



Leading People Towards a Patriarchal Blessing | An Interview with Keith Erikson

December 10, 2022

00:00:02 - 00:05:01

Hey, hey, any youth leaders out there? Serving with youth in the church is probably one of the most enjoyable callings, but it brings with it a lot of responsibility. How do we effectively lead this rising generation? Well, I have good news for you. Leading saints is organized the young saints virtual library where we have 20 plus hours of presentations all about how to lead youth. We cover topics like how to help youth transition into adulthood, how to help them avoid loneliness, how to handle smartphones in class, and we even go over scientific data about how latter day saint youth differ from other youth. If you'd like to review the young 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 one four](https://leading-saints.org/14). So you're checking us out as maybe a potential podcast you could start listening to. I know many of you have been listening for a long time, but let me just talk to the newbies for a minute. What is leading saints? What are we trying to do here with this podcast? Well, let me explain. Leading saints is a nonprofit organization, a 501c3 is what they call it, and we have a mission to help Latter day Saints be better prepared to lead. Now, of course, often means in the context of a calling, it may mean in your local community, your work assignments, we've heard about our content influencing all sorts of leaders in all sorts of different contexts. We invite you to listen to this episode of maybe a few others of our 500 plus episodes that we have out there, jump in and begin to learn and begin to consider some of these principles we talk about on the

leading saints podcast. Here we go. All right Keith, we're back in your office as like I was just here talking about your other book. But you're a prolific writer, I guess. Well, welcome back. I'm glad you're here. And so the last time I was here, we were talking about real virtual rumor and this concept of the rumors and facts that we like to dislike any human organization has the different stories that we tell and sometimes they're not they're not as accurate as we think they are or they're attributed to the wrong person that the day is of the Internet that we live in, right? So I will definitely link to that great episode and it's really impacted even things I say through this mic and I'm like, well, no Keith would not be. Would not be satisfied with me perpetuating wherever that came from because I don't know where it came from. That's great. I'm glad I can sit on your shoulder. That's right. And now they come out with a new book called making sense of your patriarchal blessing. But your historian, right? So where did the itch come to write about patriarchal blessings? Yeah, that's a great question. I think the itch itself began in a personal way. You know, I received a blessing when I was 16 and I received it from my grandfather, who was a patriarchy lived across the country and so we had to make this special arrangements and he had been a patriarch for 22 years before giving me my blessing that day. And for the next 15 years, he and I shared several conversations, but before he passed, and I was a curious kid, right? Well, what's going on, grandpa? How does it work? He would draw the line, say, I'm not interpreting it for you, but he was open to talking about the process, and so then here and there, you know, people would ask, you know, do a talk in sacrament meeting on Pedro blessings or whatever. So I go, hey, grandpa, I have to give a talk. And I learned things and but then it was 8 years ago when I became the director of the church history library, one of the things in the collection are millions of patriarchal blessings. Oh, yeah. And people could email the church or fill out a form and get their ancestors or their own Pedro button. That's right. That's right. And so the staff here was building that online system whereby patriarch submit blessings and people request copies, and we were working all of that out. And so in those settings, I just had lots of opportunities to talk with patriarchs and local leaders and general church leaders and the staff here. All of these people are really smart and they're just kind of, I kept thinking about the topic and I kept learning lots of things and then it just kind of all kind of came together and said, well, I felt like, wow, I've learned a lot. Maybe I should put it together in some way and share it. And as I read this book, it's not a history book, even though you're a historian. That's right. What's the audience or what angle were you coming at? Yeah, and so I think my angle here is that it is a devotional book. It's meant to help someone. I mean, the starting point is, I've received a blessing now what? The many other books on the market are kind of encouraging people to get a blessing and get them excited and tell them to look forward to it. And this book begins with, okay, you've got one.

00:05:01 - 00:10:02

Now what do you do with it? How do you make sense of it? How do you use it throughout your life? And so part of my approach to that angle was, well, people have been getting blessings like this for almost 200 years. And so how have they done it? If I'm trying to figure things out in my

own blessing, which I was, as a 16 year old, and I still am, and these many years later, maybe, you know, we generically say, oh, the lessons of history help us things will maybe there are stories from our own history of people, and they have to be from our history because this is such a unique religious experience. And so that kind of led me into historical research in people's journals and diaries and I for the book I didn't read everybody's blessing. The sacred that only is for the individual. But I read where people who had written about it or talked about it or shared about it. And then tried to come up with these lessons about how to make sense. Yeah. And the whole concept I've been thinking about is going to read in the book is that this whole concept of patriarchal blessings is so unique to our faith tradition. We have several things that may find another in some form and other denominations. But it's almost to the point of like, it's almost its own island where it's not necessarily directly attached to temple work or directly attached to priesthood or I mean, again, there's these connections. But even the patriarchy, it's a priesthood office, but he's not like in the quorum of the patriarchs or something in the area. And it's almost like this retirement calling that bless their hearts as the wise sage that we turn to for this. But it really is a unique experience we have in our faith. It really is. And I also think that today, in the 21st century, patriarchal blessings do something for us that other people in the religious landscape or religious marketplace are looking for. You know, I commonly hear people say, well, I don't participate in organized religion, but I'm just spiritual. And I think patriarchal blessings highlight why that's not a very good way to think about it because it has to be institutional. You need somebody who has the keys to authorize somebody to give these kinds of blessings. And what results is something that's just profoundly personal and personalized and spiritual, and so it just kind of reminds people that people say, well, I want to be close to God, but will God send his son who created a church. So that's part of and they come together. And this becomes one of those moments. And a lot of people I've talked to, especially people, you know, maybe having challenging time with their faith, or their journey. Patriarchal blessings are one of the places where they say, well, no, that I really felt something there. Maybe on the back row of elders quorum, I don't feel much. But that was one moment where I knew that God was aware of me. So there's something really powerful in this unique experience that we have. For sure. So you don't talk about this in the book as much as far as the history of, but since you're a storied and we're in the church history library here. I'm curious, what got us to this point? Here's stories about Jules Smith senior being the first patriarch and then hiram and on and on to the point that the church used to have this general patriarch, I forgot exactly what we call them. And then that was done away with. And so what context could you give us as far as history is concerned? Yeah, well, you gave the summary great. Good job. I've been listening. It's wearing off on you here in the church history library. Joseph Smith senior becomes the first, and the title patriarch does refer in part to part of the original mission, you know, this is early on when Joseph is thinking about families and connections and it's not quite before Elijah. Before Elijah has returned, but it's in this moment when they're starting to think, and one of the things they noticed is that there are people who don't have fathers. And so as priesthood authority is given and fathers start to give blessings or healings or things like that, there's this kind of a what about the people who don't. And so part of the context is that Joseph Smith senior can give blessings to the fatherless. And in the big kind of Christian context, this is like James, talking about care of the fatherless in the widows and this is part of the concern. How does everyone in the kingdom have access to blessings and insight and so there's a thread of this that goes in an inherited

way after Joseph senior, it becomes hiram after hiram, passes to William Smith, but even during Joseph Smith senior's ministry, they start to call other local patriarchs because he can't be everywhere. Including in England as the apostles are there, we get in the 1840s, we get a patriarch in England, who's doing this. So it's an international thing from the beginning and so it's both. It's a kind of a blessing that's available locally and there is an over time they call it different things. Church patriarch general patriarch presiding patriarch into the 20th century, it's mostly Smith descendants.

00:10:03 - 00:15:02

There are a few cases that aren't, but mostly Smith descendants who occupy the role and by the 50s and 60s, the church patriarch is now starts to be involved in kind of general church trainings, general conferences in the 50s and 60s were larger events, multi days, there'd be sessions for different organizations and things. And so there start to be sessions for patriarchs and training in the church patriarch helps in those ways. Church patriarch continues to travel to places where there isn't a patriarch. An organized stake or something. So we see some of that in the 20th century. But ultimately, it's in the late 1970s when under president Kimball, they start looking at all kinds of things in the church's structure and how do we grow and how do we take the gospel to the world and how do we, this is the same setting where they get rid of assistance to the 12 and they build a new 70 that's different than the 19th century 70 that become part of the world. And so in these rethinking, they rethink church meetings and go to the consolidated schedule, but it's right in this moment where one of their conclusions is that the work of patriarchs and patriarchal blessings, two things happened one that it gets assigned to the president of the quorum of the 12th that becomes the person responsible. And then two, that it really works through a stake presidents. And so we begin the current kind of relationship where stake president reviews blessings and councils with the patriarch, but it is still a really kind of a one on one role. I mean, the patriarchs, the only one in the stake, and the stake presidency the only one who kind of reads the blessings and gives counsel and so it's a lonely role. Yeah. And that's kind of been its structures the late 70s. Yeah, that's fascinating. And I sort of has some echoes of almost a baby's blessing where it's not a saving ordinance, but it's done under through keys and through authority and whatnot, but then this may seem like it's a very basic question and just like a baby's blessing is like, well, why do we do a baby lesson? Well, it helps us create a record, that's sort of an administrative thing we do. And then it's just good to get some blessing in the beginning of a life as they begin. Immortality. And then so how would you answer? And we get the patriarchal blessing is personal scripture. You could say it gives people encouragement and life guidance, something to reflect on. But why a patriarchal blessing? Yeah, that's a really great question. And I like the comparison to an infant blessing. And this is just me speaking totally personally. One of the things I've read, you know, in the old literature and instruction about Pedro I'm sorry about infant blessings that it feels like we lose a little. I think today we often turn them into, this is a blessing about the kid. But the baby can't hear you, doesn't understand you. Give your name all these things. And yeah, they can happen. But

earlier infant blessings were also about the mother and her safe delivery and expressing gratitude for the child and when you think about 19th century context when so many children die. And so that even the setting where we normally do infant blessings at a fast and testimony meeting, we've come together fasting, prayerful, grateful, and then infant blessings, I think, to me, are more communal in the sense that, if the fathers inspired to bless this baby to gain a testimony and learn and grow, well, who's gonna do that? Other than the people in the room who are going to become the primary teacher and the young wins president and that an infant blessing in many ways is tying the whole community together to say we're going to help this child. We're grateful that the child is here and we're excited to raise the child. And I think a patriarchal blessing then is it comes, there's not a defined age of, you know, people who've gotten them as young as I mean, I found one in church history. They were 8 days old. It was the patriarchal blessing that was recorded. They collapsed it. Let's just we're going to do it. Let's just do it all at once. And Pedro buzzing. But often they'll be Spencer to be Kimball was 11 when he got his 19th century will Z ten 1112 today. It's a little bit older, but we do lots of things older now. We stay in school longer in the 21st century. We marry later. So in some ways, age has pushed back just in line with culture and where we place people. But it happens at a time in culture where people are about to start making decisions. They're also about to start, well, here's the way I like to think about the transition. We often think about it, I think, in an unhelpful way, and we say, oh, I've had this child that will become independent, and I'm launching them on their own. The reason I think that's unhelpful is if you spend your whole life training to be independent, then you get really frustrated when you learn that you can't do everything in life.

00:15:03 - 00:20:01

And so I think a better way to think about it is, you know, you come to earth, you're totally dependent on earthly parents, and now you're about to go out and it's time for you to really be dependent on the lord. And that's what I try and teach my own children is you're not becoming an independent, you're transferring dependents. And now you really have to have a tighter relationship with the lord. Because I'm not going to be there to make your dinner or clean up after you do this. And you're going to have to the lord will have to guide you and help you and so that's one way that I like to think about it is this moment where this where a person and today the handbook will guide if you're getting close to your mission or military service or marriage, that that is a time to go in and receive a blessing. And that feels like a time where you're really making this transition where now it's going to be me and the lord and we're going off and so I think it comes at a moment where you really build that relationship and make it and kind of there's a handoff. I love that framing that you've gotten father's blessings all these years and now you need a heavenly father blessing to keep you going as you're now transitioning into life, right? Yeah. So let's reach back to some of your real rumor concepts. Are there any apocryphal concepts or stories or things you want to shut down right here and have that feature our goal blessings or anything come to mind? Well, Harold B Lee used to tell a story that people heard there was something in his patriarchal blessing and he would just he would always shut that one

down and say no, that's not in my blessing. But maybe in a more general way, there is often kind of interest or fear people here like, oh, wow, somebody's blessing said this or that and then they try to extrapolate it to the church. And I think the thing to shut down there is to say, patriarchal blessings are personal. They're for individuals. If the lord has a message for the church about the second coming or financial hard times or that's going to come through a different channel. And it's not going to come to one random person three wards over, who's in the same pickleball group as your brother in law. That's not the way that the message is going to come. But there is kind of this like, oh, I heard this, and I heard that. Yeah. And it doesn't, it doesn't really matter. Right. And I've heard the stories of somebody gets a patriarchal blessing and that says you'll serve a mission in a strange land. And then they die in a car accident and so there's almost like, oh, prophesied of the death. I don't know if that's helpful. We sort of read into these things that they mean more than they do or sometimes they're or sometimes somebody does say, no, you will serve a mission and but they die or something happens and they don't. And then we think what we're wrong or this wasn't supposed to happen. We kind of tear ourselves in knots a little bit. I think so. And the very first chapter of the book starts right there with just emphasize the interpretation of lessing belongs to the lord. And even people, when you can't be the armchair quarterback, I think, well, this is my child. I interpret it, or even family member passes away, and you inherit the blessing, and you read it, and you say, oh, all these things were undone. To interpret that. And so either way, rather than if we're saying, oh, it shouldn't have happened or it should have, yeah, it's between the person and the lord. Yeah. Is there anything to there's this concept sometimes where even when I interview people, they'll say like almost hesitant, be like, oh, I probably shouldn't say this, but in my patriarchal blessing, it says, as if there's this unwritten rule of you're not supposed to talk about it publicly, right? And maybe there's been quotes and things encouraging that. But what's to that concept, anything coming to mind? Yeah, no, there is a written component to that in the current handbook and past ones. It's counseled against sharing them publicly. I think sometimes people interpret that to me and I can't tell anyone. And so the handbook does talk about, you know, family members or as you feel prompted to do so, certainly in the history of the church, different church leaders have felt prompted to share sometimes direct quotes in general conference, president hinckley was one. He read a line from his blessing and talked about it. Others have paraphrased it. Some people feel more comfortable, not quoting it, but saying, well, here's generally a thing and I think in all of those, again, it kind of goes back to your relationship with God and I think the bigger picture is, you know, when God gives us light, if we take care of it and respect it, then we get more light, and that light grows and grows until it becomes a perfect day, is the promise. And so it's just kind of, how do I treat this in a way that the lord knows, I value it, and then I'm eligible for more. What about the concept of just obviously patriarchs are mortal men in their, I don't know, sometimes we have a tendency just because latter day scenes, but we're humans, we like to bring mysticism into things of like there's something magical happening here that this person says these words in a certain way that so but nonetheless, I guess I'm getting to like just with leadership in general.

Sometimes we're local bishop doesn't meet our expectations or sort of disappointed. And that sort of dynamic can happen with the patriarch too. It's like, oh, I was sort of hoping for more little more articulate language, but I didn't get that through this patriarch or there might be this feeling of. I don't want to go to that one. I want to go to another one or one. What comes to mind with that dynamic? Yeah, I think it's important to remember that like a patriarchal blessings are like other forms of revelation in that their communicated from heaven to a mortal people. In a lot of different ways. And so we shouldn't kind of try and make a generalization of this is how they work. But at one end of kind of maybe a spectrum of possibilities, it is very clear and it has been from the beginning that a patriarch is not just like a dictaphone from heaven. He doesn't just kind of plug in to some like radio station and open his mouth and he's just, there's no role from him. He's just simply translating it. Or transmitting it from heaven because the patriarch is involved the patriarchs worthiness matters the page arch is thinking and paying attention to the spirit. So that's one extreme that's wrong. I think the other extreme that's wrong is to say, well, none of the words are specific because there are certain times where patriarchs will feel a word or a phrase or maybe even a couple of sentences. There are other times where patriarchs will say things like they see a picture and they describe it. And so they may see in a visionary way a scene, but the description of the scene is that person's ability with words and adjectives and yeah, someone may have more flowery adjectives than others, but they're trying to describe a scene. And so I think both kind of approaches are helpful to make sense of your blessing. Sometimes, you know, pay attention to the words and the word choice, especially if the words echo scripture or a scripture character. If it says something like you will be like Ruth, well then you better be opening your old Desmond and reading Ruth and learning what you can. And that really matters. But I think it's also helpful to approach it in terms of concepts and maybe not get hung up on a specific word, but what's the concept here? What's the big picture here? Because that's, you know, sometimes we have a bad metaphor. We assume a patriarchal blessing is like a map, like it's gonna show me everything on the landscape and where to turn and where's the stop sign. And that's when we get really focused on like, did it say this thing, or people get really upset? Well, it didn't mention something. That matters. It didn't mention a mission. It didn't mention marriage. Does that mean I'll never get married? It doesn't mean that at all. It just means that I'm more like the Liahona and it's not telling you every bump in the road, but it sometimes the Lia hona gave them really clear instruction that made them quake and tremble. And sometimes it was just more general, like, yeah, go keep going. And I think the patriarchal blessing is like that. Yeah, it's really helpful. Just speaking to church leaders like how could they, I think you have a bishop, for instance, obviously working close with the youth and how could they better go about just encouraging patriarchal blessings or bringing any more meaning to it rather than this is just sort of what you do now and you're at this point in your life. Right, yeah, yeah, definitely don't turn it into a checklist. Everybody who reach X age, you go ask. The handbook outlines two criteria only. You have to be worthy and you have to understand how important it is. And that's it. And the bishop is the one who makes both of those determinations. And so, you know, some people will understand that it's important and really want it when they're 12 or 13. Others, it might not matter too much until they're about to go on a mission, and then they're like, oh, yeah, maybe I better, and so I think part of what the bishop discerns is how

well they understand the value of it. So I think it's great. Probably not every interview, but you know, maybe once every two years, the bishop should have just said, ask, and probably it's describing it maybe a little of what it is. I also think it's great to do activities where you can invite the patriarch to talk about patriarchal blessings and just the youth, sometimes lately they've been inviting patriarchs to sit on the stand as stake conferences, and that's good. The youth can start to see a person, but I think if you're in somebody's home when you have cinnamon rolls and the patriarch shares some thoughts, that makes it even more real. Like, oh, here's a person and I felt really good in that little fireside with the patriarch, so now I'm looking forward to my personal opportunity. And so I think parents can talk about it. This should talk about it. Again, not all the time, but at certain intervals. And then definitely teaching the principles of revelation. Teach the story of the liahona, long before, they get there because then when they get it, you can say, now you've got it. It's going to be like Aaliyah honey.

00:25:00 - 00:30:15

Okay, now I've got something to go on. So I think there are lots of ways we can be preparing them for revelation in this relationship. Yeah, I like that we don't have to hammer every lesson or every interview, but just sort of keeping it top of mind every once in a while. I remember as a 9th grader sitting in seminary class and the patriarchal blessing concept came up and my teacher asked, who in here has their picture go blessing. And I remember a few raise their hands and I thought, wait a minute, I thought you can get it at this age. And so it's almost like gauging that if you sense that maybe a youth is like they're really captivated by this. They're energized by it. They're intrigued by it, then hey, why don't we loop the bishop in and talk about it and see if it would make sense to move forward to that? And do it. Yeah, and it can start by talking. You start by reading things that are short things that the church magazines regularly publish a little every two or three years. There's a kind of preparing for your blessing. So there are definitely things that you can share and read and talk about and help them help them be ready. Yeah. So you mentioned the patriarch sitting on the stand concept. It's triggered this other thing. I don't even know if you'll have a straight answer for this. And I don't think it's addressed in the handbooks. But from what I've learned understood, obviously we call a bishop bishop Franco or a fake president president Franklin. But it's not like a title. You don't say patriarch Franco, or patriarch John. Have you heard that? Real verse rumors. I've heard both. And you're right. I don't think I've actually seen something written either way. I've sometimes I've heard him, I've heard it in the third person, like the patriarchal or patriarch so and so. But I've heard it less like walking right up to their face and saying, hey, hey Pedro and so are brothers still. So in my case, I just called him grandpa. But yeah, and I think in that way, it's like other priesthood offices we don't call someone deep in so and so or teachers so and so or high priest zone. So but there are certain times where the office of elder sometimes appropriate to say is a title and other times where it's a calling of president that it's a respectful title and bishop is the crossover that it's both in office and a Nintendo calling that becomes a title. Interesting. All right, well yeah, we don't have a straight up rule for all offices or callings or interesting. And some callings get no title.

That's right. That's right. If you're the ward organist, you have no title. It's just like, hey, play this down. That's right. We should come together and think of an awesome your hyenas or something. That's good. That's good. What about our ancestors patriarchal blessings? Obviously, you can go, you can request those. And you talk about it in the book this concept of sometimes we are talking about in our parents or grandparents or whatever. And it makes me think of I think my mother's mentioned that in her patriarchal blessings is something like your children will be known in the world. And in my siblings, we've served all over the world in different missions and Portugal in France. That's great. But also, I'm known in the world through this podcast. There's sort of a double meaning. Sometimes triple a meaning, but why should we be interested in our parents or ancestors blessings? Yeah, that's a great question. And I think the best way to answer that is to just say write out that we're going to rub right up against one of the articles of faith of modern American culture. And even kind of western civilization. Which is, we have this kind of sense of radical individualism. Like I'm the center of the universe. It's all about me. I'm making the choices. And even as Latter day Saints, we'll go grab doctrine that we think supports this part of our culture. Agency is about me making a choice. And we really put ourselves at the center of the story, which the center of the Christian story always has been Jesus. He's the path. He's the way he's the truth. We're saved on his name, and so we end up in trouble when we make ourselves through our own culture, the center of the story. But I think patriarchal blessings help us remember that we're connected to other people. And Joseph Smith just said it straight out. We can't be saved without our dead. And so we're connected. And so one of the implications is that promises that get made to ancestors do have fulfillment because ancestors do things that set up their family that set up their traditions, their own culture, they're their shaping family culture, they're and they're passing on both genetic legacies, but also legacies of faith and testimony. And so yeah, promises that get made. And you gave a great example. You know, about an ancestor of promise. And so, and so that is the reason behind this is the president of the quorum of the 12 who oversees Pedro blessings in the past has authorized that people can receive their direct line ancestor, so it's not branches is not uncle or cousins, got to be a direct ancestor, but also a direct descendant who has deceased if you have a child who has passed away for us or a spouse who's passed away, those can be requested as well through the church website.

00:30:16 - 00:35:01

And yeah, it's making that connection and seeing this when Wilford Woodruff announced that they would change the way they would do ceilings because he used to be sealed more laterally and kind of a kinship way to lots of different people. And in 1894, Wilford wrote of said, we're doing it wrong. We need to have people still do their parents still to their grandparents. And he used it in imagery that I think is really beautiful. He said, well, you need to create a great chain of the whole human family all the way back to Adam and Eve. And so I think patriarchal blessings and these promises that extend beyond generations are part of what strengthens that chain. And you know, and there are readings of malachi's promise that isn't just that your hearts

are turned to the fathers. That's nice. Oh, I know who that, but it's turned to the promises made to the fathers. And a page of blessing is a place where and there are other places covenants, but it's one of the places where promises are made to our fathers. Wow, that's powerful. Yeah, and my grandfather, he died when my mom was 17 of cancer and so I never met him. But to sit down with his patriarchal blessing, there's this personal, it's a spiritual experience for me that I try and turn to, I should do that more often, but man, it's almost as if he's sitting next to me and thinking, yeah, this is me, because it's so personal, right? And you can connect with these ancestors on a different level by doing that. That's a great story, a great experience. And so it's only those that are in our direct line. We can request from the church. But we can't get president hinckley's patriarchal blessing or anything. Well, if he's your grandfather, sure, but yeah, generally no. Okay. And I think sometimes they're quoted in Zion articles or things that sometimes biographers and again, if you're the person and you've hired a biographer than it is something you can share. Sometimes people will share them in a talk or something like that. On the Joseph Smith papers website, we did get permission to share some of the blessings that Joseph Smith senior gave. It was just part of the history. So Joseph smith's blessing is there, Emma smith's blessing is there. And so there are a few occasions where we've released some, but generally, it's for the person and their lineal family. Yeah. And he thinks this mentioned, as far as the lineage, obviously that's a huge component of patriarchal blessing is being what's the word like not finding out the lineage of each individual, anything like from a context of communicating the importance of a patriarchal blessing or whatnot. Sometimes it's just sort of cool, like I'm on TV from. And at the same time, we don't know what to do with it or whatever. Any thoughts coming to mind around the lineage. Yeah, well, since we've already started pushing back against our culture, let's keep going. Let's do it. I think there is a cultural reading of lineage that we've done poorly. And that is that we've made it, we've tried to read it as literal. As some literal thing happening. Like either I'm a direct descendant of the name that's declared there, or I'm somehow adopted, like my blessing is the formal adoption paper that now I am the descendant of that person. And there are people who talk in that way in the past in our history in 1920s or 30s. You can go find a statements like that. But I think that the bigger view, the better view and one that has been shared, especially recently, by president Nelson, by president oaks, is that this is not a biological or a literal connection. It's a spiritual connection. It's a symbolic connection. And if we think about God's mission is to save the whole human race, and one of the both vehicle, but also a metaphor is that we're gathering into the house of Israel. And so yes, the house of Israel, the family of Israel, was it a literal family and actual covenants were made to them, but those covenants are also available to every other of the 8 billion people on the earth. And so our lineage helps orient and I think it is two things for us. It helps orient us. Well, it's the connection. You're connected to Abraham and this family and these promises and this covenant. And it also, I think, can prompt us as we study. And you don't want to get too literal because some of these people sold their brother into slavery. So this isn't like some kind of a predestination that you're going to sell your sibling, right? That's the wrong way to read it.

But if we read the way the characters appear in scripture, you know, Israel gives blessings to his children before his death, but then Moses references those and kind of extends those later as they get to the promised land, and so I think and then New Testament writers talk about some of these characters. I think so I think in that bigger version, but it's not there are people who will speak or write and create some kind of a hierarchy of lineage. And they'll say, and they'll try and map it. Well, this tribe goes to this part of the world, but what inevitably they're mapping on their own cultural hierarchy because I'm in the good tribe and other people in the bad tribe. That's the way it always comes out. I'm the chosen one. But there's not a chosen one. We're all God's children. The whole point of this is that we all get connected. So that if we as humans then go and say, my tribe is better than your tribe, we've just defeated the whole really beautiful thing that God is doing is connecting us as a family on earth, like we were a family in heaven and then we're going to come in and say, well no, I'm chopping this up and my part is better. We just missed we missed the whole thing. People even pushed back and they said, well, what about, well, it talks about blood and bloodlines. My patriarch said, you're from the bloodline of so and so. And sometimes I just kind of laugh and I think have you ever read the scriptures? It feels like blood is the biggest symbol in all of scriptures. Yeah, they kill some animals and they shed blood, but if when we're talking about Jesus blood and we're talking about the Passover and we're talking about the sacrament, blood is a symbol and don't run around and try and make symbols into something really narrow and keep it big and glorious and wonderful. This is the God of the universe trying to tell you more information about yourself. Don't run around and say, okay, here's what it means. Is there a little thing? Yeah, yeah. This is all it can mean, God. God is trying to tell you a whole lot more than you're trying to hear. And I think he is a term a lot the mystery in the book. It's almost like, again, we can't take these literal, but I love just how God works through these things. And it's almost like this invitation like step into my mystery of who I think you are. And I'm going to bring more meaning rather than bloodline. There it is, period. That's what I know. I want you to step into that mystery of what does that word mean and what do you think I'm trying to communicate to you through that work, right? Yeah, and we, in our culture, use mystery to mean something spooky or nefarious or a crime is a mystery. But in the scriptures, mister and God talks about mysteries, it just means things he knows that we don't know. That's what a mystery of God is. Are the things he knows. And God tells us over and over in the scriptures that he wants to tell us the things he knows. He wants us to prepare to receive a gift of power. He wants us to prepare to receive the companionship of the holy ghost that can tell us the truth of all things. He wants to tell us things. And so yeah, I think seeing your blessing as a mystery in this sense, it's an invitation from God to learn more about you and your relationship with him and so sometimes I think we treat our blessing and the scriptures when we're looking for guidance in the scriptures, we treat them like a destination, like, okay, I'm having trouble, I'm gonna open my blessing, and somewhere there's gonna be a sentence in there that's the answer. And that's the destination view. When I get there, I'll find it and that'll solve my thing. I think we need to think about the scriptures and our patriarchal blessings as a doorway. When I want to find God, he's given me a personal doorway. So I'm going to pull it out. I'm going to read it. I'm going to ponder the things he's told me, and then through the holy ghost, I'm going to be taken into a place where he has more tell me. Yeah, and just especially learning from president nilsson and other prophets. We worship a God of invitations. And someone who may, and I've got this feeling at times where some paragraphs of my blessing where I'm just like,

where do you run of the mail? Nothing to get here, and I wish that there was a little bit more here, but it's almost like this invitation like, oh, you think this is around the middle? Like step into I invite you into this blessing, and I want to, I want to take you on a tour of what I think of you. Well, and I think a really great illustration of that is in the doctrine covenants, very early on. I'll let your listeners go find it. We'll make it mysterious for them. But there are two sections back to back that are given to two brothers, same family, and they are word for word the same, except for the name of the brother. So not only do we have these two revelations that are identical, we can analyze both of them. We didn't just canonize one with a little footnote that says, and there's a double. We can't I both of them. I think there's a lesson there because sometimes people will say, oh, it feels wrong in the middle or it fills cookie cutter or it feels, you know, not personal. And I think that's the destination view that says, what this text looks like that texture doesn't fit.

00:40:05 - 00:45:07

It's not the doorway view. It says, God's inviting you to learn more. Come to him. I mean, that's what he's always asking. Come follow me. Come on to me. Drawn here and to me, a patriarchal blessing is a manifestation of that plea to come and learn more. And that doorway is interpreted differently in different stages of life. Like when someone maybe reads their blessing is a soon to be missionary as opposed to three year bishop, you may find different meaning of purpose in that. So again, going back and reviewing it. In those different contexts. All right, off the wall question. I have future historic real verse rumor talking about bloodlines. I've heard and we can get this out if you really don't know the answer. It's sort of off the wall. I've heard people say that no Joseph Smith, his bloodline is a literal bloodline to ephraim or whatever. Have you heard anything like that? I haven't heard that. Rumor marked a rumor in Mark rumer and also market as kind of impossible to verify. Yeah. You could talk to people in the family history department who will know more about this. But generally, we just don't have very good human records beyond the 1400s. And even when you get into kings, which everybody likes to do, most of those are made up. Because they're trying to invent fun Keith. They're trying to invent some kind of thing. But there's just not data. There's just not data that takes the 8 billion people in the world and traces them to a nomadic farming and hurting agricultural society. 4000 years ago. Right. And you don't have those records. And we kind of set ourselves up for disappointment sometimes, it's like, well, I mean, if you look at this logically, could that bloodline really reach upstate New York, Sharon Ramon and whatever, and it's nothing to worry about that, but the point being is he was a prophet and he had the keys and he was part of the house of Israel because of this gathering that's happening, right? Yeah. And it's probably it probably just comes from people kind of misreading the Old Testament to think, oh, that prophecy is inherited. But if you read the Old Testament and the New Testament, the book of Mormon, more closely, you see, God just calls whoever he needs. It's not limited. And that's the point of the gospel. It's not limited. It is for all of God's children. Yeah. Well, obviously, and you mentioned it again, this would be a decent book to give to maybe some who just received their patriarchal blessing and again trying to make sense of their patriarchal blessing and how to use it, how to leverage it in

their spiritual journey and whatnot, is that maybe this could be great in the bishop office library that you can lend out copies and things like that. I think that would be great. I probably have a conflict of interest in fully in fully answering that question. But I would say this, that I did prepare it and write it from that standpoint of you got your blessing now what? And the book kind of unfolds in a kind of reasoned way to think through things. So it begins with understanding God's will and the mysteries, then it moves into the kind of the text, how do you interpret the text itself and treat it like scripture, it talks about timing, and then it also talks about conditions, one of the things that blessings do is kind of identify these are things you need to do to be ready. But then the book ends with a chapter called peace without clarity because one of the things that happens is we kind of work through what the text means and maybe the time has passed or hasn't passed or sometimes we get to a point where it isn't clear anymore. And I think one of the important things to take away is that God does also offer us peace without clarity. We often want to link the two together, you know, peace is when there's no war. That makes sense. Or pieces when we've built turned our swords into plowshares. But Jesus also offers peace that passive understanding. Or peace that doesn't make sense. And the prince of peace offers that too. And I think that's an important part of reading is recognizing that some things might not make sense. And one, I do have a little disclaimer that many of the stories I tell and I share stories from more than three dozen people who are from our history have worked through things and try to understand their blessing. But they all have one tremendous advantage over us. And they're looking back on their lives. And they have their blessing. They've seen their lives. They've seen things unfold. And they're the ones who identify, oh, I misunderstood this and now I learned I grew closer to God. Well, we don't have that advantage. We're all still in the middle of it. And sometimes it still looks blurry and sometimes it doesn't bring peace. But it can bring peace, but maybe not without clarity. And as we get through and as we, as we draw closer to God, we'll see things differently. Yeah. So you mentioned the youngest blessing that you found was 8 days old. Exactly? What was the oldest that you found? You know? I mean, I do share a story in the book of a man who was in his 80s, and he was living in Switzerland.

00:45:07 - 00:50:04

He'd been a member of the church for decades, but this is he's living through the Cold War. And so he gets this promise late in his life that he should do temple work and promise kind of counsel. And so and part of his reaction is I'm really old and I have bad health and I can't travel to a temple and but anyway, I won't give away the story. But it's a happy ending. But it is very late in his life where he and if you're, again, if you're thinking about like a map, you think what's left for me later in my life. But if you're thinking about it like a doorway to knowing God, well then you want that as any time you can get a doorway to draw closer to God. And to the 99 year old just says you'll probably die in the next few years at the end. There's always more that God has the details. And we continue to exist beyond death. And some of the promises find their fulfillments there as well. That's the beauty of it. Any other just from their historian perspective of the stories or maybe some that aren't apocryphal that have good references and whatnot that

would be worth mentioning before we wrap up or you know, I think one of my, one of my favorite stories that I tell is one from heber J grant and his blessing tells him he tells this story to his biographer, a blessing says that he'll be called to the ministry in his youth. And his day, you don't submit a mission paper, you get called from the pulpit. So he's a teenager. He knows other people like Joseph F Smith have gone when they were 15, and so he gets his blessing and he thinks it's coming soon. Well, 15 passes 16, 17, 19, 22, 23. All of his friends colleagues have had been called up at general conference set out on missions and he's just, he doesn't know what to do. And what happens is what happens to many of us. He starts to doubt the blessing, but then it builds other things. So he's like, well, if this blessing is wrong, maybe the patriarch is wrong. Well, then maybe the church isn't true. Maybe there isn't revelation. Maybe there isn't a profit and he starts to feel the weight of all of these things on top of this interpretation that he's supposed to be called to the ministry and his youth and he's not. And so one day he's walking down the street in Salt Lake City. He's thinking about all these things. He's worrying about all these things and he just says out loud, shut up mister devil. I don't care if every patriarch in the church told a lie, I believe that this is the work of God. And that ends for him the moment of kind of wrestling. Now, if you're a person walking down the street that day, it might have raised a question of what's going on. But anyway, for him it ends it, and then shortly thereafter, as 25 year old, he's called to be the stake president in tuilla. Oh wow. And then a year or so after that, he's called to the 12. And in his 20s. And then he goes back and he realizes the blessing says you'll be called to the ministry in your youth, not you'll be called on a mission. And he had read it as a mission, culturally informed, and then he'd used the cultural markers of when and he got into that whole situation because he was reading it in a way that wasn't clearly wasn't what the lord meant. And when he held on and waited on the lord and found that piece, then he saw that God had something totally different for him. Wow, that's awesome. I love those stories. Now I want to ask you about just that different projects here at the church history library. But you personally, is there another book brewing or what any personal projects that you're working on? You could tease us with. You know, there's always a thing that's working. I'm always kind of thinking about things. For me personally, writing is one of the ways I make sense of things. Things bounce around my head and I have to so I doodle things on paper and type things up and so one of those will go somewhere. I'm sure. But that's another to tease. That's fine. I don't have a title or a contract or anything to plan. I'm sure this won't be the last time you're on this podcast. Well, I would count that as a great honor. Well, thank you. And I know part of your role here, you know, you want to make different audiences aware of the great projects they're doing here. So what things could you plug about the church history library or say I went on this church history tour recently? And finally got me to tap on that history to have in the gospel library. Oh, good. Oh my goodness, there's so much here. And I knew there was a lot there, but as I started to dig, I'm like, oh, this is really fascinating. And it's organized well, and I can learn so much. Anyways. But what else could you plug? I'm glad you found it. Yes. Gospel library app is full of wonderful treasures. You know, we're working on volume four of saints. And so that is underway about this is the last one because I've finished the third one.

I'm like, wow, we're getting pretty close to the monitor. Third one brought us to 1955 and the Swiss temple and so the fourth, we haven't yet picked the end, but it'll be, it'll be in the 21st century, just not quite sure. Some things are just so close, that it's hard to write about what happened yesterday. And so what we're trying to figure out where that line is. But another really huge, huge thing, is the Joseph Smith papers are going to wrap up next year. We're going to publish the last volume of the papers. We've been working on this for 15 years in the current form. And then decades before that in terms of finally got through all his mail. Yeah, it's been so that's been really big. We just finished the last batch of two really wonderful projects one is a partnership with BYU, MLI wells journals are at BYU, but we've got them transcribed and published on our church historians press website. Also a huge project that went through and found the sermons of Eliza R snow. And these are just captured in relief society minute books and local records. It was they were all over the place when we've pulled them together into this online collection of her sermons. Maybe the last thing to say in the gospel library app, there's a series in there, and it's titled global history, but we've been writing about the history of the church in various places around the world. And they're like, it's not totally aligned with nations, because like in the UK, there is an entry for England and Scotland and Wales, Hawaii has an entry. It's had it's currently part of a nation, but in its history and the church, it was not always part of the United states. So but there are places, but there are about 70 of them now, and there are some more that are working their way through. And so this is a really cool place for a missionary. You get a call somewhere, learn about the gospel legacy in the place where you go. And then just wonderful stories of faith, Latter day Saints, all over the world who are building Zion. Yeah. Wow, that's awesome. And encouraging for sure. All right, Keith, last question I have for you is as you've delved into this concept of patriarchal blessings and whatnot. How is the doctrine of patriarchal blessings helped you become better follower of Jesus Christ? That's a really wonderful question. And I think we've touched on it a little in that it's helped me to move beyond seeing my patriarchal blessing as a piece of paper or even words on the paper or text or message and really see it as part of my relationship. With God, my relationship with Jesus and my connection to them, as I try to be like them, and as I try to turn and live with them. 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. leading-saints.org or go to leading-saints.org/contact and send us your perspective or questions. If there's other episodes or topics you'd like to hear on the leading saints 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 remember, go to leading-saints.org/14 to access our full young saints virtual library. It 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 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