



Extending the Ward Council | A How I Lead Interview with Ben Thatcher

June 7, 2023

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Anthony Sweatt has easily become one of my favorite BYU professors to interview. He's been on the podcast several times, and he also has a remarkable presentation about ambiguity of doctrine in our Questioning Saints virtual library. He discusses healthy and unhealthy ways we approach doctrine, how to help others reconcile doctrine they find difficult to believe, especially when we don't know much about it. You can watch Professor Sweatt's entire interview in the Questioning Saints library by going to leadingsaints.org/14. This will give you access for 14 days at no cost to watch this presentation. You'll be better prepared as a leader when you do. So my name is Kurt Francom, and I am the founder and executive director of Leading Saints, and obviously the host of the Leading Saints podcast. Now, I started Leading Saints back in 2010. It was just a hobby blog, and it grew from there by the time 2014 came around. We started the podcast, and that's really when it got some traction and took off in 2016. We became a 501c3 non-profit organization, and we've been growing ever since. Now, I get the opportunity of interviewing and talking with remarkable people all over the world. Now, this is a segment we do on the Leading Saints podcast called How I Lead, and we reach out to everyday leaders. They're not experts, gurus, authors, PhDs. They're just everyday leaders who've been asked to serve in a specific leadership calling, and we simply ask them, how is it that you lead? And they go through some remarkable principles that should be in a book that should be behind a PhD. They're usually that good, and we just talk about sharing what the other guy is doing. And I remember being a leader just simply wanting to know, okay, I know what I'm trying to do, but what's the other guy doing? What's working for him? And so that's why every Wednesday or so

we publish these How I Lead segments to share. In this How I Lead interview, we talk with Ben Thatcher, who is a bishop just outside of San Antonio, Texas, and also a city manager. That's his day job. And it's interesting to learn about the dynamics that are very similar in both this calling and this occupation, and how he's engaging the ward and helping them find their strengths and apply their strengths and really have a positive experience in their ward. He talks about this dynamic he uses about extended ward councils, and how he took them out of the church setting and took them to the city hall and had this extended ward council meeting that I think more should consider doing this type of thing to really bring more voices every once in a while into that meeting and learn. So listen to those high points. You're going to enjoy this conversation with Ben Thatcher. Ben Thatcher, welcome to the Leading Saints podcast. Thank you, Kurt. It's a pleasure to be here. Excited to have this conversation. Yeah, and we were just chatting before we hit record that you've been around since the Leading LDS days, listening to Leading Saints, right? I remember. Yeah, I'd go in bishopric and high council meetings and tell everyone about the podcast. Say, you got to listen to this. This is enlightening. And yeah, it's been a while. Cool. And you are a Texan. I am not born and raised. Got here a year after I was born and I was a BYU baby. My parents up in the Mountain West, Idaho and Alberta. And we've been all over Texas since. Nice. And where exactly are you are you living? So right now in Bernie, Texas, Bernie is just about 30 minutes northwest of San Antonio, downtown San Antonio. We've been here for the last three years. I'm boys they and all live in the Dallas area. My parents in the Dallas area, my in-laws are in Houston, had to go to Rexburg to meet my wife, even though she's from Texas. I knew we wanted to be back here and raise our family.

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That's awesome. And you are a city manager. Maybe for those who don't know what that is, maybe describe that to us. Right. So, you know, high level overview, a city manager is the one person kind of probably responsible for making sure all the operations of the city are being run smoothly across the country. There's different types of forms of local government. Everyone's familiar with their mayor and their city council members. But most, I would say predominantly most cities in the United States have a city manager or a city administrator. They're the guys that are run, that are hired to be the experts in running a city. Most mayors and council members don't get paid. Some, if they do, they don't get much. They have their own real day to day jobs. And so they need to rely on someone who kind of knows what they're doing. Right. And so it's not an elected position, but maybe a mayor will get elected and then rely on a city manager actually has experience, you know, looking at the budget and the finances or just the administration of a city. Yeah. A city manager will say, look, we're really not specialists in a lot of things. We have to have a kind of an understanding of a lot of things. You know, I have the city of Bernie's 22,000 people. We have a hundred million dollar operating budget. And so I probably have 15 or 16 sub city departments, different businesses, different business units, you could say. And so I have to know a little bit about police. I have to know a little bit about fire and water provision and whatever it might be. And so I've got to know how to troubleshoot

information quickly, solve problems, communicate to the council, keep them prized, let the constituents here, the community know what's going on. And, you know, and so early on, you just got to learn how to empower and teach and trust and delegate. And so that's where I've really felt a good synergy between being a city manager and being in a ward leadership position. Right. They kind of doing a lot of the same things. Cause you're currently serving a couple years into serving as Bishop as well. Couple years of serving into a Bishop. Nice. Fascinating back COVID. for We've been up in South Lake for about 18 years and up in the Dallas Fort Worth area. And also we had this prompting, Hey, we need to move, just disrupt ourselves. And I told my wife, I have this hunch. What do you think? She goes, yeah, I think let's go for it. And so COVID hit right after that. And we moved to Bernie. We'd never been to Bernie before. We were familiar with San Antonio, loved it. But then the COVID hit and we weren't going to church. And 10 months later, we started coming back to church and they're like, Hey, we need you to be the Bishop. And I didn't know a single soul, hardly at all. Cause we'd been doing Zoom church and hadn't been getting together doing activities. So that was a fun trying to figure out how to pick a Bishopric and ward council and so forth. Nice. So I want to ask you a question related to being a city manager. How many, like how many mayors, cause is it the mayor, the person like your point man who you work with primarily, right? Yeah. So he's, so every city, if they have a council manager, former government, most cities will have what they call a charter city charter. It's like a constitution that basically outlines out. It points out, you know, what are the roles and responsibilities? What are the, you know, how are you structured and who does what? What are the swim lanes for city officials? Utah, it's slightly different. Actually, I think it's drastically different those cities. And I got a lot of friends in Utah that are city managers. They don't have a lot of same authority that I may have because it's just outlined differently by state law and city charters. So yeah, so I have a mayor who's a figurehead. He does not vote on city items. He runs the meeting. He facilitates the meetings. He breaks a tie if there's ever a tie by city council. So I really have five council, city council members and a mayor. So six bosses that I have to kind of report to. Yeah. So I'm just curious of the dynamic of, you know, you have this experience and you know how things work and what will work or you've seen the mistakes and the things that work. I mean, what do you do when maybe that city council or that mayor wants to go in a direction which you think is, you know, this is not going to work or I mean, I'm sure you articulate that, but does that ever come up? Oh yeah, absolutely. All the time. And that's the big conundrum for any city manager in this form of government. So you talk a lot about quite a bit in conferences and trainings and whatnot. I really hone in and emphasize with my city council that we are going to be a very deliberate organization that's going to perform at a high level. And so what that means is we're going to be strategic in our approach. We're going to conduct master plans, strategic plans for our parks department, for our utility departments. And then once those plans are done, I want to have the council actually adopt those plans. And so those plans will have outlined a whole list of initiatives and recommendations that we need to pursue. So if a council member, and this happens frequently, and so by having this approach, you know, set up this way, the council can come forward and say, Hey, I'd really like to do this park or this thing over here.

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And I'll say, wait a minute, that's not in our parks master plan. So if you want to do that, we need to have a conversation with our city council and I need everyone to agree. And then we're going to amend that master plan. And that way I can be very clear with my staff. I've got 300 employees in the city. I can say, we're going to be very deliberate about checking off all the recommendations of our master plans. That's really helped quite a bit. Now, not every city is managed that way. But from my perspective and experience of 24 or 25 years of working different city governments, that seems to work quite, quite well. Yeah, that's a, it's almost, and maybe this isn't a perfect analogy, but it's almost like a, a coach and player relationship where the quarterback may call an audible on the field that you completely disagree with. And, and so you may have to step in there and coach them saying, no, we can't go that direction. But they still have the option of going that direction. Right. And I've been fortunate to have mayors that understand that partnership and the swim lanes of what is the role of city manager versus the mayor. And occasionally I would go to the mayor and say, okay, hey, I'm hearing these conversations with these council members or this constituency, trying to influence this council member. We need to have a conversation this way. Or, hey, so and stepped over the line, would you help me by maybe having a conversation with that council person? Because I do lean on the mayor to kind of facilitate a good council governance culture. And I take all the staff obligations, make sure they're running well and whatnot. And so haven't had any issues. Now there are horror stories out there. You hear about them, you know, and then my father's a career city manager. He's been a city manager his whole life. Still a city manager now. He's had some situations where a line is drawn in the sand and he's being told exactly what to do that maybe violates the city charter. And so you got to have strong ethics. You got to have tough skin. You got to be ready to have to react to the most challenging circumstance you never thought you would have to. And that comes in all kinds of forms of likeness. Yeah. And it sounds like, I mean, I just think of the different emails and questions that we get here at Leading Saints about how to handle this situation, that situation. And it's sort of funny just how like 90 % of the answer is, well, it sounds like you just need to go have a conversation with somebody. And to handle that dynamic, it's like, you've got to be willing to walk into an office and say, hey, this is what I'm hearing. Let's sit down and talk about it. Right. I do think the most successful city managers, and you could even say the most successful bishops or the most successful CEOs are those that have a good command of human relationships, high intelligence, emotional understand the art of, I don't want to call it negotiation, right? But it's facilitating and being empathetic to people's points of view. And just trying to unify whatever your group is that you're a part of. And if you can do that and create alignment, then you can be successful no matter what you're doing. Right. Yeah. Do you have any, and I appreciate a lot of you go down this wormhole a little bit, but any tips on maybe somebody who knows they need to have one of those conversations? And maybe it's an elders quorum president who's not quite comfortable with the direction that the bishop is going or feels like the bishop sit down on his toes or whatnot? Like how would you coach somebody to walk into an office and have a tough conversation with the direction of leadership and award? Right. Yeah. Being candid is an art in and of itself and how to do that respectfully so that other can person retain their dignity and self-respect. And so I have a lot of those opportunities at the city level. We do that almost daily and we have to be the bad guy a lot

of times when constituents or residents ask for this and we say, no, there's a law against that and they cause a fuss. But at the church level, we've all had those experiences where we may have served in leadership where positions we felt like we were marginalized, where we felt like we weren't supported or maybe the bishop or the stake president didn't know what he was doing or we felt that way, right? And you always feel bad when you start to have those feelings. And I haven't had a whole lot of those situations, but I have had folks reach out to me expressing their frustration. How do I deal with this? I got a stake president that's telling me this or a bishop that's telling me this. And in fact, most recently I connected with a former intern of mine, an from 20 years ago, who I hadn't talked to in a while and he's a bishop somewhere else. And we connected on another issue and he didn't know I was a bishop. And he goes, before we begin our conversation, can I just ask you, do you get along with your stake president? And I said, yeah, I get along with him. I said, he's great. He goes, does he support you? And I said, yeah, he supports me. What is this questioning about? And so I do recognize that there's sometimes some bad experiences. But to answer your question, I think we need to be honest with ourselves and with the people we're working and serving with.

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And not everyone has a deliberate intention that's producing the outcome that you're feeling and experiencing. Right away, my first year as being a bishop, and I was aware this was a possibility out there. You heard of these stories, but I experienced it myself. And I've been a bishop for four years. I've been a ward clerk twice, an executive secretary. I've been on three high councils, three different stake presidents. So I'd seen a lot of different local, you know, church leadership. And so I've heard of stories, but I hadn't experienced it until I became a bishop. And all of a sudden I got tested. Again, I was the new guy. No one really knew who I was in that ward. And all of a sudden there were some civil disputes. Right. Some folks who weren't pleased with certain member of the council and how they handled something and they were coming to tattle to me. And how are you going to handle that? Right. So then I had to go have a conversation with that leader. And people's emotions flare up quickly. And so you have to kind of remind everyone what we're all trying to do. No one asked for these positions. No one asked for these assignments. And we're trying to do our very best. And I do think there's always an opportunity to see, you know, things from the other people's point of view, you know, go walk in their shoes. I love Dale Carnegie's book, How to Win Friends and Influence People. That was introduced to me when I was on my mission in Paris and stuck with those concepts since. But it's hard. Some people aren't wired that way to have those conversations. And I think to the extent you can say, I think I understand where you're coming from. I think it's one of the podcasts from your, I forget, I'm not sure if it was Deanna Murphy or who that basically talked about questions and how to give feedback and basically said, hey, use the concept of my observations are this. And I see this is how you react. You do that. That defuses a lot. I use that right and left and work in that church. And that seems to help. Yeah. I love that, you know, framing the observations. I'm trying to think. I can't remember what that was. Well, I'll have to hunt it down. We'll put it in the show

notes if I find it. But I love because it's so easy to sort of default to sort of an accusation like, you know, so and so told me you said such and such, you know, I was like, wait, wait a minute. Like, that's not the situation. But to say, you know, this is what I'm seeing. Like, help me see this in reality or what's really going on there. This is what I observed. And then, you know, it's non-threatening and you can go from there. Yeah, I had it in the professional world. I had a city director that wasn't performing well at all. And it was very difficult. And everyone liked this person. And I had brought him in. This was another city. And I said, I said, hey, we need to have a conversation about how things are going for you in your role. I got to tell you as an observer, this is what I've seen. This is how I think it's making others react based on what I'm seeing and what you're doing. You might not be aware of it. So how do we make you successful? And how do we do something different or pivot? Maybe it's a different role or maybe we need to do some different behaviors or practices. That's easy to do in a corporate world, right? When you have that direct hierarchical reporting structure in the church, it's more difficult. I've had a handful of experiences where I've been able to bring someone in and I've said, hey, I don't know why, but I felt prompted to bring you in and we need to have a conversation about how life is going for you. And then they'll respond, they'll open up, and then I can share observations. And not that there was any certain behavior that needed to change, but it has produced greater engagement with some members and more council members. Yeah. Fantastic conversation. Love it. Well, let's jump into some of your principles here and feel free to speak from these any like you're doing from either a city manager context or a bishop context. I think I don't know that there's just some, those roles rhyme at times, you know? So the first principle is the principle of focus. Maybe unpack that for us. So, you know, we get inundated day to day in our roles at home, church, work, with needing to do a hundred million things, right? The list never ends and we never get to get arrived at a plateau where we finished and we can relax, right? And in church leadership, it's easy to say, all right, here's the, you got called. Congratulations. Thanks for accepting the role. We sustained you. It sets you apart. And oh, by the way, here's the handbook. Go read, make sure you follow it to a T and oh, by the way, we're going to have this upcoming stake leadership training or there's general church training or there's this fireside we need to watch.

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We need to make sure we're doing all these things. I remember feeling, you know, in other leadership roles, I just get inundated really, really easy because I'm a perfectionist and I don't want to disappoint and I'm a learner and I want to make sure I'm always continuing to progress personally. And so I was having that experience, you know, my church life, but then also in my, in another city, I was an assistant city manager for many years and I felt like we were a high performing city that was doing some great work, but it was enough. And that gets kind of depressing at times or demoralizing. You kind of feel deflated every now and then. And I remember listening to, I'll watch leader cast. I don't know if you're familiar with leader cast. That's the leadership kind of virtual leadership offering that it's kind of got a religious faith-based

aspect to it. But I remember I will watch that Andy Stanley fan. Yeah. He's a great speaker, a great storyteller. He's turned me down twice, by the way, when I've invited him on the podcast. So, you know, he just spoke at leader cast. I hadn't missed it, but I'm going to go back and watch it. So he's always one of my favorites. I remember sitting there and he was talking about the power of focus, a hyper focus. And he said, look, I got this, I forget how many employees he had in his church. And he said, he goes, I got all these employees and they're all doing their different ministries and working on these efforts and endeavors. And finally, we started experiencing that we weren't aligned all the time. We weren't being aligned. And it was causing some disruption with the work we're trying to do, all the good work and the faith building we're trying to do. He goes, so I got my team around and I said, I think we need to simplify. He goes, I think we all need to come up and write our own description. And it needs to be one sentence. Okay. And I thought, that's pretty powerful. And I've glommed onto that. And since then, I've heard him speak a lot about being simple and focusing on the things that matter. And I think at that time in my city work, we had a balanced scorecard strategic approach that had like 26 things we were going to go after. I'm like 26 things. And I get it. We have 15, 16 departments and they can take a subset of it. But as a city manager's office who's over, who sits on top of this whole organization, I can't focus on 26 things, but I can focus on five things. Right. And so I've thought a lot about that lately. And then you overlay that concept with Jim Collins, a good to great book, which I've loved that book for 20 some odd years. And he talks about trying to understand what makes great organizations great from the good organizations. And he did that research study of looking at all these organizations and he found out that there really wasn't one magic silver bullet. He thought there was going to be some sort of program or framework that the great organizations all followed and subscribed to that didn't exist. What he found is that the great organizations were deliberately consistent at following something and they got to pick that. And now if they were strategic and it had a certain mission and it never changed and they pushed towards that, then they train towards that. They communicated to new employees when they're on board, this is what we're going to be about and this is how we're going to do it. That's where the magic was occurring or how great organizations came about. And so I've thought long and hard about, okay, at the war level or a stake level, I think there's similar principles that apply. And when I got called to be a bishop and with my ward council recently, I wasn't able to do this the first year. There was a lot of coming out of COVID and I don't know if you guys are aware of that big winter storm we had that kind of just demoralized the whole state of Texas. That impacted us greatly. And so there was a lot disruption my first year, but that second year, last October, right after I started the second year, we ended up needing to realign our ward boundaries. I had 75 active youth, 25 priests in my preschool. We were just a large ward. And so we realigned. And then I was able to have almost a new refresh of a ward council. And there I was committed to trying this approach out. And I called the ward council, I called it the extended dance mix version of a ward council meeting where I asked for all the ward organization presidencies to come to a meeting. And I didn't want it at the church. I didn't want it to be after a Sunday meeting. I wanted it to be different and significantly different to all of them. We needed to onboard new members that came in from other wards. We needed to create a culture of unity and teamwork and collaboration. And so I hosted a 90 minute ward council meeting at my city hall in a training room where we had as many as we could get. And it's hard to get for more than 90 minutes. But we talked about the power of focus. And I said, here's the

thing. Here's the challenge. Each of you guys and your ministries with the organizations you have a stewardship of. I need you to go understand your role in the handbook.

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We've got to honor that. But there's a lot of things we're asked to do. And so I need you guys as a presidency to counsel one with another and identify three things you're going to do exceptionally well, which is three. That's all I'm asking. Now you're going to have to do all of it. But it's OK if you don't do all of them well. But I want three things that you're going to do exceptionally well this next year. And it took them a month or two. They liked the concept. They didn't know how to go about doing that or whatnot. But then I started having a report back in a ward council meeting. They do kind of peer reports. This is the three areas what we're really focusing on. So I've got every organization talking about what they're going to primary. We're going to make a big special heyday about every kid's birthday. We're going to make sure they love singing time. They know these songs. We're going to give them multiple opportunities to sing throughout the year, not just the primary program. Elders Quorum is going to be committed to getting those ministry visits done. They're going to do them because they've told me. They told the ward council they're going to. As a bishopric, being the young men's presidency and the bishopric, we're going to make sure our youth are having phenomenal experiences, tailoring off a lot of the conversations you guys have had about experience and hospitality. We're going to do that for our youth program. And then in sacrament meeting, we're going to have such great speakers, such great experiences in sacrament meeting that people, no matter where they're at on the faith spectrum, they want to be with us. And if they can borrow some of our light each any given Sunday or any given activity, so be it. And so anyway, that's garnered a lot of conversation. I think for a lot of folks who've been on other ward councils, they see this as really peculiar because we don't really do that. We don't operate that way at the church local level. I think we're starting to see more of that. So anyway, I think in any given year, we'll try it. At the end of this year, I'll have another extended ward council and I'll ask them, how'd it go this last year? Are you going to continue with the same three the next year or are you going to want to do something different? And so far, we're receiving really great feedback from our ward on the feeling that exists in our ward culture, the things we're doing at the youth program level, the primary level, and even with the adults, we're starting to see some ripple effect. I couldn't be more proud of how my ward councils embrace that and how they're handling that. You know, I've been thinking about this concept of an extended ward council. I mean, you've named it for me, which is helpful. And so it sounds like this is like a yearly thing that you do, right? Let's get everybody, all the presences in a room and really kick this thing off. Yeah. So we just did it for the first time in October. And I'll tell you, last summer, when I knew that our ward boundaries were going to realign and I was going to lose, I lost 100 members again, 120 members again, and 90 members of two other wards that I didn't know. And I did not want there to be a skip in the cadence of what we're doing. I wanted people to feel welcome. I didn't want people to feel like they were dismissed because I've had those experiences, my wife and I twice, where we

were realigned and we felt like we were dropped in the grease. And so I didn't want the new members to feel that way. I didn't want my departing members to feel that way. And so we spent a lot of time over the course of three months, just contemplating and meditating how to make this experience great. And I was thinking about it. And at that time, I do an annual leadership retreat at work for two to three days where I take my city directors and I say, okay, let's do a year in review. Everyone kind of make a small presentation on what they're proud of and that they did in their departments. Let's talk about what we're going to do next year and let's do some just kind of fellowship with one another and so we can build teamwork. And I was planning that last summer for the city and it kept gnawing at me that I need to do this at the ward level. I'm like, well, how am I going to do that? Like I can't do, I can't ask for a day from people. I mean, they got their families and soccer and whatever it might be. But it kept gnawing at me. And another podcast that you had, I forget what it was, but it was the one about the brother carpenter was who a bishop and he had all his brothers were bishops and they gave the advice on just be you. You are who you are. Lean on your strengths, which we'll talk about here in a minute. And so I thought about that. I go, I am an organizational behavior guy, type city manager. I build a strong culture of teamwork and collaboration of high performance. Why can't I not do that at the ward level? So I reduced it to a 90 minute thing and we had food. Was it in the church? Was that my city hall training room? I wanted it to be a unique experience that they could look back upon and say, yeah, all right, we're going to do something a little different than we've done in the past.

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Yeah, I love that. And you keep coming back to this concept of doing something a little different, right? Because you have the whole cultural hall, right, available. Just use that. But to take them out of their element a little bit, give them a new experience. And obviously, maybe not everybody has access to their city hall per se, but there's something to our psyche when we're like, OK, we're in a new environment. We're talking about in a new, in a different way. Right. And I think it really helps establish some healthy culture that way. Right. And I wanted all the organizational presidencies to understand they're part of a greater leadership group for the war. They're doing the work of leadership at the ward level. And I wanted them to feel appreciated that I'm grateful for their service, that I expect great things from them, too. It's not a, hey, you're called, we set you apart, good luck, and we'll see you later. Right. I'm like, I wanted them to know I'm right there along their journey with them. All right. Next principle is the engagement principle. Yes. I think you guys have had, you've had guest speakers about engagement and Gallup's work. I'm a big fan of Gallup's methodology. I got exposed to it, man, probably a little over 10 years ago. We tried it in the city. Back then, the tool was really only kind of corporate led. You know, they were trying to measure engagement of big organizations at the city level or out. But they came out with a different version that made it more available, widely available. And so one of the books is 12, The Elements of Great Managing. I don't know if you're aware of that one, if you've seen that book. It's a Harvard Business Review, the folks who kind of helped put that tool together, helped administer it, wrote this book. And really, while the Gallup tool, if any

listeners are not familiar with it, it's a survey tool to understand the engagement level of the organization. And they asked 12 questions and they found that these 12 questions really help understand how engaged your employee base is. I look at those questions as not just survey questions. I look at them as those are leadership principles that I as a city manager should be a master of, that my department heads and directors, I should hold them accountable for understanding those questions. And so I read this book and I was a bishopric counselor. And I remember thinking every chapter was focused on a different question or leadership principle. And as I read each chapter, I'm like, man, this has to do with brother and sister so -and -so who are doing this calling over here or we're having this issue over in this organization. And I think this tool, this principle actually would help them. And I remember having a ward mission leader come to me just frustrated. He didn't, you know, back then the ward mission leaders reported to whoever in the bishopric got assigned. I don't know if it was an outline of the handbook that it needed to report to the bishop or whatever, or maybe it did. But he came to me and I didn't have any stewardship over ward missionary efforts. He came to me and said, he said, brother Thatcher, I don't know what to do. I've been trying so hard to move the needle on missionary work in our ward and I'm getting nowhere. I'm getting no support from any of the other organizations, from the bishopric. And he goes, you're the only one that will listen to me. And I thought, man, isn't that great? And at that time, I read this book or this chapter that talked about someone at work cares about me. That's a Gallup principle. Someone at work encourages my development. I receive recognition and praise. And those are just some of the ones I just read those chapters. I'm like, this ward mission leader needs this attention. And so I forget where a little bit later that I came across a book who took the same Gallup framework and overlaid it in a church setting, a faith based setting. He took those same 12 principles and said, this is how it might work evangelical in the setting or even Protestant, other Protestant mainstream religions. And so I've tried to figure out, okay, how do I apply that at the ward level? And so I've introduced this to my ward council. It's hard to get people aren't wired to learn for leadership. It's hard to connect some of these things. But I also remember having a seminary teacher come to just fed up. This was back in 2000, late 2000s, because that was when church was producing all kinds of video material that you could use in your classes. And yet we had these old antiquated big TVs on the library, on those carts, and they couldn't hook up a computer up to it or a tablet. And the sister came to me and says, brother Thatcher, we need new TVs. And so I elevated that up to the bishop and said, hey, why don't you see if the agent bishop will maybe we can all contribute and buy new TVs, the new, you know, the modern high definition TVs, flat screen that can plug things in and play.

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And the answer came back now, we like what we have, we're not going to do it. And so another concept in this Gallup framework is I have the materials and equipment to do my job. Now, Mike, how can I extend these callings and ask people to do their best work, great work in building faith in our membership of we don't even support them on materials and equipment. Same thing

goes for for chapel setup and classroom design and whatnot. So anyway, I'm a big proponent of the framework. I use it in my city work quite a bit. I train my new directors when I hire them. This is how you're going to be a supervisor and at the city hall and Bernie. I've done it in my last day, too. But I do think there's extreme correlation with how we should support our work council and how we should support our primary teachers just by following this. Yeah. And I love just this broader concept of offering them a framework because a lot of people walk into these roles and maybe, you know, they've never maybe worked in in their secular world, like like you do, where you're managing and working with people and whatnot. And so they don't have really anything to fall back on. And so they they fall flat because they don't they they don't have any experience. So so for a leader to offer him a framework, not that it's like the only framework that will ever work. It's just but it's an effective one. It's been shown to work and to offer him that right. And so is there anything else you would say as far as like how do you help them execute on the framework rather than, you know, not just offering it to them? Well, I know we talk about things quite a bit. Each of these principles, there's one in there about talking about progress. What are you talking to your employees about progress? Well, if I were to take that to a church, to our ward level, my talking to my members about their progress, you would think that's being done in ministering interviews, right? Ideally, that's how it's set up. Is it really being done that way? And so right there, I can make a connection to my elders quorum and Relief Society of Presidents about how we should have stronger ministering interviews, right? Are we talking at a level, personal level with our members about how they're doing personally, not just how are they doing ministering to those that they have a steward to minister to? That means a lot to people. We're just not comfortable having those conversations. We very seldom do them at the church level. And, you know, so there's been times where I've been able to, when a ward council member presents a problem, I can kind of usually connect it back to one of these principles. Yeah. And so you can just touch on one of those 12, maybe in a quick one -to -one interview, and say, let's just discuss this for a minute. You know, how are you talking about progress or whatever it is, right? Well, in each of those elements, too, there's 12 elements, they break them down almost like Maslow's hierarchy of needs. I can't go and talk to people about their progress if they're not getting their, if they're not, they don't have the materials and equipment to do their jobs, right? So you have to do certain things first and it evolves and layers on top of each other. And so there's been, Gallup has done a kind of a breakdown pyramid of how you come at these principles. And so I've, again, I've spent some time trying to figure out, okay, what does that look like at a ward level if I already use the same concept? And I've created a You're right. You said it. Not everyone has those experiences, getting this type of training or exposure to working with people. A lot of times when you go to church training, it's, okay, here's the handbook, or we're going to go to a stake leadership meeting. And so we're going to go in the chapel on our Sunday best, and we're going to open with a prayer and a song, we're going to have testimony, and they're going to tell us about some program we need to be rolling out. But we don't really get to the nitty gritty of how to tackle the hard stuff, too. Oh, that's really helpful. Anything else around the engagement principle that we haven't touched on or? No, I just think if we look at our membership in our ward councils from what are their engagement needs, where you could probably, if you're experiencing as a bishop, if I'm experiencing a hiccup somewhere or frustration, it's probably because there's some sort of engagement need, I'm not meeting, I'm not helping them meet. Yeah. And so I turn the script back on me, and I look at it through those

12 lenses of, okay, how's the elders quorum president doing with these things or my ward as a whole? So. Love it. All right. The next principle is personal talents and strengths. So again, going back under the Gallup framework, right, they author the strengths finder stuff. I'm a big proponent of strengths finder, and you've had some guest speakers talking about personal strengths.

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I love it at work. I have all my directors, my assistant directors and managers do the strengths finder. I have a big matrix chart of every department who does what, who's great at what, right? That helps me understand how to lean on someone and leverage their genius in a way that I wouldn't if I didn't have that understanding. And so that's hard to do at the ward level. I read for all my whole ward council and things change out quite a bit, but I do tell them that, and I talk with my youth when I have ministering interviews with them and when I do my one-on-ones with the ward council, I talk to them and I ask them, I say, what is it the Lord has blessed you with? What superpower has he given you? I need to know that. Be honest and open with me. What do you think that looks like? And if I call and extend a calling to someone brand new and say, so I'm going to call you to do this. Would you accept? Yes. Okay. Great. When I set them apart, I say, now you've been set apart. You can have extra enlightenment and power to fulfill this calling, but I need you to stop for a minute and think about, reflect upon all the talents and strengths of superpowers Heavenly Father has blessed you with. I need you to tell me what those are. And that throws people off, but I said, you really need to know what you think that is. When they tell me and say, okay, here's what I need you to do. Don't think about how sister so-and-so did that job right before you. I need you to think about how you're going to apply what you just shared with me to the handbook of instructions for your assignment. And so we spent a lot of time conversing that way. And I spent a lot of time on ward council will help and them understand that's their expectation. They don't need to be like the elders quorum president before he was called because he had special talents that were needed at that time. And I struggled my first year as being a bishop. I just felt like I was drowning. I was underwater all the time. And, and, you know, having that as many active youth as I did, which was really kind of unheard of and kind of a Texas ward to have 20 priests. I mean, I had to go outside to hold preschool. We didn't even have a bishop's office big enough. There was no room. We had three other, two other wards in our church and we're a smaller chapel. And so it just wasn't working. And I I'm figuring that, trying to figure out how the young men presidency dude is. I never was in a young men's presidency before I've been in Bishop Rick. So I understood how that worked, but I just was struggling my first year. And I remember coming into a stake conference, maybe a year ago, elder Michael Dunn, you know, the grizzly bear story, right? Have you heard elder Dunn's grizzly bear story where he got mauled by a bear hiking or running? He's got a great story. Anyway, he showed up to our stake conference and we were convening as a bishop's council about things and whoever the bishop that was in charge said, or what items do you want to talk about? And no one had any offered up any agenda items. And I said, well, I got an item. I

said, I need help. I need you guys to counsel me and tell me how you are handling the youth programs because I'm drowning. And they all looked at me clueless. I didn't realize ignorant me, new to the state, new to that area. I had like the largest ward in the stake and, you know, everyone had maybe had five priests as opposed to my 20. They didn't, they couldn't connect with the issues I was having. And so they were counseling with me when all of a sudden elder Dunn walks in the room and he goes, brother, don't want to disrupt your meeting. I'm just here to listen. And it just got quiet, right? Everyone was like, what are we going to talk about? And he goes, what questions do you have? And no one had anything to offer. And one of the bishops goes, well, Bishop Thatcher needs some counsel. And he kind of said, he's struggling with this issue about how to handle all this youth stuff that's going on. And so I spoke up to provide context. I said, yeah, elder Dunn, I'm just curious if it might be at all possible or the church might go back to the old young men's program. That would really help me out a lot. I get what they need. They really need us to be intentional with the youth, be present with them and help them lead and connect them with heaven. I get all that and we're there, but I'm drowning planning, training, all that stuff. And he smiled and he looked at me. He looked at the bishops and said, here's the deal, brother. It's not ever going to change. What does need to change is the church's perspective of what a bishop's supposed to do. Right. And we've heard the, I think it was Elder Cook that said, Hey, the bishops that we grew up looking at, you know, what we expected of them are now what an elders' quorum president does. Right. And what we viewed the young men's president before is really what we need to view the bishop as now. And I remember sitting there back and I was like, well, I just politely got chastised by a general authority and I need to think differently.

00:45:05 - 00:50:17

I was sitting there telling the stake president for months, Hey, I really need help. We need to And it dawned on me that I need to lean on what I do best. Right. Why? I got, I got four boys. I'm a baseball coach. When I, in my spare time, when I'm not running a city or doing my side hustle as a bishop. And, and I thought I need to be a coach. Right. And so I ended up getting up in a fifth Sunday with the, with my adult members and letting them know I did a state of the ward type address. I showed some data. Here's how many numbers are coming here and there and how many missionaries we have coming from our ward. And I said, I'm really proud of the ward culture that we have sending missionaries out from our ward. That's something we're going to continue to focus on. That's going to be one of our top three focuses as a bishop. Right. We are going to continue to send missionaries out from this ward, but I need help from, from you as a ward I go, you do not need a youth calling to, to be empowered or enabled to be a mentor to the youth. But no, that's where I'm going to spend my time. And so I asked my elders, quorum president, early side president stand up. I physically gave them a key to my office as a, as a symbol for them to see and said, they have business hours, office hours in my office, whenever y'all need. You have a marital issue. You have a mental health issue. You have a work go see that if you even have a pornography issue, right. Or whatever, call them up and you can be in

my office with them because I've got to be with the youth. And I shared the story with elder Dunn and they were just wide eyed and they got it. And then, you know what? Immediately right away, everyone's like, sign me up. This is, I've had this experience. How can I speak in front of the youth or how I want to be a teacher in Sunday school or primary with the youth. And anyway, so I've just learned, I go, I need to, I'm going to be successful in this role. I need to think about, okay, who am I? How's the Lord blessed me? How's he strengthened me? And really it goes back to all the, all the investment that I've had in me personally, professionally that can dovetail with my, my bishopric stewardship. And so I run a ward leadership or a city leadership council. I have a leadership team that meets every other Tuesday. I, I operate them or work with them much like I would with council. We don't move on, on an item unless we got unity or alignment. Right. They don't understand what all this is about because that's, it's uncharacteristic of past city managers they worked with. Right. But it just makes my life a lot easier operating in a way that, that I've, that the Lord's already blessed me with. Right. Yeah. Oh man, there's so much there. But I love it. I love all those stories and those approaches. And just going back to the basics of, of strengths, like identifying strengths, I guess there are these cool like models and mechanisms like strength finder, right? But you do have to pay for those and it's, it can add up of, you know, an award counselor or whatnot. But, but just sitting down and having the conversation, like you talk about with the youth, like what are your strengths? And my mind went to what a remarkable resource we have in patriarchal blessings to invite members and leaders to sit down with a patriarchal blessing and say, all right, read it with the only intention of finding specific strengths that you have, that you can then apply to your calling. Right. And there's so much there to just, again, it's just about having the conversation, inviting them to think about what is your strength and how can you apply it? Absolutely. I had a conversation with an president many years ago who was recently kind of getting reactivated and, and he had a lot of potential. And I said, I talked to him about strength finder. He was enamored with it because I went, he went and got it. I said, all right, he shared me the, the report and said that, that is awesome. I go, here's what you need to do now. You need to go get, get your patriarchal blessing and read it and overlay the strength finder on top of that blessing or overlay the blessing on top of the strength finder, and then tell me your observations or how you feel. But the same thing, you're right. It's a strength finder is a tool, a patriarchal blessings, your own general feelings on how you lean towards things, help you identify your talents and strengths. And I talk a lot about with the youth, they need to start identifying that early, early on and lean on those. Yeah. Well, but I can tell if I ever came to your house, I'd probably spend a lot of time in front of your bookshelf looking at all the books you have about leadership or organizational behavior. And I think we're kindred spirits that way. So absolutely. Yeah. That's why I've been a listener for a long time. It's been great. Cool. Any, any other principal story concept that we need to make sure we hit before we wrap up? Now, I'll share one, I'll share one other thing with you, you know, in public service, in city government, and most folks that get into city management or local government, they might go get a master's in public administration or a master's in public policy or affairs local or what, governmental affairs.

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And a lot of these institutions, and I was fortunate to go, have gone to University of North Texas. University of North Texas is one of the top city government, city management programs, top in Texas, one of the top 10 in the United States. And a lot of these programs we'll share with you when you upon graduation, the oath of the Athenian city state. And I don't know if you're familiar with that, but the legend goes, and there are in where back the day in the Athens city state, young men, when they were getting ready for military service, they would go through some sort of academy or whatnot. And it could have been leadership or military academy. I don't remember. But once they graduate, they then make this oath, this oath to the city state, and then they become a citizen. And it goes something like this. And there's different variations out there, but it talks, it says something like this. And I got it framed, and I keep it by my computer at work. And it was given this to me upon graduating. And it says, we will ever strive for the ideals and sacred things of the city, both alone and with many. We will unceasingly seek to quicken the sense of public duty. We will revere and obey the city's laws. We will transmit the city not only not less, but greater, better and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us. So for me, professionally, that's a personal motto that I'm adhering to. I didn't take that oath, but I've adopted it. And most city managers or public servants do, that we are going to take whatever we've been given, our stewardship, and we're going to leave it in a much better place, in a much better situation, because we have that sense of pride in our civic duty to build great communities. And I think there's a lot, I mean, I think there's extreme amount of synergy with how we operate and restore gospel in a church setting in the same manner, right? You're called to do some great work. You don't know what your mission might be when you're giving a calling. But if you're giving it your all and you're honoring your covenants to minister those around you, to serve those, to have the same ideals of leaving your young women's organization in a better place than it was given to you, then we're going to be great wards. We're going to be great stakes. We're going to be a great church worldwide. And hopefully along the way, we're building faith and doing temple work and missionary work too. But I just have adopted that personally, even at the ward level. And I share the same thing with those I serve with. It's all about being better, right? We don't ever arrive at a plateau. If you're truly converted and committed to this restored gospel of Jesus Christ, you understand that you're on this eternal plane of progression. And so we need to seek to make our wards better. Again, it was Elder Dunn who also had that 1 % better talk a few years ago in general conference, that whole theory of marginal gains. If we can be committed by hyper-focus on one or two things to improve upon, that means we're going to be committing to being better 1 % at a time. And so what are we doing as a person, our personal study, our personal progression, our family progression, our community progression to be 1 % better, to kind of live in alignment with the same oath that I just shared with you. Awesome. Well, Ben, last question I have for you, as you reflect on your time, both as a leader, as a city manager, and as a bishop, how has being a leader helped you become a better follower of Jesus Christ? Right. Great question. Right. I asked my Relief Society to answer that question once in one of our ward councils. She did not appreciate being asked that, but she did good. Look, you know how it is. When you're in leadership positions in the church, you have the ability to be a front seat observer of some miraculous work that's done by the hand of the Lord. And as a bishop, and when you're in stake presidencies, you see that. When you're in old

school, when you're a young winds president, you see that. I'm seeing it right and left. And it's because of being genuine in our approach to serve and try to be better and try to do right by the membership. But here's what it comes down to for me. I remember about a decade ago, I was listening to the scriptures on audio. I was on a road trip and went through an anus and then I was in Jeram. And all of a sudden I heard a scripture that just knocked me over. In fact, I had to stop.

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I pulled over the side of the road and rewound it. I don't know if that's a thing you do, rewind, 10 years ago, I don't know. Went back. And when was the last time you heard anyone say, yeah, scripture in Jeram had a profound impact on me, right? That's the series of where the plates keep getting passed down. And people write a little bit, but they don't write a lot. And in Jeram chapter one, verse two, he talks about how he goes, look, I'm not going to write a whole lot of things. There's already been a lot that's been written. I'm not going to write about my prophesies and revelations, because what more can be written than what was already said? Haven't my father's already declared the plan of salvation or the great plan of happiness? What more do we need? And I remember thinking, I go, bingo, that's it. That's it. There's a lot to our church. There's a lot of complexities to the gospel, for sure. No doubt about it. But at the end of the day, again, coming back to the theme of hyperfocus and simplicity, it's the plan of salvation. And so I tell people all the time, and with my war and with our war when they come in and chat, whether it's through temple recommended interviews, or if they have concerns or questions about the things that are going on in society and how that impacts the church. I tell them, I go, read that scripture and tell me how you feel. Do you understand the plan of salvation? And if you do, and if we all understand it and are committed and converted to it, then what does that mean? That means we're going to do our very best to adhere to it, to follow it, to reap the blessings of it personally. And then we're going to try to, and then we're going to try to bring as many people along that path with us. And so to me, to answer your question, being a leader has just put me in another position to be able to maybe extend a little more influence to try to bring in many more people along that path, which is following the Savior's example, to ultimately return back to our Father in heaven. And to continue the great ministry, whatever that looks like after this lifetime, right? We're just learning how to develop more strengths right now that will help us hereafter. And it's exciting to think about that. And so I'll just leave that with you that I know that our Father in heaven is proud of every one of us. No matter whatever we can bring to the table, he wants it. Bring our very best, whatever that looks like, he'll take it and he'll magnify it. Blessings will fall down, right and left when we're not looking for it, as long as we're trying to do something, as long as we're trying to be our best self. I wholeheartedly believe that. Tell my boys all the time, figure out what you're passionate about, make sure it's in alignment with what you can do in the restored gospel and the rest will be gravy. And that concludes this How I Lead interview. I hope you enjoyed it and I would ask you, could you take a minute and drop this link in an email on social media, in a text, wherever it makes the most sense and share it with

somebody who could relate to this experience. And this is how we develop as leaders, just hearing what the other guy is doing, trying some things out, testing, adjusting for your area and that's where great leadership is discovered, right? So we would love to have you share this with somebody in this calling or a related calling and that would be great. And also, if you know somebody, any type of leader who would be a fantastic guest on the How I Lead segment, reach out to us, go to [leadingsaints .org slash contact](http://leadingsaints.org/contact), maybe send this individual an email letting them know that you're going to be suggesting their name for this interview. We'll reach out to them and see if we can line them up. So again, go to [leadingsaints .org slash contact](http://leadingsaints.org/contact) and there you can submit all the information and let us know. And maybe they will be on a future How I Lead segment on the Leading Saints dot org slash fourteen to access the remarkable presentation by Anthony Sweatt about ambiguity and doctrine. 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 cannot shrink nor run away and to which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability.