



## **“I’m Not the Gatekeeper, I’m the Welcoming Committee” | An Interview with Kurt Brown**

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Have you ever heard of scrupulosity? This is a mental health concern that is impacting more Latter day Saints than you think. Scrupulosity is religious obsessive compulsive disorder, where individuals are hyper obsessed about their worthiness and repentance. Sam Baxter, a former bishop sat down with me to talk about his lifelong struggle with scrupulosity and how he got treatment. You can watch this interview for free in the mentally healthy saints library by going to [leading-saints.org/14](http://leading-saints.org/14). This gets you 14 days free access to Sam Baxter's interview about scrupulosity and 25 plus other interviews about ministering to those who struggle with mental health. The content is priceless for leaders, so visit [leading-saints.org/14](http://leading-saints.org/14) for free access. So your 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, listen, everybody sit down. Buckle your seat belt and really make sure that by the time this episode is done, that your podcasting app doesn't automatically delete it because you're probably going to go back and listen to it again twice three times. It'd be more. I had the opportunity to sit down with Kurt Brown. He has a pretty cool name, but that's not the whole story with his name. We'll get more into that in just a minute. But

Kurt Brown is a former mid single adult ward bishop, did some phenomenal things, disrupted culture in such a positive way, grew the ward attendance that they were bursting at the seams. And even got in trouble a few times for maybe doing too good of a job as a bishop, but then got his name on a list somewhere and now he's headed off to Tacoma Washington to be the mission president there, starting in July of 2023. Now, we start out the episode, just talking about his unique background, being a convert to the church and the rough childhood he had and being a young single dolt in a mid single adult himself being married at the age of 35 and I just love it to hear when the atypical individual gets called to serve as a mission president or is a bishop or whatnot. And Kurt Brown was one of those individuals for sure. And I'm so excited to have him serve in this way. Now, our conversation about repentance, how he handled repentance, how he reached out to the individual, how he saw himself and not as a gatekeeper, but is a welcome committee. These are transformational components. So important, then I should probably just start talking about it so you can hear it for yourself. So here is my interview with Kurt Brown. Today I'm with Kurt Brown, how are you? I'm doing great. All right, we gotta just start with the name. This is the irony of this is nobody cares about us. But hey, guess what? We're gonna tell the world. Can you start a podcast with topics that nobody else cares about? I know, but we're gonna do that day. So obviously we both have the same name, spelled the same way, Ku RT. I mean, can you believe people put a K at the end of that? I know. Or an iron at the beginning. Shout out to Davis Smith who connected us. So he's preparing to leave as a mission present in Brazil. You're preparing to leave the miss president in Tucson. Him and I met each other at the church administration building in the hallway. We both looked like deer in the headlights. That's actually how we met. And we've become fast friends. And that was orchestrated by the heavens. Of course, could happen. So he puts us in touch. We get on the phone, we're talking stupid dad jokes about you've never met a younger than 40 and I happen to be 40. You are the youngest Kurt I've ever met. If there's any other Kurds out there, it's turning into a grandpa named. Let's get together. We'll figure out a time. You email me and I look at your email and it has your middle name is Harold. And my middle name is Harold spelled the same way. So we're both Kurt Harolds. When you texted me that night, I thought you were putting me on. I'm like, there's no other Herald anything in existence. I don't know if I say the picture of my driver's license or what, but I was like, no, no. This is really my great grandfather, Harold Francom. I'm named after him. Yeah, you sent me into a complete rabbit hole. I spent the whole rest of the night mathematically trying to calculate how many Kurt Harolds are in the U.S.. My dad said something in our family history.

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There's even this point where our last name got written down as Brown somewhere. So I almost became a Brown. I don't know. That would be hilarious. The typical two guys show up at a party with the same shirt and they're like best Friends forever. So now we're best Friends. I've been looking forward to this all week. I don't know what else we're going to talk about. Here we go. Anyways, so put yourself in the context. Who are you? Other than Kurt Harold, 51 years old, got

married when I was 35, recovering wall streeter when I was a kid, I wanted to be Alex P Keaton on family ties. Have you ever seen that show? Is that the Michael J. Fox? Yeah, yeah. And probably the most embarrassing thing I can tell you is when I was in 8th grade I wore a tie to school every day, 'cause I wanted to be that guy, go to Wall Street, get rich. So I did, I went to Wall Street, did the whole Wall Street experience. And probably should have had a social life and some other things. But your convert to the church families of the church. Tell us about your Northern California. My father was a football player, played in college. I played a little bit of pro and the Canadian football league was an elevator mechanic. Nobody in my family's ever graduated from college. And then my dad was like a permanent 18 year old and my mom finally got sick of it and left him. He was devastated. I stayed with my dad. How old were you? Daddy's boy. And then a while later I was playing sports with a kid, and my dad loved his family. And one day was like, you got to tell me how your family is so cool. And my dad had really been reeling from my mom, leaving him. And she should have left him. But he was reeling. And that's what led us to the church. And for a couple years, he went on and off as an investigator, couldn't get her head around 14 year old boy. Her profit. I remember going to church with him and he still was really skeptical. He wouldn't even let me get baptized. And your young teenager this morning. And we're just like going. But it changed my dad's life. It saved my dad. And so much of my testimony was watching my dad go through that process. And he is an amazing man. Just an incredible person. One of the most helpful kind people that you can meet. And just as a young person watching him from going like a lot of worldly things and then having this change, even as a young person, I could appreciate the power of that. And then eventually he got remarried and here we are. So what did you get baptized? So I was ten when I got baptized. Time is your dad? Or no, no, no, later. He made me wait. Okay. He ended up baptizing me, but he wanted to be sure it wasn't called. He'd heard things. So it was like, we went all the time. We were fully active members of the church, and it was kind of funny. And then in a crazy twist, a couple years later, my mother and my younger sister went with my mom and lived with her. They joined the shirt. Wow. And so we had never been in a church when I was a kid. And then within a couple of years, both of my parents joined the church, and they're now remarried to other people. It's funny, all those years went by and then later we were doing family history and realized that both of my parents families had come across the plains as saints. Oh, wow. In somewhere somebody just sort of went inactive and that was it. And so we didn't really know that we had that connection with the church. It just wasn't part of our lives at all. So you went through the traditional youth experience in the mission was always on the radar. Eagle scout, you know? Yeah. And where'd you go on your mission as a young man? A mission called the Canada Halifax mission, which really went from northern Maine all the way to the North Pole. We had four Canadian provinces. We had three time zones. At one point, I think it was the largest land mass mission in the world or something. And it was an amazing experience. I think now it's been folded into Montreal. I think it's all one eastern Canadian mission now. Were you French speaking? No, I was English, but we had both French and Russian speaking missionaries in the mission. At that point, you're all in. Good mission experience. Mostly. Yeah. I've been thinking about it a lot recently. My visionary journals recently with this new calling. But wasn't sure I was going to go. My dad didn't serve a mission. No one in my family did. And I didn't know much about it. And I had a college playing college basketball at the time at a small school in California and kind of lived for basketball. And I kind of felt like, I don't want to walk

away from this. And it's just doing really didn't have a testimony of being a missionary at all. So I felt like I should go, though. I got my own witness. You got to go. And then when I got to the field, it was a train wreck. I just really, for three or four months, I just was miserable. And then I called it. I was like, I'm going home, and I packed and called and said, give me a plane ticket. I'm out here and my comp and my mission president talked me into giving it 30 more days. Really, you know? And I got a special blessing. It's going to come in handy. And it was an amazing 30 days. It was what I needed. You know, the lord was merciful and helped me. And then by the end, they had to shove me on the airplane to get me home. I just ended up loving being a missionary. But yeah, you look back and you think as a young person, you're lucky you made it. You're lucky that you survived and did some good things. Because it's hard for you to young person.

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Worth mentioning as far as mission or before the mission in your upbringing or whatnot. No, you know it was, you know, we've had some hard things happen. My dad married somebody who wasn't very happy was pretty abusive and my dad was gone a lot and stuff. And so I was kind of raised by her in a weird sort of way. So it was some trauma there. And my sister really struggled. My mom passed away when my mother was only 45. So my sister was only 18. I just off my mission. Really threw my sister into a major league tailspin drugs, all kinds of stuff was living on the streets and my dad had gotten remarried and so my sister and I were kind of felt like we were on an island a little bit and I was trying to take care of her and so I was telling Davis when we went to dinner and met we kind of didn't know where to go. My sister and I so we moved into an abandoned house. A buddy of mine, his family had a key to a house that they took care of and the owners lived in another state and had for like a decade. So we moved in. You became squatters. Yeah, went down, tried the power turned on, the water turned on, cleaned up the place. My sister lived there like squatters. No one knew. We just totally kept this into the radar and eventually my sister cleaned herself up and she has an amazing story of her own. She passed away when she was just 34 years old. By the time she passed beautiful family, just to head her third kid was working in the temple as a temple worker had really her life had done a complete one 80 and yeah, we miss her a lot. But yeah, so we had some pretty colorful experiences. My sister and I, I like to say we have a little bit of a textured past. They're just example of an example of redemption. For sure. Had the power of Jesus can change us. And even me, you know, I had an amazing mission experience really wanted to take my shot and go to Wall Street. I did. And what was it about Wall Street? I mean, just this perception that was created in the movies and things. I was raising the 80s, right? So I was that 80s kid. I'm going to go to Wall Street, get rich. It's exciting. And greed is good. Exactly. What's the movie? Wall Street. Michael Douglas. Yeah. You know, when we had periods of my childhood where we had no money, my dad was unemployed. I think too much of my motivation was out of fear of running out of resources. So I just felt like I didn't want to get rich to spend it. I wanted to make a lot of money so I could feel safe. It was like a lot of my motivation. But it seemed exciting to go

to Wall Street. It was like a sport. And it was an amazing experience. I was a trader on the floor for several years. I got to trade derivatives and all kinds of fun stuff, cool stuff. So my style was pretty wild. You didn't go to the path of college and get in the finance degree or I did, I dropped out, I played two years of college basketball at a JC in California, had a great experience doing that. We had a great team. Transferred out here, thought it might play to you for Rick majerus. There was a whole dead end of that story, but that's how he got to Utah. And then ended up getting an academic scholarship to BYU, spent some time there. And then I wrote a little investing program, a little trading program because I was a massive stock market nerd. I should have been dating in Provo, I wasn't. I was just totally yes, absorbed in this, you know? And my mission president and we've been business partners now for 30 years. This strategy of this little trading program that I wrote. And at first we had all kinds of problems with it and I was freaking out and couldn't sleep and whatever. But we got the bugs worked out and it worked and we grew a fund. My mission president and I and I stopped going to class and took off and went to Wall Street. That was. And so I didn't graduate from college either. And you're going to Wall Street to an education, but of hard knocks type of thing. Because it was sort of like I had my fund and things were going okay, but I really wanted that real Wall Street experience and really learn how that community works and just everything that comes with that. And so here I go from Provo to wall street and it was a wild wild awakening. I mean, the culture and the lifestyle back then in the early 90s, it was not. It was cocaine in the bathroom and everything you can think about in a movie is there. So it was a little it was a culture shock for me. My dad, I'm like, man, this place is nuts. Are you living in Manhattan and so I was actually, yeah, back and forth between New York City and San Francisco. Because our investment bank was actually headquartered in San Francisco. But I spent a lot of time on the floor there. And I was single. And I would just live on both coasts, had a place in both cities and wow as well. And so what was your faith journey like at that point? You know, it's interesting without knowing it, I just slowly because of all this traumatic stuff in my family, my sister, my mom dying, a whole bunch of stuff I won't bore anybody with. But I was just pretty numb and it was like, let's just go get my career going. And just kind of without even paying attention, I just slipped away. Before I knew it, I wasn't attending church, I wasn't. And it wasn't, it had nothing to do with the church. Nobody offended me. There was no doctrinal issue. She believes it was a convenience. It was totally inconvenient. And this goes on for a while for a couple of years, and then it dawns on me one day, I'm making all this money, dating supermodels, or whatever. And it's supposed to be so exciting. And I'm just totally not happy, you know? And you'd think because of my background as a missionary, I would understand why.

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But you kind of forget and so I'm, but it finally Dons on me everything I'm doing is just for me. I'm the most selfish, like I could possibly be. I'm not helping one other human, you know? And so I started doing things like volunteering at big brothers big sisters going down to the soup kitchen and things like that. So I recognized that the selfishness was a problem. But then as you start to

move back closer to the savior. Even if it's just helping other people in any way, the light kind of starts to pull you in. And then at some point I realized, and I really do miss this. I miss actively having the savior in my life on a daily basis and the holy ghost. And so it was like, all right, I'm going to go and start attending church again and go in and talk to a bishop. And I was like, this is crazy. I can't believe I am in that. Never would have thought I'd be in that position. So you mid 20s, late 20s, late 20s. But you're still going back and forth doing the Wall Street. Yeah. And finally, as part of that process, I thought, you know, I need to get off of the trading floor in New York. And it's just too much. It grates on your soul a little bit. Just being around that all the time and then I can tell you some wild stories. Your boss expects you to take your clients to do certain things and get certain things and stuff like that. And so it's a little bit compromising, even if you're on your toes. So I knew some guys that ran a firm here in Utah, an investment firm. And I asked them if I could come help engage with their firm. And they let me buy a third of the firm. I relocated here to Salt Lake City and now I've never left. That was over 20 years ago. Was that a tough transition? Because I'm sure the money was good. In Wall Street or it wasn't. I was ready. I was ready. My boss is a great guy. Walk me to the cab today I quit, tried to talk me out of it all the way down the elevator, all the way out to the taxi. Good dude kept saying, we'll give you this. We'll give you more. And I just said, hey, Scotty, this is not about the money. I need my life back. I need my life back. I need some balance. I need other things. And at this point, you're sort of back integrated into your routines of the church and things. Yeah, mostly. But you know how that is, that's all kind of relative. You know, I look back at that period in my life and it's really unfortunate. I could have done so much more good in my life. I could have helped so many more people and been a more positive influence on the world. It was improving, but a man I wish I had that, I wish I had that time back. I wish I had the chance back. So now you're back in Utah at this point and a young single adult almost a mid single adult. What do you remember from that? And I had started thinking as I get into my early 30s. I think I would like to get married. I think I would like to have a family. And maybe the proverbial settling down. And I was starting to feel it. But honestly, totally dysfunctional about how to have a relationship. No good examples at any point in my life of in my family of having a good relationship. Data amazing people and it was funny because after a couple of years that I went and saw a counselor for the first time and I'm like, man, I need to go talk to somebody. And I walked in and she was a friend of a friend. She goes, you know, so why are you here? And I said, well, I dated so many incredible people. And they're all totally different. And the only thing they all have in common is, and clearly I'm the problem, you know? And she just laughed and she's like, well, we can work on that, you know? It was a really healthy process for me to be able to go vent stuff that I never really openly talked to anybody about. But you got to a point where you were able to find the person that was mid 30s. Yeah. Got married when I was 35, met my wife, Katie, at a dinner party that I didn't want to go to. I was in a state of mind of like, I hate dating. I was actually getting into that state of mind of like, it may never work and frankly I'm maybe fine with it. Like that's like mentally where I was moving towards. And then Katie and I got introduced to each other and almost didn't connect, even then. And there's this whole long drawn out thing, and she had a career, she had television reporter, I've been with NBC and ABC. And but it worked. It worked. She's a patient woman. Nice. Nice. And now that's about 15 plus years ago. Yeah. So we got married. We met no 5, got married no 7, and in retrospect, I just looked back and I'm like, I'm just so grateful we made it. It's hard when you have two older people that have careers and

have been through a lot. And she truly is incredibly patient and helped me learn how to be a better husband, just a better partner and team player. So with that backdrop, you get this opportunity, this calling to be a mid singles ward bishop in Provo, Utah. And this is a ward that didn't exist. You were creating it. So what's the story? Where does the story begin? Yeah, it's funny because Katie and I actually met in a YSA ward, but it was one of those YSA wards in Provo that plays old. But the average age was like 29, you know? And there was probably 40 or 50 of us that were over 31. I mean, that was most of the leadership of the ward. And you know, there's these periods where some stake president comes through and does like a purge and kicks everybody out that's over 31.

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That gets played, right? And that was us. We were in that in Provo. So now we're married and we've got two kids at this point, and that's a whole crazy journey. And then I get a call one day from a buddy of mine. And I've been working in young men's for like ten or 12 years, which I absolutely love. Like young men's is the greatest calling in the church. And this buddy of mine says, hey, in our stake, we're thinking we're going to start mid singles ward a single adult ward, 31 to 45. And we need a bishop. And I'm like, good luck with that. If I think of anybody to be able to let you know, and he's like, why don't you come down and talk to us? And I'm like, oh, you got to be kidding me. And it was a ward that didn't exist, but it's in an area where there's a lot of singles that fit that demographic. And that's where Katie and I had lived. That's how we knew that stake and knew the stake president and whatnot. And then, yeah, they said we want to start this ward. We got permission from the church, but we don't even have a ward yet. I mean, it's nothing. No one even knows yet, so you want to take this on and get this started. Went home and talked to Kate Ed told Katie I'm like, there's no way we can do this. I was building a business. I had sold my ownership in another firm. I'd been a partner for 13 years. And we were building a new firm, and it was going well, but I was really busy on the road all the time. And I'm like, there's no way. I mean, I can do all this. We're in the process of at the time, we're adopting our third child who was a special needs foster baby. And man, it was just insane. And I was like, I don't want to cheat the ward. How much time can I actually commit to this? But my wife, she's the one with the faith. I was kind of complaining to her and she's like, this is what the lord wants us to do. He's going to make a way. So let's do this. Yeah. And so I mean, where do you even begin to start a ward? They had you and now you need counselors. And the fun thing about being a single adult ward bishop is you can pick counselors from anywhere. They said, you can pick somebody in saint George if they're willing to drive up all the time. We don't care. So it's kind of a unique thing. And that was a really fun process. And we ended up just the bishopric will be lifelong buddies. I mean, we text each other on the daily basis still. We've been released for over a year. And then what they do is they'll seed a new ward with some list of records, so we started technically with about 60 or 65 records. And they just tell all those people, you're going to this ward now. Yeah, that your records are going to be moved there. And it's sort of like, there was one mid singles ward in Provo in north Provo at the time. It had been there for 34

years that ward. But it never got real big, and so a lot of the brother just didn't feel like there was a need for a second ward. But south Provo is really like an epicenter for single adult aged singles. In ways is sort of the overflow from BYU students. It's just interesting. There's a demographic down there, a lot of town homes, smaller houses, condos, and there's so many in this one area, and then it's sort of like tangent to BYU. It's just a huge population of young professionals down there. It's awesome. That's where Katie and I met and we had a blast living down there. Wow, that's awesome. So you get your counselors and get the records, get the 60 records. And see you Sunday. And it's sort of like, what do you do? So we decided we better market. People need to know what we're going to be here. Most words don't. Here's the boundaries. If you live in here, you go to that war. Mid singles. I mean, you had boundaries, right? Yeah, we had boundaries. We covered 11 stakes, but those mid singles could go to a geographic ward if they wanted. So you wanted to market and see how many you could bring to you. Right. And it was no secret that there were a lot of people over 31 going to the YSA wards in south Provo. So those stake presidents and bishops were trying to find a way to maybe gently get those people to come over to a single award. So there was a lot of vested interest in a lot of different people to have something be successful. What we did at first was before we even started the war, it was so much fun because we already had Katie and I knew a lot of people in that demographic. So we had, like, a little think tank. We just got a little focus group together, had dinner, and just talked. And we just said, tell us what the perfect single adult word looks like. And it was so much fun. It was such a fun evening that we did a second one with another group of people. All referrals, and we just took tons of notes. Okay, let me back up. You held it at the church? Yeah. Just in the gym. Yeah. Yeah, we just catered in some dinner and had 25 people in there telling us what to do. And then how did you get the people there? Like you just asked stake presence to send. No, no, just from our network. Okay. So we knew some single adults already, because we had come from that community. And then we said, hey, listen, we're going to start this new ward. I want the I want the best single adult people you know to come and tell us what this ward should look like. Okay, so this is so crucial because I think even geographic traditional bishop could hear this and be like, well, our words different, people just come. But no reason you can't have a dinner and just invite anybody to say, tell me what the perfect word looks like. It was amazing. I mean, that feedback is so valuable. There's so much you can do with it as a leader. And the thing is, even though Katie and I had the single adult experience, you're only going to know your own experience. Well, let's hear it from 30 other people, right? Everybody's got a little different view on this.

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And those two dinners. And I think we have maybe had 50 to 60 total people that came out and shared ideas about what the perfect single adult ward was. Was some of the most enlightening conversation I've ever had. What were some of the ideas that you remember that came out? Well, a lot of it was more around attitude, you know? And I think a lot of us know this in the church that there's kind of two issues, right? There's doctrine, and there's culture. Well, I think



most of us feel like the doctrine is precise. And yet the culture can vary wildly, and especially when it comes to being single, and honestly, the older you get in your still single, there's a very special and unique challenge with that in our culture. And it was more of that attitude of what is this going, how is this going to feel? And that's what comes out time and time again. Because there's an interesting dilemma, right? If I'm 35 or 40 or 45 and I'm single, whether I'm divorced or I've just never gotten married. We don't mean it to be this way in the church, but it's very easy not to feel at home in a family. And it's nobody's fault typically, but it's different. I mean, I'm married now and I'm in a family ward, and it's totally different. And so it lends itself to accidentally marginalizing in ostracizing people. There's also, you know, I think most bishops have stayed present to really, really well intentioned. I do. I think they make major sacrifices and do their best that they can do. But accidentally, a lot of bishops have created problems for members that are going through a repentance process or they're coming back to the church or they're struggling with something, or they have a faith crisis, you know? And that attitude, there's almost like this old school attitude of just like suck it up, have more faith and just do this blindly. Here's the sign up sheet. I'm sorry, but that's not anything about how to save your operator. Nothing. You can't find anything in the savior's words that shows him being that way. And these are real issues. And so we needed to create a culture of 100% acceptance. And that was what really came out time and time again. So by the time we had our first sacrament meeting, we knew exactly what our marching orders were. We knew exactly how this needed to play. And so the 100% acceptance. What is the first couple of weeks to look like? Walking into establish a cult, right? There's probably some benefit if you don't have the past imprint of culture. In fact, we started it. We just decided we weren't even going to issue any callings. None. So for the first few weeks of the ward, we did everything was a guest speaker and a guest teacher. There were no callings. Because we didn't need a primary young men's young women's yet, right? We didn't need that. So you could just run around so we could all get to know each other. We had 60 records on the first Sunday 320 people came on the first Sunday, and we had 500 plus after 5 months. Holy hell. I mean, it was, in fact, on the first Sunday, the cops came because people had parked all the way down the street in a gas station and a bunch of other places. But we really had worked hard to get people to come take a look at this. My wife even made flyers and spent two days putting flyers on condo doors in south Provo. We wanted people to know we have something. And even on the first Sunday, we had lots of people that had not been in a church in three, 5, ten, 15 years. They got a flyer. They heard about it. They said, I'm going to go check it out. I'm single. You know, whatever. And we knew the experience when somebody came in the door and be equivalent to what you would feel if you were in the presence of the savior. And that's it. There's no other goal. So what does that look like? When someone walks in, what are the experience? Well, first of all, just the language starting with the bishopric and then moving through all of the leadership simply is wherever you are, the savior's arm reaches you. And I mean wherever you are, and on a regular basis we talked about examples throughout the scriptures and throughout modern history. Look at the apostle Paul, he was an apostle that arguably was a murderer, okay? If the savior's arm reaches him, who doesn't it reach? And what happens, especially if you're alone, is the adversary convinces us we're broken. It's the greatest to me, it's the greatest enemy of the gospel of Christ. Is the idea that somehow I'm different. I'm broken. I'm on the outside looking in. I'm not one of them. So the culture has to be a little bit like an alcoholics anonymous meeting. And if you've ever been to

one, they walk in and they will celebrate somebody that's been sober for 12 hours. You can get a 12 hour chip at AA. And they will stand up, they will laugh, they will cry, they will hug you for 12 hours of sobriety. And we have this culture of repentance and sin equal shame. But we should be celebrate repent. We should be celebrating the atonement. When somebody stands up and says, I'm weak and I'm struggling.

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That's actually the celebration because that's the beginning of the healing. That's what the savior needs from us to help lead us to joy. So the greatest thing that I can tell you about that ward is we had people that came and took smoke breaks during sacrament out in the parking lot, right? They felt at home in that environment. If we can't talk about that, we have no business moving on and talking about anybody else. There should be no person. The walks in to our congregations. It doesn't feel at home and welcomed and warm. That's it. That's the experience. So we did this thing where every single Sunday immediately after sacrament, we would break into what we called the visitors meeting. And anybody could come into it. And after sacrament, the ordinance, or right after sacrament meeting writers, Sacramento meeting. We go right into the high council room because we were the last we were the last war of the day. So we had the building to ourselves. We go into the high council room and we would start. And I would say something or one of the counselors would say something and we would give this message whatever your background is. If you woke up this morning with a desire to do good and be close to the savior, you're in and your back and I can show you Kurt reams of statements from modern prophets around that exact message when your heart turns to him, you are repenting. You might be doing something bad last night, but if you got up this morning with a desire to do good, you're here. You're in. You're not on the outside. We worked really hard to create that. Well, what it did was it attracted members that felt that way too. And when we would have a visitor that somebody didn't know, you couldn't believe the swarm of people that would go over there and welcome them. No matter who they were, what they look like, what their background was, and there was some heavy duty stuff, right? I mean, I mean, I could read you a list out of my journal. I mean, I dealt with the FBI, dealt with heavy, heavy stuff, prostitution, child abuse, I mean, you name down that list. And yet I would lay my hands on their head, give them a blessing, and I would be blown away every time at the love that the savior had for that person. And it was no different than me. And so that's the environment our congregations need to have. And it blows my mind that we move on and talk about other things without having that, be the DNA of what we're doing. So what did you call the meeting after Sacramento? The visitors meeting. The visitors. Sometimes it was a new member. Sometimes it was a returning member. In Sacramento, all those that are new or visiting will see in the high council room type of thing. And then they'd know to go there. And we're meeting. It was always big. And the bishopric was always there. Always. And you sort of let off with this message. Almost always. Same exact message. This is so crucial because I can see. And I remember the why I say war that I attended long ago was they had this new member meeting. And it was like, here's where you

find the calendar of activities. The housekeeping items, right? Totally. You let off with this message of this is our culture here. I think that's such a crucial component of building culture. You got to lead out with it. I hope they find that we would take the whole hour. I mean, that was Sunday school or priesthood or whatever. And we would go around the room and every person in the room, including the people that had been there from day one, whoever was in the room would go around and tell their story. And it was wild. So brand new people. Oh, brand new or people that have been interested. Where are you coming from? And what happens is if you start off with that tone and with that message, walls drop. And people write in that meeting would say the state is my first day back in church in 9 years. Wow. And on most weeks, there are people just weeping in the room. The programs of the church are all secondary to this. This is the point, right? Because the gospel is a message of hope. It's not, it's not a club, it's hope, and there are so many people feeling hopeless. And but if they could feel the holy ghost for real, they'd feel hope. Yeah. And so that meeting and then every sacrament meeting was focused on that. That's all we focused on. There was no drifting outside the bullseye. Like it just wasn't. We just didn't do it. And I want to underscore this point the story. There's just something there's a few words more powerful than tell me your story. And my mind goes to in the Garden of Eden, where God says Adam, where are you? Essentially, you're gone. What's your story right now? And so I'm just thinking about maybe that frustrated elders quorum president who's like, man, cornfield's flat. Maybe take time in your core meeting and go around and say, tell me your story, because when we hear each other's story, I mean, just hearing your story leading up to this, and I'm drawn to that. I'm like, yeah. Kurt's a human here. I mean, there's more than just a Herald name here. There's a whole different story. And honestly, that's probably a good segue to something that I think was most shocking for me as serving as a bishop was those moments of real raw vulnerability and intimacy in that room between a bishop and a member of the ward.

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To me when somebody comes and opens up, if we're not careful, our cultures created something akin to punishment at its worst. But even like other kind of weird shame gray areas. And for me, I just felt like if the savior was sitting in this chair, I always wanted to sit just need a knee with whoever was in there with me. And if the savior was there, what would he do? When this guy comes in and talks about pornography or something way worse, this is the four would be the first thing to say we would. He would. He would weep with you. And he would put his arms around you. And he would say, it's okay, you're okay, right? I look at my little kids, my 6 year old girl comes into the kitchen. She's sad, crocodile tears running down her face. And I'm mad at her, but the second she says, daddy, I'm so sorry I did this. Okay, you're a father. And I'm a really bad mortal, right? What's the savior doing for us? When we do things that we know we shouldn't do. The compassion is so beyond what we are extending each other. Not just in our culture as a church. The whole world we're not extending each other compassion and he is. And so I remember when I got set apart, Elder Roni said to me, he said, as we're walking to the parking lot, he's just remember one thing. You're not the gatekeeper, bishop. You're the

welcoming committee. It's like all he said. Wow. And so when somebody comes in, I feel like they're going to vomit all over me all this stuff. I mean, I had people that came in and hadn't seen a bishop in 20 years, like unload, right? And then they say, I want to fix this. And they say, what do we do? And I'd say, I don't know. What do we do? They look at me like, well, you're the bishop, you're supposed to know what to do. And I'm like, let's ask, let's just ask. And let's go on this journey together. I'm a Sherpa with you. Let's go do this. And my experience was over and over was that the compassion of the savior is so much more than we're extending ourselves and he's so much quicker to forgive us than we are ourselves or each other. And as bishops and priesthood leaders, we have to be driving that so much more aggressively because we have made mistakes in our culture of maybe driving shame when we should be celebrating us owning our weaknesses. And that's awesome. I love that. Before we miss it, you talked about even in your sacrament meetings, you were on target. So just break down your sacrament meetings. What did that look like? How did you do that? Well, one thing we did was for three years we'd never assigned one single topic. Not one time. It was carte blanche. When we called a member and we said, hey, can you speak for 8 minutes or ten minutes? We'd say you have only father what he wants you to speak on. Spirit will tell you. End of story. It's so good. You do that for general conference. I was going to say, I was just going to say, if it's good enough for the 12, right? I think maybe that can make people nervous. Nervous. It was amazing. And we watched on a weekly basis, the spirit worked through incredible members of our ward. People that came out of nowhere, people we didn't even hardly know. The spirit would rise up and the themes and what would be pulled and touched on it. So that was actually a really big part of it. For better or worse, probably you have to ask the members of the ward, but I grabbed the microphone on a regular basis, or one of my counselors did during a sacrament. Maybe at the beginning, or maybe at the end. And I did this a lot, you know? I early in the ward, I was interviewing people four nights a week. There was a lot of people struggling with a lot of pain. A lot of pain. And I want to give people that chance to release that pain. So my wife will tell you I was gone a lot. And I would stand up and tell the congregation, don't like your carrying pain, come see me and get it out of. I promise you, come unload on me. And you will find so much relief. And we're obsessed with this. President Eyring when he called my wife and I to be mission presidents here several weeks ago. He was so awesome. He said to us, we're a handbook crazy church. Cute president. I got the title of this episode. That's great. That's the greatest. He is the most amazing human. So we spend like two hours with him, and this was such a big part of the theme. And he's like, but at the end of the day, the handbook is not what we're doing. You have keys, and you have the holy ghost. And your job is to be that arm of love, that the handbook and all that is like, they're all just tools. And so when someone would come in, I would never, ever move into a conversation around, oh, this is what we have to do. Here's the checklist of pent that's, right? No taking the sacrament. From the playbook, right? That's ridiculous. This is not what we're talking about, right? The first, it's just, let's talk.

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And really, what do you think the savior wants you to do? So I didn't tell people how to repent. We would pray about it together and they would tell me what their path was supposed to be. They have the holy ghost the same way I do. And almost, I would say 9 times out of ten, they were spot on the money. They would submit to me and say, here's what I think my path to repentance is and I'd be like, let's roll. Yeah. Let's do it. And so I would stand up and sacrament me and say, come in. And we would hammer this theme. And everything that we would highlight as a bishopric is you're fine, we're all struggling. Okay? Don't let the adversary tear you down. So this concept of you know, grabbing the mic every once in a while. I think with leadership is almost synonymous with the word of presiding. And we hear it so often, presidents own so he's presiding. It's entered the category of cliché that we don't know what it means or whatever. In my mind, presiding is being the person who has controlled the meeting, not to make sure that someone doesn't get up and talk about wacko Doctor Who cares. Exactly. But to make sure that every no matter what happens or what is said in that meeting that they feel that hope, they fill the redemption of Jesus Christ there. And so if that requires you to stand up and say, let me just quick note here. I need to make sure it's communicated with that person is trying to articulate to you as the bishop, you know, it's available for you. Jesus is for you. I had under in prior to being a bishop, I didn't understand what a bishop got to see and the breadth of pain. And struggle. I mean, you know, I've probably been a harsh judge of people my whole life. But no more. After I served in that calling, I look at people now totally differently. There's so much pain that we don't see from the person that's sitting next to us. And so a bishop needs to be able to stand up and say, because you kind of end up having a feeling about your group because they're coming and telling you the most deepest personal things. It's sacred. And yet you also can then stand and help give everybody more hope because of what you're hearing from others, because you're never going to be able to meet with everybody. And you start getting these insights like, wow, you know, 7 out of ten people coming in or beating themselves up about something unfairly. We should talk about this as a group. The other thing in terms of tone, we shouldn't be afraid to talk about things. We want a whitewash everything in our culture because we want it to be perfect, but that's not what's inspiring. You don't inspire me because you're perfect. You inspire me because of what you've done not being perfect. That's what's inspiring. So, and whether I should or not, I don't know, but when somebody would come in and tell me something, I would say, let me tell you some things I did when I was in my 20s, and I was an idiot. And they look at you like, wow, you're a bishop now. So somehow you got it together, right? I mean, it's like, and I'm like, yeah, but this is real. This is life. And we're too afraid to talk about these things. We have to be able to stand up and say, I struggle with this. And champion for each other. And I love the way you frame it of we think the bishop of office and sin and what sins or I got to go to the bishop's office for. We have to sort of this unofficial list and but to frame it as in why don't you come in and just unload your pain. That's right. And I remember this one sweet moment where this when I was a bishop a lady came in and just talked about the struggle she had with her mother in law. It wasn't a sin. And I was just like, I can sit with you in this. That is sounds really hard, right? So creating the visual is a place to unload pain is like so much diffuses the shame. And you and I both know how many people do you know that have sort of faded away from the church or have a bad taste in their mouth about the church. And it was driven by some priesthood leader. Yeah. I lived in fear that somebody would walk out of my office and not feel hopeful and inspired. I don't care how you come in my door and how bad it is. Like I had a guy

that came in and said, man, I got prostitutes every day for 5 years, like, okay. Even that guy should walk out my door and feel hope, and inspiration for the future. If not, was I a good bishop? He may not come back. It doesn't matter what's in the handbook. That guy's got to walk out the door with hope. Right. That's powerful. So let's talk more just about the whole repentance dynamic. And this is one, I hope to create some more and more content about this because I've just heard so many stories across the spectrum as far as how one leader interpreted repentance in that process and it seems like sometimes I wonder do these bishops even understand what repentance is or what it looks like or why we have it, right? And so just as far as diffusing the shame and instilling hope. And you've impacted a little bit about that. Any other guidance? Let me give you a couple of more things on that. One is I have always been annoyed by priesthood leaders that insert themselves too much into the process.

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If Kurt Francom comes to visit bishop Kurt Brown, you're not answering to me, but too many bishops act like you're answering to them. We only answer to our savior. I call it the spiritual parole officer. Oh my gosh, man. So I always explained my role as a Sherpa. We're going to the top of the mountain. I'm carrying some bags with you until you're good. Let's go. Let's go. I never, ever did an interview on the other side of my desk. I always sit with you. We are together. I am your advocate. There's a real major misunderstanding about this judging Israel thing. Okay, yeah, there are times you have to protect victims. That's a big one. You got as a priest leader. You got to protect victim. You got to protect the church. That can from time to time. But those are rare. That's not most of the work, right? Most of the time I'm your advocate and you're cheerleader. So that's number one. There's a mentality around this. We've got to get right. But the second thing is, is anybody that creates with heavenly father. Their own plan is going to buy into that plan more. So this whole thing with our little checklist about, okay, I want you to read your scriptures for 30 minutes every day, and you can't take this sacrament, and you can't go to the temple, and I've got my who says, I have the manual, you have the manual, somebody's making this up, okay? And you might feel really strongly that this is like your way, but that's the bishop's way. But what's right for Jill? What's best for Jill? Well, who's going to know that better than Jill? Like Jill and the holy ghost can get there. And I'm a Sherpa. So that's what I'm saying. I always sent people out and said, I want you to, I'm going to fast and pray together this week. You can come back and you're going to present to me what you think the savior wants you to do. Wow. I mean, unless it was really extreme. And by the way, I mean really extreme. I don't think priesthood leaders need to insert themselves as sort of take over. Look, there's members of our church are really high IQ people. This is a smart group of people. It's only going to hurt the process of I'm coming in and I'm dictating my biases, okay? So I'm here to help you connect with the savior. That this framework, I feel very strongly about. We had incredible success with this. It's inspiring for people. It's hopeful. It helps them learn how to reconnect with the spirit, which is the more important part of the process. Not my stupid 7 item checklist. That's not the point in the process. So it's a big deal. I'll tell you what the third one is. Okay, what were the first

two? Just to clarify? No, so setting that framework. Gotcha. And you're going to tell me what got you. Is your path to repentance? I'm not going to tell you. That's really bad policy. Love it. Yeah. Bishops think, well, you got to be careful. But too many bishops think it's all revolving around them. The third thing was almost discovered by accident, but it was a lot of what I told you my experience when I was on Wall Street and I kind of realized I was really selfish and all this kind of stuff. Do we have a minute for me to share one example? Of course I'm not going to use this person's name. I had a gentleman a brother in the ward come into me. Incredible. Highly intelligent, successful, good-looking guy, one of the nicest guys you ever met comes in we're chatting it up one day and he just starts falling apart and he says bishop. I'm a massive porn addict. And I'm like, okay, and of course you're going to hear that a fair amount. And he's like, no, you don't understand. It's really bad. It's like multiple times a day, every day, for 14 years. My parents have money, they've put me through programs. They put me through camps. I've read 23 books on the subject. They're sitting on my shelf. I go to 12 step, blah, blah, blah. I'm out of ideas. I'm just I'm out of ideas. He was numb. Just numb, right? I'm a brand new bishop. I don't know what I'm doing. I used to go home at night and say to Katie, I'm not trained for this. I'm not like there's no training for this. So I wake up a couple nights later out of a dead sleep in that little silly story. They tell in general conference. Sometimes, which, by the way, never happens to me. This is the only time it's happened to me. And I wake up in the middle of the night and I've got this wacky idea, and I'm half awake. And I go to the bathroom and I like, I'm like, I got to remember that. And I make a note in my phone and I go back to sleep. So on Sunday, this guy comes in. And I asked him to come in. I said, are you willing to try anything no matter how crazy it is. And he's like, dude, I told you, man, 14 years, and I'm so out of ideas. And I'm like, well, I got one for you. I'm like, let's see how much faith you have. We were kind of laughing. He just a great guy. And I said, first of all, it all goes out the window. I want the books gone, the 12 step gone, the camp's gone, the whole thing gone. We're done. We're done with this. There's no more meetings. No more discussion about what you've been pornography addict. In fact, this is where it got a little gray area. As I said, the next time you look at porn, which sounds like it'll be within a few hours.

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I said, I want you to go and look yourself in the mirror afterwards. And I want you to not care. I want you just to look in the mirror and be like, oh well, there's a lot worse things I could do in the world than see some images of naked people. He's looking at me like, where are we going with this, right? And I'm like, and then here's what I want you to do. There's one thing you have to do. Every single time you mess up, you have to do something nice for somebody. That's it. Just do something nice for somebody, act a service. But here's the deal. You have to do it right then, even if it's three in the morning. Okay, I said now you have to get a notebook and I want you to record every single instance. And he's like, she's going to be a lot. I'm like, yep, get the notebook. Here we go. So this starts in a couple of weeks goes by and he comes back into visits. He's got his notebook. No change. No help. He's like bishop your idea sucks. So a few

more weeks goes by. He comes back. We do it again. No help. This goes on for a while. And I'm like, okay, this is a terrible idea. And it's not helping at all. So then this guy moves for the summer. He goes away to work somewhere, comes back, and I'm thinking, I haven't talked to him. He comes back at the beginning of the fall, and he comes into my office and he's like, I'm two months. Sober. Wow, I'm like, what? And he every Sunday he comes and pokes in. Yep. Great week. Great. 5 months guy gets to 5 months. And then one Sunday he comes in. Shut the door, falls apart. Devastated, bawling. Fisher was a terrible week, binge week, whatever. And I'm sitting there next to him. And then I just couldn't help myself. I just started laughing. And I got up and I threw my arms around him and gave him a giant bear hug and he's like, why are you laughing? And he's like crying and I'm like, 'cause it worked. I could totally worked. And he's like, dude, I just told you like, I just had this awful week, and I'm like, but you went 5 months and then look at you, you're devastated after like a few bad days. I'm like, when are you and I first met, you were numb as a door. I said, look at you now. Do you really think that success means you'll never fail again? Unlike your trajectory is just straight up. Okay, so you have some hiccups and you have some offsets. Fast forward. Guy gets married in the temple. The next year, and the week of his wedding he comes in to get his temple recommend things signed, whatever. And I say, he shut the door for set. I'm like, you gotta tell me in retrospect. Now it's been over a year. I'm like, what was it? Like, what changed? And he's like, here's the thing. He's like, when we tried this whole service strategy and no longer focusing on the fact that I was an addict, he's like, in retrospect, I began, I had seen myself as an addict. In fact, my whole self worth was I'm an addict. He's like this weird service thing and he had countered him. It was several hundred. Verging on a thousand things that he had done acts of service, writing notes for people, baking things for people, shoving people's walkways at three in the morning. It's a great list. He said, what happened was the service I started seeing myself almost like as a Robin Hood. He's like, over time, I saw myself as a really good person and not an addict. And he's like, there was something about seeing myself as good that lowered my desire to do things I shouldn't do. It made me want to be closer to the spirit. So I think what happens is we obsess so much about what we struggle with, which is actually what the adversary wants us to do. It becomes our worth. But that's not our worth, right? And you hear this all the time. People would say things to me like, if I didn't look at porn, I'd probably be married and have kids by now. People, I'm not sure how those two are totally correlated, but we build these things on our head where if I'm struggling with something, my life can't advance. We do this to ourselves. Somehow my career is tied to the fact that I have a temper or like whatever the correlations are, that's not what the savior says. Can you imagine Kurt if you and I went to the other side of the veil tonight and sat with the savior, what's the odds of a savior would say to you, you know that thing you were struggling with? Because it was so challenging for you, I'm really glad you didn't succeed in the other parts of your life. Because we build these frameworks and that actually becomes our self worth. And I think as leaders and even as friends, we have to help that not be the point because we all have things we struggle with. Let's make the rest of our lives great. So let's engender greatness. So every time someone leave off, I'm like, I would say, go create something great. And let's start limiting the focus on oh my gosh, the world's ending because I struggle with X yeah. Wow, that's so powerful. And I love the first step of you recognize that you've got to get rid of the shame that's in it.



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And that's just inviting people and giving them permission to say, the next time you quote unquote relapse oh well, not a big deal. It sounds like so elementary or silly, but it is that shame spiral that keeps people in this absolutely. And then you're able to shift his identity. If you have a drinking problem and then you feel terrible about yourself, it's going to exacerbate the drinking problem. So what's happening is in the name of living the commandments, we're playing Satan's game. We're playing right into his hands because the message of the savior is hope and even if you're weak, you're great. And that's what we've got to get better at. We've got to get better. Listen, if I'm a bishop and somebody musters up the courage to walk into my office and vent an unload. They already won. They've already won. Why am I beating on you now? You already won. Yeah. There might be more work to do, but the big win just happened. Your owning it and take the page out of the alcoholic anonymous playbook, right? The ownership of our weaknesses is the most powerful step, right? We have to throw our arms around each other at that point and say, yes, you win. Yeah. You know what I'm saying? I love it. So tell me more about how it sort of this member led repentance. And you're there as the quote unquote judge in Israel to get the keys, right? So generally, I mean, did you not ever restrict the sacrament with those words of people restricts their own sacraments? When they came back, what type of ideas would they be? It was awesome because if we took ten members of the church and they were all just really great members of the church and we got in a room and we all talked about what we were struggling with with no filter. What would be meaningful to each of us is going to be a little different. So how can each of us have the same exact path to repentance? And bishops create their little 7 item checklist, that doesn't work for everybody, right? It's all really personal. So you got to tell me what's personal. So for some people, the symbolism of not taking the bread and water is really powerful, and it helps them not to take the sacrament. But for other people, it actually helps them to take the sacrament. It's like going to the temple. There's things where we're like, okay, I'm not going to go to the temple because I don't feel totally worthy. And by the way, worthy is one of the wildest words in our culture. But I'm not going to go to the temple because I don't feel worthy, but there are times that's the act exact place you need to be to draw strength to get over what you're dealing with. And the point is, don't overthink it. Do you really think anybody is going to hell because they did something wrong on Thursday they took the bread on Sunday? Come on. This is symbolism. I mean, this is like, so it's important, but it's important because it's personal. So what happens is, once somebody is humble and sincere, let them go work with the spirit to figure out what it is they need to do to get where they need to be. Nobody's going to know better than them. And then I can just help provide some guardrails or maybe some insights or some motivation or some encouragement. And I'm telling you, it was probably 95% of the time whatever the plan was that they proposed was so great. And things I wouldn't have thought of. Yeah. And I'm sure you get the guy that's like no sacrament for four years. And you're like, okay, let's dial it back a little bit. And that's where you can step in. I had a guy that lived on a 100% government assistance, special needs individual, was in his 40s and hadn't been to the temple in 12 years because he didn't pay tiling.

I'm like, you have to be kidding me. This is unbelievable. Get in the temple. Wow. You're living a 100% on government assistance, and you feel like you should be paying the debt. I mean, we consider and debate that all day. But this is not the point. The guy's heart was gold. I mean, yeah. So tell me about the concept of reframe or help us better understand how you see the membership councils or formerly known as disciplinary accounts. At the end of the day, you got to step in somewhere with some of these, but it's last resort. It's last resort. And so last resort. Somebody who's truly humble and sincere. You know, and you need the spirit to help you know. That's tricky. It can be tricky. But we must air on the side of giving people the benefit of the doubt and giving compassion. You know why? Because the savior's told us from the beginning that that's what we have to do. When we talk about mercy and justice, okay? It's crystal clear that our first requirement is to extend compassion for all, love, understanding, benefit of the doubt.

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You start there. Then if in the process, somebody is almost forcing it into a bad place. Then you may need to get into a membership council. I mean, of course there are situations you have to have membership counsel. But I've also seen lots of people itchy trigger fingers, bang, you did this automatic membership council. That's ridiculous. That's not at all what the savior is wanting for us as members of the church. What's the goal? Is that the goal is the goal to have a black and white checklist. Which among us wants to be judged in that way. No one and that is not at all how the savior operator. Pick up the New Testament, read the first four books again. That show me where it plays that way. It doesn't play that way. It's powerful. And I just know, even if you have to go that way, all these other things you've built around that the D shaming the hope, the focus on identity, like even if you have to go down that path, like I've talked to many people who've gone through that discipline or the membership council process, it's more of like the additional shame they felt or the abandonment they felt. So yeah, maybe that's part of the process, but you're like, you've established yourself as the Sherpa. I'm still right here in red to the top. And by the way, these are hard things. I met with Elder Ballard one time and had a really heartfelt conversation around. Same sex attraction. We had a lot of members of our war. It was a big part of their lives and who they were. When I talk, I tend to oversimplify a little bit. But I really, I know, and you know it's been fun these last few months getting ready to be a mission leader. And meeting with the 12 and sort of getting training from them. You can't believe the compassion. You can not believe it's in some ways I'm like, it's amazing listening to them in this training with us new mission presidents. And then how culturally sometimes we like to do things in the church. You and I both know that the savior's first second and third move is always going to be towards compassion and love and patience and understanding. And membership councils, the last thing on the list. And we all know that. And so as priesthood leaders, we must have the true welfare of that person in mind and what's truly best for them. And if we err on that side, we will always come out on the side of the savior. Yeah. Wow, inspiring. Tell me about, I don't know how else to frame what we talked a little bit before, but how you kind of got into trouble. And that was a lot to you being a mission president. Oh my gosh, this was wild. So the war just explodes,

right? And we're 6 months in, and I'm working four nights a week, and I get this tiny family of three kids, special needs daughter, all this stuff. My poor wife is running a house. I need to interview her by herself. Oh yeah, for sure. And I begging Salt Lake to split our ward. It just exploded. And by the way, it was standing room only and we could have easily filled two words. And I'm drowning. Am I counselors got special permission to do things that normally only bishops? Full tilt. And I got stonewalled by Salt Lake for months on end. And my stake president who's just like the greatest guy ever, he's like, man, I don't know what to tell you. We're just not getting anywhere. And then finally, I'm blowing them up directly. And he's got this rogue bishop. And they finally respond and they say, we're not splitting your ward bishop until you get rid of the 135 members that don't live in the boundaries. And of course, I knew this was a thing. And I knew at some point this was going to rear its head. Somebody was going to say something at some point. But here was the deal. Many, many of the people that came to our ward had been not attending award at all anywhere. Many. And this was home. And we had a culture and a family in that ward a deep love and concern for one another. I mean, these are a group of singles that share a lot of the same trials and challenges and tremendous deep empathy for one another. I mean, this was home and what a lot of members of the church don't understand about these singles awards is it's more like your family than any conventional unit because if you're 40, you're not going home to mom's house every Wednesday night to do your laundry and get dinner. So this is our family and I'm looking down that list of a 135 members and I'm thinking there's no way I'm sending that guy out, that girl out, no way I'm telling them to leave. I mean, we were re baptizing people. Lots of them. Who had been out for 15 years, maybe been excommunicated or whatever. It's working. I don't fix it. Why am I going to turn around the room out, you know? And so I say to my stake president, my poor stake president is a patient man. I'm like, I'm not kicking him out. Somebody's going to have to come do it. And I explain all this.

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And then it just goes back and forth, and nobody wants to give any ground on us. And finally one day I got a call from the area presidency, one Sunday morning and they're like, we're coming to visit your ward today. So I knew I knew somebody had sent it up the food chain and we were going to get so one of the members of the area presidency came down and spent the day with us went to all of our meetings and then we had a big meeting with myself and him and the stake president afterwards and it was amazing. By the way, he's an amazing guy. And we spend an hour and a half at the end of the night, downloading with each other. And he looked at me and just said, bishop, this ward is a special place. There's a special spirit here. I talked to a lot of people that were here today, and he's like, I would absolutely not ask one single person to leave this work. We'll get you this way. And that was it. And then it took some time. There's still a lot of red tape. But we got to split. And it was great. And so it was really funny because when I months now here we are months and months later and I'm in with Elder Cook being interviewed to be a possible mission leader. And it came up. He brought it up. Somebody had shared that story, but somehow that didn't get me kicked out of the church. There's such this we're raised in

the church to be really good boys. And so we grow up to be really nice guys. And we don't want to break the rules. We don't want to push the envelope. Listen, they gave us handbook. Let's just follow it to the T, that's not thinking outside the box. Let's not make waves, right? So inspiring about your story is that there is this feeling of like, am I doing, am I in trouble? I don't want to be bishops aren't the type that we're in the principal's office growing up. But like this is what inspiration revelation hope you got the keys turn on the engine. Do you know how many hours I spent praying about that? I mean, months on end. Myself and my counselor. I mean, my counselors will tell you, they will sit here and tell you the same thing. We had a tremendous conviction about protecting the one. You know, that story, the one in the 99, we are all the one. Every one of us is the one. And we really felt deeply about protecting the one. I mean, I couldn't believe it was coming out of my mouth. My wife thought I was nuts, and I just told the stake president, by the way, agreed with me. But I just told him I said, they're going to have to release me. We're not going to do it. I'm not doing it. These are their souls. And they're going to have to come down here and see right now. And you told me when you called me, this is why you were calling me. Yeah. So you can't get mad at me for doing what you called me to do. That's powerful. So what was it like getting released? And I mean, what a remarkable experience. It was bittersweet. I was tired. I was really tired. The last couple months I was ready. How long after the split was it during the year? We got the split, all that done, and the wheels in motion on that and whatever. But it's only a three year calling. But it's a sprint for three years. It's really incredibly taxing. It was really bittersweet though. It's hard for me to even talk about it here sitting here with you and not cry. It's just the most amazing humans. You know what? It's hard to talk about, but as a culture sometimes we think, oh, what's wrong with that person? They're 40 years old and they never got married or they've been divorced twice. Or whatever the thing is, man couldn't be further from the truth. But I served in that ward with a giants in the kingdom, giants. I mean, you watch. I mean, some of these people are going to be major leaders in our church and in our culture. And everybody's got their own journey. Everybody, you know? And the plan is different. We've got to get away from this idea that, oh, I got to go on the mission and be married by this point and have the kids and yeah, I'm 51 and have a baby. So I'm a little tired. I'm making up for lost time, but you know what, I'm glad I had the journey I had. I needed that. I needed to learn those lessons, you know? Yeah. So what's the story of being called this mission president? Yeah, it's crazy. So I was building this business year about two years ago. My wife calls me one day and we were really lucky. The business was growing like crazy. It's a firm I had wanted to build for a while. It was kind of build my own firm and we were in the last 6 years old now, so a year and a half ago, four and a half years, firms growing fast, building it down in Provo. Wife calls me one day and says, okay, I don't want to freak you out, but I just had this impression that we got to get ready to go on a mission. And I'm like, at the time, I'm still the bishop. And I'm like, okay, honey, we have a special needs daughter. We're working on another child, we're building, I'm building this business and I'm the bishop of this ward and I'm like working 25 hours a week at the ward. I'm like, you're dreaming. There's no way. And so a few months go by and I get a phone call from a national investment firm. It says, hey, what do you think about us buying you? And I'm like, and the second I hung up the phone, I remember what Katie had said a few months earlier. And I called her at home. I was on the road. And I said, were you serious about that? She's like, yeah, I was because I don't know when, but I really feel like, and I'm like, because you know, if we were ever going to serve, I'd have to sell the firm.

Like, I can't leave the way that it is now. We'd have to do a lot of work to get it to hand it off and help other people run it and whatever.

01:10:04 - 01:15:02

But I still thought she was not. But it takes years in our business to transfer a firm. You don't just sell a business and walk away. It's not like technology. This is a relationship business. It's Wall Street. So they'll really good about selling the firm, which is against all the conventional wisdom of selling the firm. We would have made way more money how we waited longer, built the business a lot bigger and all this kind of stuff. But I still wasn't like, oh, I need to sell the firm because we're going on a mission. So we do this deal with this big national firm, and then it was four months later. Phone rings, Sunday afternoon, Elder Cook's assistant. Hey, we want to cook once to see you and your wife, and I was like, you've got to be kidding me. By this point, we have our fourth child, second special needs kid. Who we hadn't even adopted, but he's in with us as part of our family, working towards adoption. And we're barely keeping the wheels on the bus Katie and I at home. I mean, it's our hands are so full with these kids. With the business transition and all this. And so we go up and meet and it was an amazing experience. And it's what you've heard so many times. Call came completely out of nowhere. But they had been researching us for some amount of time for 12 to 18 months, they said, had a little folder on their desk with our picture on the front. Elder Cook just starts grilling us. What do you think? And I love these stories of hearing that they're not calling the guy who was stake president four times in an area 70. And those men are wonderful leaders and glad they're in the mix there. But to mix it up a little bit. Yeah, get the non traditional guy in there. And honestly, it's funny because both Elder Cook and president eyring in those meetings. I was candidate with them about my past. And everything wasn't always textbook. And you know, lots of weird textured things and whatever, and they were unbelievable. I mean, we met with president eyring for over two hours. And I've never been in the presence of that kind of love, my whole life. I've never felt anything like that. It's what I imagine. It's like sitting with the savior. He was so inspiring and so humble. The stories that he shared with us that of mistakes he's made, even as a member of the 12, with some of the most inspiring leadership messaging I've ever received. I mean, here's a member of the first presidency just owning his weaknesses and humility. And it's just something I wish everybody could hear. I walked out of there feeling so much more hope about myself. And then when did the call of Tacoma? Yeah, yeah, so the way that it works is you kind of do this one interview and they kind of kick the tires on you to find out is there some reason you couldn't serve. And then they just say, hey, you may never hear from us, which is kind of awkward because you know they're considering to call you to be a mission president, but then they're like, we may never call you. And fat president eyring said, my brother went through this process and never got a call, died without ever hearing back on anybody. So he says, you got to be ready for that. And then, but then yeah, in that meeting with president I ring, there comes a point where he extends the call and it makes it official. And then says, hey, we're going to send you a letter in the mail, and you'll find out just like the young missionaries do where you're going. But the

difference is we can't tell anybody. So we're not allowed to open it on Facebook, right? So we get a call and it's been so much fun. My kids. We were really worried about the kids would feel. My two older ones are 9 and 6. The special need ones are the two younger ones. And the 9 and the 6 year old, it was really funny because one day we were at church and Katie and I knew we were being called. But we hadn't told the kids yet. And I'm in the hallway with them looking at the missionary plaques on the wall and we're reading every single one. The versus where the kids went. There's like 20 missionary plaques on the wall. And my son looks at me and he says, he's 9. And he says, dad, I don't think I want to go on a mission. And I'm thinking, oh boy. Because we've been trying to figure out how to tell him we're going on a mission. And I'm like, how come button? He's like, well, I think I would miss mom and you and mom too much. For two years or whatever. And I laughed. And I said, you might feel different in 18. And then I just like it came to me in the moment and I just said, did you know that every once in a blue moon, the prophet asks a whole family to go on a mission together? Oh, that's cool. And him and my daughter just lit up. I mean, they were like no way. They were like, do you think we would ever be asked to do something like that? Of course I knew by this point. And so we built it up. We even had the letter, but we made them go to the mailbox for a couple of days before we opened the letter. And they were just giddy. So for them, they're young enough that it's a really adventure for them. It's not like they're leaving their high school or something like that. Awesome. So three years starts in July. Yeah, July 1st. Here we go. I don't know how we're going to make it all happen. Wow, well, can we touch base in three years? Absolutely. Yeah, yeah, I'm sure I'll have all kinds of weird stories to share. It's going to be awesome. I don't get so home early now. I can not wait. My mission president meant so much to me in my life. No week has gone by that I don't think about him and his lessons. And his first stressful is all the stuff is going on the mission as a family. I can't wait to get up with those missionaries. I can not wait. And I already think Tacoma is the greatest mission. The world I've never been to Tacoma. So here we go. All right, we'll make our name proud.

01:15:03 - 01:18:21

We'll do a show. Last question I have for you is, as you reflect on your time as a leader, I was being a leader, helped you become a better follower of Jesus Christ. Oh, the compassion. The compassion. I'm sad to say, you know, I think for a lot of us when we're young, we're really black and white. And I was, and I wish I wouldn't have been, you know? I just feel tremendous. Sympathy and compassion for the complex trials and pain that people wear the little personal hells that no one else knows about. And it's changed me, you know? And man, I got a lot of things I don't do well, but I'm a lot more compassionate to others than I was a few years ago. I feel like I feel like I have a lot of, I need to make up for lost time to be honest with you. When I was younger and more crazy and I think that's the gift I think that the savior spent his whole ministry tied to show us that if we'll give to others, that's when we get. You know, if we will lift others, serve others, love others, give them the benefit of the doubt, you know? That we will win, and so that's why I feel like when we struggle the hack, so to speak, of struggling, is go lift

others. We have to not focus on our own, and if we'll go give left us, you know, and that's where the compassion kind of plays in. That concludes this episode of the leading saints podcast. Hey, listen, would you do me a favor? You know, everybody's got that friend who listens to a ton of podcasts, and maybe they aren't aware of leading saints, so would you mind taking the link of this episode or another episode of leading saints and just texting it to that friend? You know who I'm talking about. The friend who always listens to podcasts and is always telling you about different podcasts or what's your turn to tell that friend about leading saints. So share it. We also love to hear from you if you have any perspective or thought on this episode, you can go to [leading-saints.org](http://leading-saints.org) and actually leave a comment on the episode page, or reach out to us at [leading-saints.org/contact](mailto:leading-saints.org/contact). Remember, solve the burden of meetings by visiting [leading-saints.org/14](http://leading-saints.org/14) and getting 14 days access to the meetings with 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 all and only true and living church upon the face of the earth. We were immediately put in a position of loneliness. The loneliness of leadership from which we can not shrink nor run away. And to which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability.