



Building Empathy in Elders Quorum | A How I Lead Interview with Weston Robinson

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Let's talk about the plague of pornography for just a minute. Wow. This is one of the biggest issues that so many deal with in these latter days, but few talk about it, or even know how to talk about it. And when they do talk about it, it's usually in a private setting with a leader who is expected to know how to navigate struggles with pornography. Thankfully, leading saints has put together a remarkable resource called liberating saints. It's a virtual library with 25 plus presentations, focused on helping leaders be better prepared to help someone overcome struggles with pornography. We cover topics like how to minimize shame when the bishop's office, how to talk with children about pornography, and even how to talk about female pornography use in relief society. If you'd like to review the liberating saints library at no cost for 14 days, simply go to [leading saints dot org slash 14](https://leading-saints.org/14). That's [leading saints dot org slash one four](https://leading-saints.org/14). While you're at it, we'll give you access to all of our virtual libraries that cover several leadership related topics. So click the link in the show notes or simply visit [leading saints dot org slash 14](https://leading-saints.org/14). Hey, this is another how I lead episode where we reach out to individuals across the world who've served in leadership are currently serving in a leadership capacity and we just asked them, how is it you lead? And they are always so good to send me in advance. I usually make a request, send me two or three leadership principles, this sort of act as our agenda during the interview and it leads to great stories and principles that hopefully you can be inspired by and maybe they'll lead to some new leadership approaches that you take personally. Today I have the opportunity to chat with Weston Robinson who's down in Las Vegas, Nevada,

and adhesive and email few weeks back and was looking to be interviewed per se, but he's been listening to leading saints for a while and sent some gratitude my way, which I always appreciate and then talked about his experience as a leader and I thought, you know what, why don't we get on the mic and talk about it. So I want you to listen for just his unique approaches with mentorship with perceiving the needs in his quorum. I think he's got a great approach of doing that. And then we get in a little bit of his story that's a little messy. Maybe what we categories is a typical elders quorum experience, but I think it's more typical than we realize. So let's jump in. Here's my interview with Weston Robinson. Weston Robinson. Welcome to the leading saints podcast. Happy to be here. Thanks for having me. Now you're in Las Vegas, Nevada. And how long have you been down there? I was born here. I was born. Born and raised. Nice. Same with your wife or. We actually grew up in the same state. We didn't know it until we were already seniors in high school, but she was also born and raised here. Cool. So just you as a person, let's just quickly put you into context when someone comes up to you and says Weston, who are you, what do you say? That's a great question. I am going to law school in the fall. I got my undergraduate degree in psychology. I've done a bunch of different jobs. I worked in construction for a few years, operating equipment, working in factories, worked out a show downtown doing lights and sound for comedy shows. So I think as far as life experience goes, I pretty buried resume, maybe. That might be the most interesting things about me, but married for about 5 years, no kids yet. Cool. Now you email me back in May of 2022. What led to you in that contact button and sending me a message. Yeah, so I got back to my mission in 2015. Oh, I went to Ecuador. Love it. And I think leading saying started in 2014. But when I got the podcast, yeah. So when I got back from my mission, I was looking for content. When you're on a mission like the spiritual high, like you always have things to do and things to study. So I started looking for podcasts. And leading LDS at the time was one of those. And I just started consuming all the content you had, and I just been follower ever since and I really enjoyed the content on the podcast and just appreciate the work you're doing. Cool. Nice. And then you had opportunity to serve in some leadership, I guess, twice as elder scorn president since your mission. And then reached out and shared a little bit about your story, right? Yeah, that's right. So because I started listening to leading saints when I did, I think it kind of informed a lot of the maybe what I wanted to bring to a leadership role. I would listen to some of the podcasts and things I would come out and maybe read some of the articles and think like, hey, that's a pretty good idea. Maybe I'll try to do that. And my leaders and church kind of saw that and decided to throw me in the fire, I guess. I don't know if it's a reflection on my ability or just a reflection on the desperation of the ward, but I was in a position a couple of times to serve.

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And really enjoyed those opportunities. Nice. Well, and I responded that I love hearing from different people that have served different callings and different demographics. And so being a

young elder scorn president in a YSA ward and in a family where I thought, hey, let's get western on the podcast here and explore his leadership journey and see what we can learn from it. Or just learn about what you learn from it, right? So jump in there. So you were the other one president in the YSA ward where you met your wife then? Yeah, so it gets you grew up in the same state. We did. So we actually met. As seniors, we went to youth conference, and there was a dance. And her and I met there, but at the time I already had a mission call, so I wasn't really looking to date anybody. But we did go on a few dates, and then I left on my mission. She served hers and we both came back and we were in the single ward together. When I was serving as a result of corn president, she was serving as activities co chair. And those two callings, I think that's what the bishop does to get people to marry each other is to put them in those two callings. Because we're working together on exactly. We're not endorsing that tactic, leading science. So people try it. It worked in our case. That's where we met. We dated for a couple years and got married back in 2017. It's nice. Cool. So just with hindsight, looking back on your time as a president in the YSA ward. And then in the family ward, was this after you were married soon? Yeah. What was the general, what was the general feeling from those experiences as an elder scorn president? Yeah, so I think looking back on the YSA experience, I think it was overwhelmingly positive. I mean, our ward was the university ward at UNLV. And so we would go through ebbs and flows of people. I mean, during the summer, we'd have maybe 40 of us. But then during the semester, we'd have, I mean, just a hundred or so. It's still not like a huge ward, but like big enough, like a diverse enough to have an interesting experience. And then the family ward was just, it was different in a lot of ways. I was the youngest guy in the room, but probably at least ten years, but on average, like maybe 25 years, you know? And so, and ironically, it was the ward I grew up in, and so that was kind of an interesting dynamic there as well, but and this was after the elders quorum high priest combining, right? Yeah, that's right. So I got married in 2017. I think the combining happened in early 2018, April 2018. And then I was called as elders corn president, like fall of 2019. Well, let's jump in the you sent me a list of principles here that the probably got us into some stories as well that the experienced in the first principle is as I strive to repent daily my connection with the spirit is enhanced. And that allows me to discern the needs and concerns of others. That intrigues me, tell me more. As I was first of all, I did not expect you to respond to my email. And then so after I'm addicted to my inbox, Wes didn't you be surprised? But after you did, you asked me to share two or three principles. So I thought about it for a couple of weeks. And this first principle here is something that I think has just foundational church leadership. I think that in my humble opinion, I think this is part of why we have church leadership callings is to center our lives on Christ and teach what little we can about how others might be able to do that. If anything, it's basically to serve as an example. And so that's kind of where this principle came from. I think it's at the foundation really of what our what our church leadership hopes to accomplish and calling people the callings and things. Yeah. So when you say strive to repent daily, this is sort of this idea that general idea, yeah, we're all striving to repent daily or whatnot. And so I think a lot of you say, oh, don't worry, Wes and I'm doing that. I'm trying to be good, and I go to church and take the sacrament, but is there like a deeper understanding of this concept that you found in the context of leadership? Yeah, so I think that when I was younger, maybe I used to think of repenting daily as like, I'm going to screw up that often, like I really need to repent every day. And so it was more of like focused on maybe changing behavior, like trying to stop doing certain things. And maybe the more negative

side of her pending, if there is a negative side, but at least the mentality of a negative repentance. I've done this thing, so I have to repent. And I'm going to do this every day. As a result of sin. But I think as I've grown up, I've noticed that repenting daily isn't necessarily just repenting of sin daily, but it's coming under Christ daily. And that difference in principle is really meant a lot to me. And experiencing different things in leadership. Because sure repenting, I mean, obviously it's important for a pen to the point to put sins behind you. But I think we seldom think about the other definition of repent, which is to turn to turn into the savior and to really see how we can more fully send our lives on him. And that might not be dealing with sin every time, but how can I talk to my wife differently? Or how can I, how can I treat my family differently? Those little nuanced things really come into repentance as well.

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And I think those things might be a little, they've gotten more important as I've gotten older and maybe put some childish things behind me. I know that repentance is actually a process of coming under Christ and becoming more like them. And so what did that look like for you? Like the day to today focusing on scripture study and prayer and things, what did the day to today as you regroup mentally and think, how can I repent and turn into Christ today? Yeah, that's a good question. It did include a lot of scripture study and included applying the scriptures into my life that included maybe reviewing conference talks. I think that what was a goal for me and what is still a goal for me is to try to maintain a closeness to the spirit. In all contexts in all situations. And so that can mean even like at work if I'm I work at a law firm right now if I'm talking to a client like how would Christ maybe approach this client? Or how would how would Christ approach this basketball game if that's what we're doing one night at a mutual? And so I think just thinking about Christ in different contexts and how our character can mirror his really is kind of the day to today aspect of it. If that makes sense. Yeah, I like that. Just sort of being in this cadence of I'm doing life with the Jesus right now. Even if I'm sitting down with a client, it doesn't mean I'm not doing life with Jesus. I'm still here, but I'm still trying to see that through that lens of Christ and that helps you turn on to him. Yeah. Yeah, exactly. And then what about this concept of, you know, by doing that daily repentance, you better discern the needs and concerns of others. How do you define that dynamic and how to look in your experience? Yeah, so I'm going to share a little quick story here. I used to shovel dirt for construction company when I was in my undergrad. We shoveled a lot in third. There was a grading company. And it's like the funnest job. But there was a guy there. His name is his name was Jim. And Jim was 70 something 76, maybe. And he would operate the equipment and he was like, you've been there a long time. But every once in a while, Jim would come out and he would shovel dirt with us. And you could tell just in the way that he did it, he knew what he was doing he knew where the dirt needed to be knew what it needed to look like. And us like laborers, like, might be a little less attuned to what it should look like if it's perfect, you know? And so I kind of take that and I

think about it and think if someone like Jim has been doing this for years, he's made a pattern of shoveling dirt correctly because there's a right and wrong way to do it. Then just watching him do it is enough. Like you can learn from him. But then when he says something and teaches you how to do something, teach you a principle about what we're doing with grading. That means a lot more because it's demonstrated in the way he does it. And so I think as a leader, maybe you're put in a position where people kind of look at you a little different or look at you more often. And so if I maintain a habit of daily repentance and coming under Christ, then if someone else is trying to do that same thing, I'm not saying I know it better than them or anything, but if I just maintain that habit, then I can share and hopefully they can be encouraged at least by my effort to do that. And maybe back to share some pointers, share some scriptures, share some things that have helped me and my growth to Christ, and that can in turn kind of invite and help them do the same. Yeah. So this concept of sort of getting out of the truck and down where their life is happening and so you can better discern what they need. Yeah, so I think it's all just president you're often put in a position where you can do just that. You can kind of jump out of the truck. And kind of be with them and sit with them. That happens administering interviews. That might happen in just talking to a guy after elder scorned one day, you know? Just kind of seeing where they're at and seeing how what they're doing to center Christ or to put their life centered on Christ. Yeah. Yeah. And that's just being proactive about that after classes or after elders engaging and connecting. And anything else you do to better discern the needs and concerns. Yeah, I mean, conversation is key here. I think that you have to be approachable. You have to be someone that people can talk to. That's something that I credit my parents for that trait of mine. I'm not saying I'm like some great communicator, but my parents can literally talk to anybody on the planet between the two of them. My dad, he'll go into any situation and just be able to make friends with who's ever there. My mom, she's the kind of person who in kids are crying because they lost their parents at Disneyland. They run right to her. I don't know why. That's just the kind of person she is. And so between those two people, I mean, I learned a lot about communicating when I was a kid. I learned a lot about connection. Not any direct instruction or anything, but just in the way they live their life. And so I try to do that. In any situation I'm in, really, especially a church where connection is so critical to our success there. So I'll just try to be approachable, I think the jobs I've had life experience that I've had this last short little 5 years has been enough to kind of give me some something to say to anybody. And that's kind of my goal is and that was kind of easy and the singles work because we got such a diverse group being right there in the center of Vegas.

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You kind of get all types of people in your church on Sunday, and so it's important to be able to have something to say when they walk through the door, you know, to be able to connect with them on any level, wherever they're at. Yeah, I mean, that concept of approachability is so

paramount. I think it's one of those things we don't sit and consider enough as leaders of really getting to a place where you understand how approachable you are. And then figuring out how to shrink that gap if you're not, right? Because if you're not approachable, you're just not going to connect with the people or be there or be there go to source when they do need some help. Yeah, I agree. Anything else with the principle one, we haven't touched on. We cover it pretty well. I think so. I mean, I just think it has to do a lot about trust. And if you live in that kind of life, then people can trust you when you testify of the savior's experience or the savior's atonement and changing your life. You know, I just think that you can't testify that if anything happened to you. And so the more I can, the stronger that testimony can be. All right, principal two, you wrote, if an individual chooses to see others as mentors, their perception of that person changes, and they will be able to see the best in them. Break down this concept of mentors. Yeah, so this was kind of huge for me. In the singles ward, and it was different in both contexts. Obviously, the singles ward were all kind of the same age, all returned missionaries. I mean, for the most part, and so we all had kind of similar experiences. And in that ward, as I mentioned, it was pretty diverse. We had a lot of, I mean, we had people tradesmen that were in there. We had people working on PhDs. We had return missionaries. We had recent converts, and it was a pretty diverse group of guys. But something that we did in a presidency was we had various people teach for a part of my time is actually I think for the whole time I was elder scorned president. The singles ward, we had three hour church. We had four lessons a month. And so the presidency would teach one of those, but we had one regular teacher about the other two lessons. We would try to assign that out to different members of the quorum. And we did that in an effort to encourage everybody that they would know that their opinion matters, that they're valued. And that they need to they need to share their experience. And we kind of put them on the spot sometimes, you know, and kind of encourage them to do that just because it was critical to our relationship as a quorum. And I think this mentor concept, I think, can kind of come out mostly when people are teaching lessons. When they've been assigned a topic, at least in the context that we're given in the vehicle we're given to discuss the gospel, teaching the west and kind of is where that mentorship can kind of come in. And so in the singles ward, that's kind of how it looked was kind of asking different people to teach lessons, maybe different people that participate in family home evening activities. Or even in planning events or activities that we had, we try to get different experiences involved there. In the family ward, it was very different. Like I mentioned, I was like 25 years younger than most of the people in the room. And so it was very easy for me to look to them as mentors. I was also raised in that ward. My wife and I, after we got married, we find the house kind of in that area. And so that was our home ward for a while. And so I knew a lot of these guys. And I looked up to them when I was growing up. And it was kind of odd to be in a position where I was the elder scorn president. I just did air quotes. I know we're recording, but I was called to this position, but it was like I felt like I had so much to learn from the guys in the quorum. And so I kind of pulled from what I knew. I encouraged others to teach lessons and that worked for a while. But what really changed my experience was recognizing that these guys kind of saw me sometimes occasionally, as a mentor, someone who might know a couple of things, it might be able to share that experience with them. I don't think that's a result of, again, like who I am as a person, but maybe my experience in some way was able to benefit some of them and they were able to ask questions and build that confidence. And so that's kind of how that looks. I mean, I don't know if that was clearly

explained or anything, but I just think it's anyway. Yeah, well, I'm curious that shift from just being an elder scorpion structure them being seen as a mentor. So was there a different way? Like when you say you put them on the spot or was there a way you helped frame them in that role as a mentor rather than just another guy in the corner? Yeah, that's a great question. And I appreciate it. It probably helps clarify that mess that I just said. But I think that, yeah, there were things that we would do. So in the singles ward, we had this guy who was going to law school. And so every lesson he taught was kind of in that frame. And in the activities that we'd have in things, like he was like our legal expert, you know? That was something that he could share with us, you know? We had another guy in the singles ward who was doing he was a recovering addict. And he was attending the singles ward, and he was someone that we called upon off into teach lessons. Because he was in a place where he was still struggling with things. But he had experiences that we didn't. And through his through the lessons that he shared and through the experiences that we had with him in different activities and things, we were able to glean from that experience and learn from him.

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So it's just little things like that. I think the lessons really aren't like the focus, but it's in how you prepare them for the lesson. So if I was going to ask somebody to speak in either word or to teach now the word, I would meet with them. Occasionally, and I would say, hey, this is what you do well. This is what I've noticed about you. How can you relate that to this topic? And so we'd have conversations like that, and this was back when we would do the teaching in the savior's way. And so we would discuss that in the teacher council as well. Like how can the individual instructors kind of bring their own experience to a lesson. And sometimes, you know, sometimes people don't respond well to that and it's just a normal lesson. Other times you have this incredible welder, for example, who can come in and explain how the gospel makes sense to him because it's like welding, you know? Who else would have thought of that? But this guy who can share this unique experience. And so that's kind of what I mean. And then it happens outside of the church outside of the chapel too. I mean, I would make an effort to administering interviews, try to get to know the guys in the quorum. You know, I try to understand their experience. And a lot of them, I became really close friends with just because I thought their experience was unique. And it's something that I wanted to learn from. So we'd spend time together, you know? And so that's kind of another side of that mentorship thing maybe is you have an opportunity to learn from each other often in different contexts. Yeah, and I like that that you give them permission to sort of bring their best skills and talents into the lesson, right? Because sometimes we have this cadence, this tradition of how you teach a lesson in elders gorm, right? And we sort of default to that. But to say, hey, I want you to push past that and your welder, bring in some welding of your legal mind great, or maybe you have a hobby of church history like, hey, wrap that into the lesson and then my mind goes to like in my elders form,

there's a brother Bennett. He used to be over all of landscaping at the bountiful temple. And so whenever I have a landscaping question about my yard or whatever, I go to him, or I send him a text, I'm like, hey, you know, what should I do about fertilizer or whatever it is? And he sort of becomes a mentor that way. And an expert, you know, the local expert of landscaping or whatever it is. And so as I love that, as a leader, you sort of give them permission to bring that into the lesson and be that smarty pants for ten, 15 minutes that they need to be, right? Yeah, exactly. Exactly right. I just think that's a really brings you together, just kind of recognizing the difference of experience. On Sundays, I think it's easy to kind of think that everybody's just kind of the same because all we're in the same shirt and tie. But it's really their lived experience is how they've how they've come to understand the gospel. And that's really what you want to hear about on Sundays. You don't really want to hear necessarily that cadence that you mentioned. You don't just want to go to the conference talk. And I mean, that's nice enough. But what you really want is you want someone to explain how the gospel, how they've learned the gospel through their lived experience. And so anyway, so we just try to try to create a place where that could happen. And I don't know if it was successful all the time, but that was the goal. That's cool. Yeah. That's a different approach. I love it. Anything else about mentors and creating mentors that we haven't touched on? I just think, just don't be afraid of it. I think when I, again, like when I was in the family ward and I had a brother approached me about an issue that he was having. His brother was in his early 40s. And I was 24 years old and I just felt like, I don't know. You know, but I wasn't going to say that to him. And so he was in a position where he was coming to me. Again, not for any credit to myself, but just maybe desperation of the war. I was in that position to help him. And you just have to learn on what you have to understand what you can lean on as a leader. If you're going to be in a position to mentor and assist others, you have to know what resources are available to you. You have to know what it is. What it is you currently share with others and how you might be able to support them. Even though you're experiences might be, it might be able to mismatched, you know, and you might be in a position to assist, but anyway. All right, third principle, if an elders core meeting is properly facilitated, then the quorum will engage and connection will deepen. I guess this sort of dovetails off of that last one. Yeah. Yeah, it does. And that was kind of the idea of these is I think they kind of telescope a little bit. But the experience that we had with this principle in particular kind of happened during 2020 during COVID. We obviously couldn't meet for a while. And I was called, I think November of 2019. So it happened pretty quick in my time as elders corn president. And my brother in law, like that first week in March after they announced that we weren't going to be able to go to church anymore. He suggested that we have zoom lessons. And that became a thing that was a couple of months later, whatever that became like the way we did church, but he was on the ball. Like that first week he said we're going to do zoom lessons in this cell we're going to do it. So I said, okay, let's do it. And so we had a Zoom meeting. And the first one didn't go very well.

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But as we kind of practiced that, we got a lot better at it. And I think that's kind of where a lot of changes happened, not just not just on board, obviously in the whole church. But I think for our ward, specifically, we were able to really focus on what makes the less an important and what makes what makes that Sunday experience different from maybe a Sunday school experience and how we can connect as a core and we had a lot more to talk about as far as quorum health went. That counsel period at the beginning of a meeting was actually something that we took advantage of, that we kind of do an assessment and see if everyone's doing okay. What needs you might have in the quorum and how we can assess those. And so it was just a unique opportunity, I think, to focus on what makes a good lesson or what makes it good facilitator. And so yeah, so it was kind of a refiners fire, maybe of elder scoring lessons. Yeah. Is there any specific principle of point as far as if you were leading a class on how to facilitate a core meeting? Like anything specific that comes to mind? Yeah. So this is something that I thought about recently. I read the book because of your podcast, I read the book, trust and inspire a few months ago. Oh, cool. And in that, I think I mentioned this in an email or something. But in that first, and one of those sections, they talk about Gandhi. I don't know if you remember this. I think he read the book. But yeah, I did, huh? They talked about Gandhi and how he was invited like this UN meeting or something and he was expected to give just like a few minute talk. But he gets up at the end and delivers like a two hour address that was eloquently given and it was like perfect and it was inspiring and afterwards one of the event managers came up to Gandhi secretary and said, how did he do that? Then there wasn't a teleprompter that wasn't any notes. He just spoke for two hours. And his assistant says something to the effect of what Gandhi thinks is what he is and what he says and what he does. He doesn't need notes. It's just what he lives. And so I think without getting too philosophical and deep, I just think if one thing could be said about facilitating lesson, it's that if you're going to teach the gospel, you need to live the gospel. If you can teach about Christ, you need to have your life centered on Christ. And I mean, I don't want to say that facilitator shouldn't have notes because I believe they probably should. But if you're in a position where you're prepared to teach a lesson or facilitate, I just think those notes might not be as important as your preparation for that opportunity. Yeah. And I love that. Everybody is prepared to some extent. And I love how Deanna Murphy's discussed this. Walking into a class and being willing to surrender your notes and your prepared remarks or whatever or the outline that you have to just lean into maybe the discussion that comes up. And maybe you don't know what you're going to say next. But you're going to lean into that, right? Or you're not going to stop a comment just so you can get back on to your lesson plan, right? You're going to just lean into the organic nature of what the spirit can foster there and then facilitate heading over to the facilitation of the spirit. And it gives messy at times, right? Or can sort of blow up in your face of like, okay, that didn't go well, but I'm willing to try again. Right. Exactly. And that was a principle, again, that was different between both experiences and the YSA ward. We had a number of return missionaries, and so the discussions were always pretty deep and pretty relevant. Everyone was bringing out their scriptures and their experiences from their missions, and it was, I mean, the hour was over pretty quick, but it was a very good discussion. And in the family award, you know what people that have been doing church for a lot longer that are pretty used like the regular cadence of things and might not like that creativity

or originality much in an elder scroll lesson. But I remember one of the things I did early on and serving that position in that ward was I would ask I would ask a question. And I would tell them that we're going to be okay with silence. We're going to sit here for about that 30 seconds if that's what it takes. We're just going to look at each other until someone wants to say something. And that became kind of a theme. I love teaching. I love facilitating. And I would often take advantage of those opportunities. And I just think sitting in that silence kind of allows for the spirit to do what you just said. I mean, to facilitate the lesson to help others to encourage them to share what they need to share. And so that was important. Yeah. Any other perspective as far as facilitating a core meeting that you'd want to hit on before you move on. I just think we need to think about what we need to understand it as it is. I mean, it's a quorum meeting. It's not a Sunday school lesson. It's not a place where we come to review conference talks. It's not, I mean, it's not a lot of things. What it is is a place for people to gather and discuss things that might be more sensitive. And longer. And I really miss those core meetings, but my dad, for example, just how to core a meeting yesterday. You facilitated a lesson in this ward yesterday. And he talked about being slow to anger.

00:30:02 - 00:35:06

And he asked a number of the people from the quorum to participate. Weeks ahead of time, he asked them to write a little journal entry about what it means to be slow to anger and how that works for them. And so he had this outline on this lesson that he was going to prepare, you know, and he had a few people a few ideas. And he goes in there and he reads the first one in the discussion just takes off and everyone just kind of shares their own ideas and what they prepared. And I just think that's kind of how it should look. I think that that's what our core meetings need to be is kind of a place for vulnerability can happen and people can address concerns that are mutual. They all might share. So I think that as we facilitate and as we're careful about how we facilitate that we can get closer to achieving that each time, so that's powerful. Good stuff. I don't know. I don't know, it could transition here, but you were mentioning before we record as far as your personal journey as an elder scorned president wasn't maybe as storybook perfect as some people, the stigma, we'd like to sort of put the leaders on a pedestal like, oh, they figured out life. They just do everything just right. They don't have problems because they have embraced it, raced the gospel fully and really make a mistake. Anything to say to that or we can skip it all together. What do you think? Well, I think it might be kind of relevant. And that's cool with it. Let's do it. So yeah, so I think I was not a perfect elder scorn president. I'm not a perfect person. That's just the reality. I struggled with a few things. I came back from my mission. And everything was okay. And it quickly became elder scorned president there in the YSA ward. And had a great relationship with my bishop. As a young elder scorn president, being 20 years old, having a smartphone in my pocket, I made a lot of the same decisions that a lot of people my age make. I struggled with pornography for a while. And

it was a difficult thing for me. Upon returning from my mission, it wasn't, it wasn't something that I classify as a critical issue. It was occasionally every few months, you know, like one of those types of things. And I had a great relationship with my bishop in that ward. We meet every once in a while. We kind of talk about some things. And I was improving and that was what was critical for him. So let me ask you, you said you were made elders corn president soon after going into that ward? Was this something that from the beginning was an issue that you're open with your bishop about going into that role as another court president? It was something that he was aware of. But again, it wasn't something to say that it was like an addiction wouldn't be accurate. Yeah, it wasn't like out of control. Your life was not functional. You had stability, but you had some slip ups and you're working on it. In the world today, it's like how could you, how could you not? You know what I mean? And it's just like it's so pervasive, it's everywhere. And for a somewhat lonely 20 year old, it can really be something that you can lean on. And I have a lot of empathy for that. So yeah, so there were a couple of instances before I was made other corn president, but we had discussed them. He was like, you know what? You're the guy. And so he taught me to be able to support president, and that's how it worked out. And so in that for those first like 8 months, things were great, perfect. We ran the quorum, things were fantastic grooving. And then bishop got released. And the gentleman, their brother, they used to replace him. He was an older guy. He was someone that I had a lot of respect in operation for. The word we really loved him and his wife, the new bishopric, they were all like 75 plus, they're really old guys, but they were great. They really had a good handle and an idea of how to run in a single award and how to connect with the kids or the young adults. And so it was a really good experience for the most part. And so I expected that this bishop would kind of have a similar relationship with me as I go in with him and I discuss some things and tell him kind of who I am and what my experience is that we'd be able to kind of maintain our relationship. And the first time I decided to do this was on an FHE, I just asked bishop calmly if we could step off in a room somewhere and have a chat. And I kind of told him about some of the issues that I had had in the past. At this point, I was doing pretty good. I mean, I wasn't slipping up or anything. I just wanted him to know, as bishop, I think you should know this about me. And that interview turned into a two and a half hour interview. And this was during a family home evening where the rest of the ward is in the cultural hall. Looking for the bishop and elder scorn president, you know, and we just weren't there. And during that interview, he talked a lot about excommunication. You talked a lot about eternal damnation and things. And concepts that I was very not expecting at all. It completely blindsided me. And but I mean, I was, again, I was a return missionary. And I thought, you know, I just completely justified what I did was absolutely wrong. And that's the way it needs to be. And so I left that interview and I cried in the parking lot for about half an hour, you know, I wasn't okay. And so days kind of go by and I talked to some of my friends in the ward just kind of share this experience with them.

00:35:06 - 00:40:05

And if we quickly, I realized that was kind of an overreaction. And like my Friends kind of helped me understand that. And the behavior kind of persisted with this bishop would come up to me on Sundays when I was kind of with my buddies up there and getting ready for it and he would tell me like, hey, you know you're not taking the sacrament today, right? And I can just in front of all my Friends, you know, and it was like, yeah, bishop. Yeah, no. You're right. And so that was my experience for about probably 6 or 8 weeks. It was like that. He talked to my girlfriend at the time who is my wife who ended up marrying he tried to convince her to not marry me. Like to not be with me to find somebody else because I was useless. And she saw this stuff and I continued going to church. I was there. I was there every Sunday and I just remember that that was a pretty great source of conflict for me. And I eventually met with my state president. One of my friends suggested that I meet with the state president and kind of tell him what was going on. And so I did that. And I explained to him what had happened. The bishop was released a couple months later, but we found out that he was dealing with some dementia, like some form of dementia that allowed that kind of, I don't know, the kind of messed with his reactions to things. I don't know all the mental, like the mental side of it, but there's some other concerns to say the least, right? Yeah, there are some health concerns, exactly. And so, and the sick president was, I mean, very understanding. And he kind of took me in like under his wing and things. And kind of helped me transition from the good experience that I had with the previous bishop and he really kind of was gentle with me and helped me understand maybe some of the issues and things that this bishop had faced. And after that bishop was released, one of his counselors was called his bishop and grant Cox is his name and grant Cox changed my life. I love grant Cox. The first week he was a bishop. He called Kira and I ended his office and just met with us and I explained kind of what I've gone through the last couple of months. And he began to cry and we just kind of had a good moment there. And I just think that experience really informed a lot of how I feel about leadership. And how I feel about empathy. Again, I have nothing but love and admiration for that bishop that did his best. Given the circumstances, I just, I'm grateful that I was surrounded by good people in our quorum. We had kind of established a brotherhood in that ward and when it was my turn, they came around me and they held me up that way, you know? Yeah. So I don't know, it was a unique experience. Not one that I'd recommend. Or not one that I want to go through. Yeah. No, I love that. I'm glad you brought it up. And as many listeners know, we're not in the business of pointing out off a leadership and throwing individuals under the bus or one now. But there's a few things that I think that story is worth sharing one is just this hopefully to crush the stigma that leaders have to be perfect and they don't slip up. And they shouldn't have to meet with bishops or work on their life like that happens. And there's a lot of opportunity to find room for these individuals depending on the severity of what they're struggling with and what not to find room for them to still serve. And not cast them out and say, well, you'll definitely not be the eligible president next week. We've got to move quick here. And then the other thing to point out is the importance of community and brotherhood. Having a quorum and connections that you can go to and say, wow, I just had this tough interaction with my bishop. Can I talk to you about it? And finding support elsewhere. We don't have to put it all on the bishop to find support and for him to say all the right things and because if he doesn't, then that spins us out of control. And then I just love that you reached out to your state president. You can reach out to additional levels of leaders and I know there's a million stories that people have of. Yeah, I went to the state president. It was even worse. I get that. But I just

love the messiness, the rawness of that. And then bless his heart to discover that there's some health concerns that maybe stimulated some of that negative interaction and you to have a forgiving heart and to move on. And I just love in one story to just look at the messiness, but the empathy of leadership that we can show to those leaders striving to do their best. And I'm sure he was trying to say that the right things and maybe it wasn't going so well, right? So great story. I think that's important to share and keep track of. I appreciate that. I appreciate that a lot. If you don't mind, I just have another little detail here. I think something that I learned from that experience in addition to all the wonderful principles you just pointed out. I really learned that church is for everybody, you know? And I know that seems pretty general and it seems like something that we should just know, but I could see how someone easily in that situation would just not come.

00:40:07 - 00:45:00

You know, and it really came back to that brotherhood that I had. And I think, in a sense, then I've had excellent experiences with church leadership and my wife and I were struggling with fertility, like that's an issue at home. And we learned this a couple of years ago last year. It just kind of blindsided us. You know, we're a young couple trying to have a family and it just wasn't working out for us. And Kira was going to her doctors and everything they were saying everything was fine. I went to my doctor and they're like, hey, it's you. I didn't say it that way, but yeah. That's a good summary of it, right? And you know, and I think in a weird way, that initial experience of that bishop really kind of prepared me to be blindsided the way I was with that unique health concern. Because it just kind of put me in a position where I was able to understand that even though we might not have the picture perfect experience of the picture perfect family there's a place for us, you know? Yeah. Even though I was in elders corn president, that was being told by his vision, not take the sacrament. There was a place for me. You know, and I love, I love that our church is that way. And again, it's not perfect. I think there are a lot there are places and experiences where that's not the case where the church might not be that way. But I think that's the goal. And I think I'm just grateful that I've been in a position where I've been surrounded by people who understand that as the goal. Especially now in our wards now, our bishops just fantastic in our state presence amazing. And that nothing but support. And I love that. And so there's a couple of unique experiences maybe. Maybe not everybody goes through those. But I'm just I'm grateful for them. Love it. Love it, Weston. This is great. I appreciate you being so vulnerable and open and then sharing some of these principles that I think will bless a lot of leaders, especially elder scorn presidents that listen to this. Last question I have for you is you reflect on your time as a leader. I was being a leader, helped you become a better follower of Jesus Christ. And maybe you already said it, but you can read it. You can double down on it. That's a great question. I have been thinking about that question for a while. And I don't know if there's a great answer for that. I think that there's just so many things you could say, you know? For me, it really comes down to being able to empathize with others. I think that's kind of what the gospel is all about. And again, we kind of talked about this

when I brought up that first point there. I think that as we're in a position to serve others and to help others come into Christ, we're in a vulnerable spot because a lot of our weaknesses kind of come through. And I think it's designed that way. I think it's designed, but God intends that we're in a position to kind of feel awkward sometimes to feel uncomfortable to feel like we need to do better. And I think leadership does that pretty well. And so as I've been in those positions and as I've had experiences like that, I've been able to draw closer to others because I recognize their awkwardness. They're uncomfortable. They're inability to fit in sometimes. And I can recognize that Christ is what really brings us together. And I hope that I'm serving in the bishopric right now and one of our in the ward we're in. Again, a lot younger than a lot of people in there. And I just hope that through my experience, I can share with them that Christ is what brings us together in crisis, the reason we're there. A lot of diverse opinions in the church today, a lot of diverse ideas and feelings, but I just think that the ability to put that all side and to really focus our lives and our worship on Christ is what will bring us together. And so I think as a leader, I've learned to empathize with others and I've learned to appreciate their experience and learn maybe how to relate that experience to Christ and building that testimony up in time. And that concludes this how I lead interview. I hope you enjoyed it and I would ask you, could you take a minute and drop this link in an email on social media in a text wherever it makes the most sense and share it with somebody who could relate to this experience and this is how we, how we develop as leaders, just hearing what the other guys doing, trying some things out, testing, adjusting, for your area, and that's where great leadership is discovered, right? So we would love to have you share this with somebody in this calling or a related calling, and that would be great. And also, if you know of somebody, any type of leader who would be a fantastic guest on how I lead segment reach out to us, go to leading saints dot org slash contact, maybe send this individual an email, letting them know that you're going to be suggesting their name for the singer view, we'll reach out to them and see if we can line them up.

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So again, go to leading saints dot org slash contact and there you can submit all the information and let us know. And maybe they will be on a feature how I lead segment on the leading saints podcast. And remember, go to leading saints dot org slash 14 to access our full liberating saints virtual library. It came as a result of a 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 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 of which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability