongest theme, right? The first second and third are about our people doing what they're supposed to be doing. Number four is are people getting the help that they need. That's just telling. And it's not condemning. It's normal. It's just who we are and we're so focused on solving problems. And number 5 is anything I'm doing making a difference. And I think a common concern for bishops, whether church is at home or churches at church, is they go home at night. They got the buzz from solving all the problems from fighting all the fires. And then in their quieter moments, they wonder, but is it making a difference? And that, my friend,

that's a transformational longing. That's something in your soul saying to you, you want to make a difference. And I would suggest that if bishops and other church leaders would spend a little bit more time doing the work of pondering on those types of impressions and those types of yearnings to make a difference, they might reorient the way they use their time during the COVID-19 period, but also when things go back to normal. Right. Especially in a future when you won't, you don't have a pandemic that shuts everything down, giving you time to ponder. When you realize the benefit and experience the benefit of regular pondering. And again, this is like cliché, every bishop's guy, no pondering yet. But I'm busy, whatever. But to really prioritize it may be higher than you were so that you do have those moments of, what do you say? Hold your peace moments, right? Or you can just stop and say, okay, I want to run off and do these things, but I'm going to hold my piece right now and sit with it and see if there's any deeper inspiration that maybe would come while holding that piece.

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And back to hiram Smith just to follow that up. Pondering isn't an activity you do. And that's where I think we go awry in today's fast paced culture. And even so I would equate pondering in the current research in the current buzzwords with mindfulness and mindfulness is about becoming more aware. Well, becoming more aware isn't an activity you do. It's a state of mind. It's a way of thinking. So when the lord says to hiram, I have a different kind of work for you to do. Those are my words. He uses words like this, which are very, these are some of the most provocative verbs and commandments that you could give to someone. He uses words like appeal, cleave, keep obtain, study, seek, build, deny not and treasure up. That's the kind of work that the lord wanted to hire him to do and he said, wait a little longer. When he said, don't suppose that you're called to go do something until you're actually called to go do it. Is that in the interim, I want you to do this kind of work. And by the way, he didn't say this, but I'm sure the message got through to hire him pretty loud and clear. By the way, your little brother is really good at this kind of work. He's really good at pondering and thinking deeply and becoming more aware before he acts, okay? Now, I can already hear some of the listeners saying, but what about, you know, DNC 58 that says, we have to be anxiously engaged and we can't be can't wait to be commanded in all things, right? We don't want to be slothful. We want to be out there doing stuff, right? Hey, listen, I am a huge proponent in our leadership workshops. There are three keys. One of them is focused learning, one of them is deliberate experimentation, and I talk all the time. Get out on the street and try stuff. And the third one, though, is disciplined reflection, which we would equate to this idea of the work of pondering. And so they're not mutually exclusive. Pondering reflection, it's a mindset. It's a way of being, it's a way of organizing your thoughts. Worrying is organizing your thoughts about problems and especially around assumptions that things are going to go wrong, right? Pondering is about clarifying the realities of your situation. The lord says truth is things as they really are and as they really will

be. So as we ponder, we're trying to pull away all the assumptions that are not accurate that are painting an inaccurate or incomplete picture in our minds of the way we are, the way God is and the way the world works. Doing oftentimes, displaces that kind of thinking, and we just go on the assumptions that I know who I am. I know who you are. I know who God is. I know the way the world works and I'm just going to go do something because this is going to solve a problem. And I can't tell you how many times I've talked to leaders in the church and out, and they say to me, I don't understand why it didn't work. I did all the right things, right? Well, no, you did the right things according to the assumptions that you held in your head about the situation. But if you actually understood what that situation really was, you would have done something different, okay? So pondering isn't just kneeling in your closet all day long. It's not just sitting in front of your scriptures all day long. You can be out and about talking to the people. You can be holding activities. You can be doing virtual projects or activities or whatever it is, right? But if you have a pondering mindset, you're thinking deeply to drive a greater awareness about what the truth is in this situation. And frankly, Kurt, in a survey responses, that's what's most interesting to me. Is that people are having these flashes of insight. They're saying things like, I'm learning that my people are okay. I'm learning that they don't need me as much as I thought they needed me. And then they go back to their assumptions and their rationalizations and they say things like, but there must be problems I don't know about. Or they say things like, but they need to give some comments about they need to get me more respect and authority. Ecclesiastical leader. And so we're getting these intuitions that are helping us to better understand the way things really work. And if I had any wish for the leaders of the church going through the COVID-19 experience, it would be that it would heighten their understanding of the way things really work. The way things are really are in their church. Or in their ward. When they go back to normal church, church at church, that they will be able to take those learnings and recognize that wasn't just COVID-19. That wasn't just because we were staying at home. There were things to learn about people, individuals, groups, the way groups work together, the way people relate to the gospel, the way people relate to me, right? All leaders, most leaders, most managers have a self inflated view of their overinflated view of their importance in the equation.

00:40:03 - 00:45:03

And that's been a struggle for a lot of our leaders in this survey is to grapple with that understanding that the people can actually function without me. And so we tend to make it seem like there must be problems. There must be things that I have to go solve because I have to feel important, right? I have to feel like I have value and worth when instead, if we would do the work of pondering, the lord would lead us to the type of work the type of doing, that would be transformational. And I promise you this, transformational work, transformational ideas only develop through intensive pondering. Man, there's so much here, Dan. So much here. But so helpful. And what I'm learning is some ideas that come to mind is that oftentimes, and I love the

idea that when we say pondering, you're absolutely right. It doesn't mean we're like sitting in a room and just like humming. And everything's scriptures here and there. And waiting for inspiration to descend, but at the same time, going out and doing something doesn't necessarily mean we're doing something to formulate some level of success. But rather, we're doing things to formulate some level of learning about the situation altogether. And my mind constantly goes back to this word of surrender. This action of pondering has a healthy ingredient of surrender in it, where, you know, going back to the example of the youth leader, where they're thinking, I want to maintain control of how our youth is experiencing the new youth program. And I don't want to lose ground, so therefore I'm going to double up on the Zoom activities. We're going to do all these things in order to formulate a level of success with the youth program. But I think the big difference here is what you're articulating is that no, instead you get a mindset of I'm going to do, but I'm going to surrender all control as far as what this, what form of success or what success looks like at the end of this. And I'm going to learn and allow this pondering process to unfold in order for a deeper or higher level of success or God's measure of success to be made manifest rather than my artificial creation of success. Am I on the right track? Yeah, so let's take it to a one on one ministering example. So we often hear stories in the church about I showed up and I delivered a loaf of bread and it made all the difference in this person's life. And we've had those experiences where literally somebody showed up at just the right time with a bag of apples or loaf of bread or whatever piece of service they had to offer and it was a godsend. But we hear those so often that we start to think that reaching out or I'm going to use the word connecting because I write about that quite a bit in the article. That connecting is so that I can discover your problem and solve your problem. And that's how we approach our experiences and that has, you know, when you get it right, when they actually have that problem and you actually solve that problem, it's magical. But when you get it wrong, it leaves a bad taste in the mouths of the people. And they say, wow, I think I was just being used to validate that person's self identity. They were looking for a problem, and they just went home, feeling like they solved my problem, or if you're the leader, and you didn't find a problem, you walk away going, huh, huh, I thought there was a problem there, and I couldn't find a problem. And so maybe I don't know how to get revelation, right? Or whatever it is. So, but there's a different kind of connecting, right? And this is more of the elder bednar administering one by one concept, right? What if instead of connecting with someone in order to find out their problem, we just connected with them because we wanted to connect with them. We just wanted to establish that human touch point and just leave it at that. And this gets very deep into psychological theories about what makes people happy and creative and all these things. They need to feel supported. They also need to feel independent and autonomous, but one of the key things is they need to feel supported, right? So now let me paint this scenario for you, okay? So I've got, let's just say that there's a sister at home who's older who doesn't have family in the area. She's been all alone. She hasn't been receiving the sacrament. And so I start to worry about her. And I started to go into hypothetical worry, which is she's probably depressed. She's probably miserable. She probably thinks the ward is forgotten her. She probably thinks I'm a terrible relief society president or bishop or all these things right. I stake president's gonna call. I'm not gonna know what to say, but I'm actually really worried about getting her infected because her health is compromised. So I really, this is all hypothetical worry. We're turning up psychic energy and it's leading to anxiety and not leading to productive outcomes. But to address this anxiety, we feel

like we need to do something. So I'm going to go finally, I'm going to go visit her. I'm going to go figure out what her problem is and I'm going to go solve it. Alternatively, what if what the lord really wants for her is to feel discomfort? What if what the lord really wants for her is to recognize that she's dependent upon the ward to provide for her spiritual nourishment. And that's not serving her well and the eternal spectrum of things.

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What if what the lord really wants is for her to come to some conclusions on her own, okay? Now, we talk about transactional leadership and transformational. There's a third style, which is laissez-faire, which means hands off. I do nothing, right? So what I'm not talking about with this sister or any of your word members is laissez-faire. I'm not talking about checking out. I'm not talking about leaving them up to the winds and just seeing where they blow, right? But what I'm talking about is recognizing that there's a purpose and a higher purpose that can be served by crisis and by uncertainty, right? So I'll give you my own life experience. I had some I had a head trauma that put me in the emergency room and my heart rate was plummeting and it was one of those kind of scenes from ER where there's like 30 people in the room trying to keep me going, that kind of thing, right? And I'm in and out of consciousness. And I wake up shaking uncontrollably on a gurney in the MRI room or cat scan room or something like that. And I have no control over my ability to speak or anything but my eyes open and I'm aware for a few seconds. And the guy at the table says, well, it's good to see you awake. And he says, you know, we can't do the scan until you stop shaking. So it would be good if you could kind of hold your body still for a minute. And I look at him and think, yeah, that ain't going to happen. And I turned my head over and closed my eyes. But before I go unconscious again, I have a distinct thought, the distinct thought is this. I think I'm going to die. And the second thought was, I really believe in God, because right now, I've turned all of my thoughts and all of my energy and attention to God in this moment, for my wife, for my kids, for my current situation, I've placed everything on him, and I walked away from that overall experience with my health going, wow. When push came to shove, I really believe in God, okay? Now, what if the sister at home or any of the youth or whoever else that we're worried about? What if what they really need to do is get into an extremity? Where they are alone, where they feel utterly incapable. And have to put themselves totally in God's hands. What if God really wants to communicate to them that he's there, that he's their support? And what if they really need to walk away from this experience knowing that he loves them and cares for them? Not because somebody showed up with a loaf of bread at the right moment, but because the holy ghost pierced their heart and said, even when no one else is here, I'm here, okay? Now again, it's not laissez-faire leadership. So what's the role of the leader in this kind of situation? And I'm not this is not a one size fits all either, by the way. If people are in crisis, if they're in a mental health crisis or a physical health crisis, they need help. You have to intervene. You have to go to them and you have to serve them in very

distinctive ways. There are problems that need to be solved. But if they're not in a mental or physical health crisis, what we can do as leaders is we can comfort those that stand in need of comfort. Without taking their comfort away. We can mourn with those that are mourning without taking the cause of their mourning away, right? And that kind of creates a boundary of psychological boundary around them. Lets them feel that support that says, hey, this won't go too far. If this starts to slide into crisis, you have someone you can call or somebody will be here and will show up. So you can go through this uncomfortable period, which by the way, discomfort and growth are, they go hand in hand. If you're not uncomfortable, you are not growing. So what we tend to do as leaders is we want to solve people's problems so fast that they aren't, they are uncomfortable long enough to grow. Yeah. Right. So this is the transformational mindset Kurt, where we say, my responsibility is not to keep the peace. My responsibility is not to keep you comfortable. My responsibility is not to solve all your problems. My responsibility is to create a safe nurturing environment in which you can suffer. In which you can be uncomfortable for a long enough period that you will grow. That you will change, right? And we call this the melting point, right? We need to get them to the melting point where they can be malleable and develop new character traits. So much there to pack, but I mean, again, it goes back to that idea of surrender to the point that you can not, it's so easy to get caught up in the control of I want to control this person's outcome. Their experience with the gospel so that it doesn't scare them away. When in reality, it's those moments that are able to scare people away. They're the most sanctifying to them personally, right? I think there's leaders out there that think of maybe the recent graduates, high school graduates, or those that have returned home from a mission, if we do not organize award parade and hoopla over this individual, what if they retract? What if they disengage, right? And again, that may be something to do, and there's nothing wrong with that.

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But I think it goes back to the principle of am I doing this to not only validate them as an individual, but also validate myself when in reality sort of that transformational mindset involves that surrender of saying, I'm going to surrender all the result of this suffering and this morning that they're going through because I think there's a deeper deeper journey for them where they can find God on a deeper level and sometimes I can unintentionally with the best intentions get in the way of that of that journey because I want to maintain some level of control where I want them to feel something. You know, I want to project them on project that onto them. Am I in the right ballpark? Am I? I just want to keep going with that. So I do think it's important to note for the audience that there's nothing wrong with doing a missionary parade. There's nothing wrong with doing a virtual scavenger hunt. There's nothing wrong with even doing a virtual Sunday school class or whatever, right? The key here is have you done the work of pondering that has led you to believe that that is an important element for your unique congregation for your unique

people and are you doing the work of pondering as you go through the experience, right? What are you learning? What are you learning about the people, right? And then the other thing is, you know, we talk about positive deviance as the people who are outside the norm who are flourishing in spite of suffering all the same constraints as everybody else. So when we look at the leaders who are positive deviance, one of the unique things we find about them is that they always know why they're doing what they're doing, right? Even when they even when they get put into a situation that wasn't of their own making, they're still in control of their own actions and behaviors. They know why, right? And so when you think about maybe doing a missionary parade since that's our example, whose sponsoring that, what's the greater purpose? Do they know why, right? Because there's a very transactional way to do an activity like that or any of the activities we do in the church. There's a very transactional way to host award Memorial Day picnic, right? Where, hey, we can walk away and say, hey, we did it, right? And then if it's transactional, we're going to focus on things like how many people came. And did we meet the budget? And how good was the bacon? And those kind of things, right? How many complaints did we get? Whereas if we have a transformational agenda, we're willing to tolerate a little bit of chaos. We're willing to tolerate a little bit of noise because we're working the community towards something bigger than what it is, right? And that's something that in a couple of the two bishops interviews that I did, I can tell you that most of the bishops I've interact with interact with over the last 15 years. They have this deep sense of wanting to create a Zion like community and unity is a word that comes out a lot. I feel like we need to be unified. I feel like, right? But I can also tell you that most bishops end their tenure, their 5 years, and they have this kind of subtle recognition or this what's the word I'm looking for, like, regret. They have this subtle regret that I wasn't ever able to unify the ward, and I wasn't able to take the community to that next level. Well, the reason why is because we're so consumed with the problem solving mindset. We don't recognize that the transformational mindset is actually diametrically opposed to it. This isn't you do a little of one you do a little of the other, they're just kind of the same thing with the different words, right? When you're in problem solving mindset transactional, it's all about purging variation from the system. It's about, like you said, control. It's about getting predictable, reliable results, right? That's what managers typically are hired to do, right? And we think as bishops, that's kind of what our job is to keep things organized, right? And frankly, the expectations that are placed on bishops move them very strongly towards that problem solving mindset. It's a church wide cultural phenomenon. But the transformational mindset is about promoting variation. It's about encouraging people to experiment in ways that might lead to failure, but they might also lead to excellence, right? And you can't lead your community to a higher level. You can't lead an individual to a higher level unless you're willing to take them into that melting zone. And that's scary because we don't know what's going to happen. We don't know how the community or the individual is going to emerge from that kind of experience. And so we don't go there. It's much easier to just solve the problems and to keep the trains running on time. It doesn't matter if the trains are going to the wrong place. Yeah. And I think this is something that a lot of leaders are facing right now where we are getting the green light to ease in or to phase into a returning to church church, right? Where a lot of people are maybe racing towards this, maybe a lot of stake presidents are going to be aggressive in obviously keeping with governmental advisories and whatnot. But to say, let's get these people back there because there's something about that normalcy that just feels comfortable, right? And my mind just goes

to this as you talk, this idea of pondering, but if we are doing the senior parade in the ward or the scavenger hunt or whatever, like any action we do and the strong leadership principle comes up is have I sat with this decision long enough to truly know that this is a transformational experience rather than a transactional experience.

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Because it's so easy to fall into that transactional. Yeah, and I think so here's the other thing. We talk about worry and how leaders in the ward and just in general worry law. But it's a group phenomenon. Toward counsel conversations are dominated by worry by what's going to happen this. How about this? Can we prevent that, right? They're dominated by problem solving. So it's not just the individual leader. It's the leadership group that's got this phenomenon going on. And so when you talk about reintegrating into back to normal church life or church routine, here's the thought that comes to my mind. I hope there's one stake president or one bishop out there somewhere, just one in the entire church who, when he's given the green light, says, even though legally and policy wise by the church, we have the green light. We're not going to start church back up again yet. Because I've done the work of pondering with my ward leaders and I don't feel like we've learned what we need to learn yet. I don't feel like we've had the experience that we need to have. Because then I'm not reacting, I'm not saying, oh, I got the green light. I got the red light so I canceled church. I got the green light. So when I went back to church, we're just puppets, right? But I would hope, and it's not true for everyone. It's not true for every congregation, but that would show to me that the bishops and the ward leaders out there, the stake leaders out there are thinking deeply and they're saying, I was told to start church back up when it feels right. Now that doesn't mean wait three years, right? But it might mean we're going to take a couple of weeks or maybe a couple more months and I'm going to lead the people differently during this time period so that we have the experiences in what we call the crucible. We have these experience in the crucible in the melting pot before we're too eager to go back to normalcy. Yeah. And I would add to that, maybe you are led that direction, but I think an important principle here is that communicating this process with those that you lead, right? It would be one thing, because you hear it all the time, like, well, you can hear some begin to say, yeah, well, everybody else stake has started, but ours hasn't, like, what's wrong with our state prisoner? What's going on there, right? Exactly. And so that leader needs to somehow articulate this pondering process that he's going through. He's just not lazy or apathetic in this journey back to church. I sort of like being home at doing church at home. So let's see if we can squeeze out another four weeks, right? But to really communicate to the stake, this is what we're doing. I am seeking a higher purpose because just as you talk about these principles to me, it's inspiring to hear that. If I have a leader that's in that mindset, it inspires me to get in that mindset, right? Amen, brother. Have we covered it all, Dan? I mean, we solved the world's problems. This is it? No, we're not solving any problems. That's right. That's right. That's right.

Well, cool. I'll just say since we're on this topic as a closing thought. I used to have a client that I was half coaching and then I took on an executive role with his company. Whenever I started to talk about anything that wasn't problem solving, he would throw his hands up in the air and he would say, there you go again, you just want us to sit around and stare at our belly buttons. And he would just repeatedly say, I don't like staring at my belly button. I like doing stuff, right? And so I just want to reiterate for the audience out there. The work of pondering is not staring at your belly button. The work of pondering is intense, and it also takes place on the street, but as you go about your work as you go about your day as you go about your walks in the neighborhood or your phone calls right, it's a different mindset to say, what's your problem and how can I solve it, then it is simply to say, I'm here. I'm here just to learn and to absorb and to be and the spirit speaks to those who are still. And that's the number one leadership principle and leadership tool that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints leaders have over all the other leaders of the world that I work with. Not that they can't receive the spirit in their callings, but that the spirit is directly engaged in the work of the lord's church. So we should be our primary priority and focus should be doing the work that invites the Holy Spirit into the work. That concludes this episode of the leading saints podcast. We'd love to hear from you about your questions or thoughts or comments. You can either leave a comment on the post related to this episode at leading-saints.org or go to leading-saints.org/contact and send us your perspective or questions.

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If there's other episodes or topics you'd like to hear on the leading scenes podcast, go to leading-saints.org/contact and share with us the information there. And we would love for you to share this with any individual you think this would apply to, especially maybe individuals in your word counsel or other leaders that you may know who would really appreciate the perspectives that we discussed. And that concludes this throwback episode of the leading saints podcast. And remember to review the mentally healthy saints library, click the link in the show notes or go to leading-saints.org/14th. Get came as a result of the position of leadership, which was imposed upon us. By the God of heaven who brought forth a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and when the declaration was made, concerning the old and only true and living church upon the face of the earth. We were immediately put in a position of loneliness. The loneliness of leadership from which we can not shrink nor run away. And to which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability