



Aurelia Rogers, Founder of Primary | An Interview with Emily Cushing

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Have you ever tried to help youth with their mental health? That's a tricky road to travel. I have to tell you about an inspiring presentation we recorded with a one and only Jodie Moore. Yes, that life coaching Jody Moore. A few years ago, she recorded a fantastic presentation covering topics like normalizing tough feelings with youth, a more positive understanding of stress, how to minimize shame, and mastering the skill set of empathy and better understanding anxiety. I want you to see this presentation as soon as you finish this podcast episode. You can go to LeadingSaints.org/14 and this will get you access to the entire video library at no cost for 14 days. Jodie's presentation is in the Mentally Healthy Saints library and you'll be a better leader or parent when you finish it. Again, go to LeadingSaints.org/14 or check out the show notes for the link. Hey, if you're a newbie, the Leading Saints is important that you know, what is this Leading Saints thing? Well, Leading Saints is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping Latter-day Saints be better prepared to lead. And the way we do that is through content creation. So we have this phenomenal podcast, we have a newsletter, we have virtual conferences, so much more. Articles on our website. I mean, I could go on and on, right? And we encourage you to jump in, check out Leading Saints, go to the search bar at LeadingSaints.org and type in some topics and see what pops up. We're just glad you're here to join us. Welcome back to another episode of the Leading Saints podcast. And we're talking about a remarkable woman in this episode, a woman in history, in church history. Her name was Aurelia Spencer Rogers. You may be asking who is that? Well, that is the individual who started the of

idea the primary organization in the church. That's right. Primary did not come from a prophet sitting up a bed and saying, we shall have an organization for children to learn the gospel. No, it came from a sweet lady named Aurelia Rogers, who had a prompting to do something more, to step out and care for the children in her area and teach them the gospel in a way that then Eliza R. Snow came to town and said, that's a great idea. I'm going to take this back to the president of the church. And here we are, a worldwide organization that we call primary, that for you lifelong members of the church have a special place in your heart for primary. Am I right? The songs, the lessons, we can all go back there. We can remember the names of many of our primary teachers. And we have Aurelia to thank for that. Now, Emily Cushing is actually the person I bring into the broadcast to discuss this because she recently wrote a book called She Did, Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Faith. And Aurelia is one of 23 different women that she does a quick life sketch and research on their lives about how they impacted the church, how they impacted our faith community and just women of faith. It should be examples that we know of to inspire our own faith. So we go through the history of how the primary was started, how it became an official organization, and just the type of woman that Aurelia was to show such faith and to step into a mission. Regardless of a formal title or position, she transformed the church just like all of us can do in our own influence. We can change our words. We can change our stakes in a positive way. We can make a difference wherever we are at in the church. So let's jump into the interview with Emily Cushing, and we're going to explore the life of Aurelia Spencer Rogers, the founder of Primary. Emily Cushing, welcome to the Leading Saints podcast. Thank you. This is a long time coming. You've been in doing some research, writing a book, and now you're talking about the book you wrote. Yes. Yep, exactly. This is a fun part, maybe. I don't know. Yeah, yeah, I'd say it's nice having the manuscript off the computer and into book form. Nice. So you wrote the book called She Did, Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Faith. Maybe give us the premise. So it is about 23 women. They're all Latter-day Saint women from pioneer times up until present day. And it basically, each story tells a little bit about their lives. And most of them had some sort of challenge that they overcame and using their faith and their belief in Heavenly Father, they were able to overcome those things and move forward. Nice. Now you are, by vocation, you're an elementary school teacher and others had to be elementary school teachers, right? Yes, exactly. So how do you land on this world of women in church history? I have always loved writing and I've always loved church history. And with this specific book, Aurelia is actually, we kind of call her the OG because I had heard a conference talk given by David B.

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Haight in 1978 is when he gave it. And he talked about the founder of the primary, Aurelia Spencer Rogers. And it was a beautiful talk and I had never heard of her before. And I was born into the church. I grew up going to primary. My children all have attended primary. And I thought, how come I've never heard this story about her before or know her name? And so that's what led to wanting to write a book about her. And then I heard another story about a woman who

was on the Titanic, who was a Latter-day Saint. And so it was this idea that kind of blossomed from those two women and then started finding other women and eventually wrote the book. Nice. So there are 23 total women in the book. And as we were sort of talking about which direction would go with this interview, I want to maybe hyper-focus on Aurelia Spencer Rogers. And I remember this sort of the story of the primary organization wasn't started by prophets waking up in the middle of the night and thinking, what we should do is have a children's organization. It came from a grassroots effort of Aurelia, right? Is that the best way to frame it? Yeah, yeah, yeah. So Aurelia, she, and I don't know how much of her backstory we'll get into, but this specific with what you're talking about is she was a mother, she was in Farmington, and there were unruly boys who were around the town. And she thought, oh, we need to find some sort of organization for them where they can learn manners, basically, was kind of where it was at. And so she knelt down and she prayed to Heavenly Father asking for some solutions to this problem. And she heard a boy saying, there are auxiliaries for everyone else in the church, but there aren't any for children. And so when she heard that, she thought, well, maybe there should be. And like you're saying, it wasn't like it came from the top. It was something that then she presented to Eliza Snow, who was the General Relief Society President at the time. And then John Taylor was told about it and she met with him and then he approved and said, go ahead and start this organization within her own community. But within two years, it became an organization at the entire church level. So about what year are we talking here? 1878. Okay. Yeah. 1878. And by 1880, they had adopted it as organization. Yeah. So generally speaking, I mean, the man had that sort of that priesthood auxiliaries from early on in the church. And we know that, you know, Relief Society was organized very early on. Do you know of any other organizations that were sort of in the mix at that time? That's a good question because actually it did say in my research that when she received the revelation, it's the only auxiliary children are the only one who do not have their own auxiliary. So that would make me believe that there was a young men and young women organization, but I don't know that for sure. Interesting. Interesting. So it, and I didn't realize it was sort of this moment, this revelation that she sort of heard that prompting come clear. And then, so, and then you said it was about a two year time for it to sort of get to a place where it was more organized. Yes. And then within a decade, so within 10 years, it was in like, within all the settlements within the church. So maybe just give a little bit about Aurelia's background, her life. I mean, what would lead her to this point where she's actually thinking about children and their experience in the church? Sure. So Aurelia was born in Connecticut in 1834, and she was born to a Baptist minister. And so because he was a minister, the, you know, his church paid for his home and his, you know, salary, everything else. They lived a comfortable life. And then his brother, when Aurelia was about six years old, Orson was Aurelia's father. Orson's brother came to visit and he had been baptized into the, you know, as a Latter-day Saint. And he had met Joseph Smith and he came and he told them about Joseph Smith and he told them about the translation of the Book of Mormon. And they stayed up late into the night and finally Aurelia's Orson, you know, this is true. And they started crying and they decided that they were going to become members of the church. And once this happened, I mean, this means for him that he's giving up his career, they're giving up their comfortable life. But once Orson decided that this was true, he never looked back and they were scorned by their neighbors, by Aurelia's mom's family, because they then were, he did the call to go to Nauvoo. So they went to Nauvoo and during this time period, it's when Joseph Smith lived

in Nauvoo. A lot of these prominent early church leaders that we hear about were in Nauvoo at the time and Aurelia had a front seat to all of that. She saw the Nauvoo temple being built when Joseph and his brother Hyrum were martyred. She saw the procession. She was nine years old at the time. She saw the procession going through the streets of Nauvoo and she followed it. And then they got up and the bodies were laid out and for people to view. And her father, he lifted her up to the window and they grabbed her through the window and they moved her up until she could view the bodies of Joseph and his brother.

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And then they passed her back and she was sent back through the window. So she was right there. No, no. So she was with them. And then they were getting persecuted a lot. There was a year of peace after the prophet died. And then they started to get persecuted again. And so they decided to move West. They moved to winter quarters. And when they were leaving for winter quarters, her mom got very sick and died. And so they took her back to Nauvoo, buried her body. And then Aurelia and she had an older sister and four younger siblings with the father moved on to winter quarters. But once they arrived at winter quarters, her dad was called as the president of Europe, the president in Europe. So he left them. So Aurelia's older sister, Ellen, was 14 years old at the time. Aurelia was 12 and they had these four younger siblings. And so you can kind of see from a young age, she was a mother figure of these young children. And it's hard for us to understand now. And even then, that must've been so crazy to leave your 14 year old and your 12 year old. And he left them there, went to Europe. And so her background was kind of built on sacrifice and in a little bit of heartache. And then Brigham Young, he invited the children to come across the plains with him. And this was in 1848. So they'd only been in Utah for a year. And so she came across the plains, she and her five siblings. And it took five months by foot and over a thousand miles. Then they get to Salt Lake and they live in a dugout, basically a fort. And then she gets married at 16 and then moves to Farmington to start a family. And that's when she started noticing these boys that she thought needed a little bit more direction in their lives. And so that's when she knelt down and prayed to ask like, what can be done? So that's kind of her background. And she did, she saw a lot of stuff that we just read about, but she knew these people. She heard Brigham Young ask people to be part of the Mormon battalion and she saw them march away. So a lot of things we read about in our history, she was a witness to. Wow. That's fantastic. So was there in this moment where she's thinking about the rowdy boys and whatnot, does she have any type of formal or informal role in the church with children or what was that like? Or was she just literally just being caring and thinking about the young kids? Yeah, that's a great question because like I said, she was probably like a mother to these children, her own siblings. But after she got married, they had four children and her fourth child died and she became extremely sick after he died. And she also became really depressed. And that's something, I don't know, personally, it makes her just even more real. You hear about these figures from the past, but sometimes you don't hear about their personal struggles, just kind of the things that they accomplished. But she was very depressed because

she'd had a hard life too. But when this baby died, she said to Heavenly Father, and she thought she might die too, but she had three little ones. And she said to Heavenly Father, please don't let me die. I know what it's like to not grow up with a mother and I want my own children to have a mom. And she loved children. And so she told God, if you will spare me and let me live, then I will be your servant and I will do what you want me to do. And so she had this love for children. And then when she was looking for a solution later to this problem of these rowdy boys, it came to her that start this organization. And so she was the president of it at the time. And then after they made it official, she was on the board for the primary. She was on the primary board the rest of her life. But at the time, it didn't really say she was a huge leader at the time. I know that she also helped on different committees, helping indigenous people and other things within her community. It didn't really say she was a specific person within her community when she started this. So I'm just curious, the details, did she first go and present it to her bishop or the local leaders? And then how did it even begin to get momentum? Well, I think back then, the church was smaller. You had a little bit more access to the prophet than what you do now, a lot more access. So Eliza Snow, she had a conversation with Eliza Snow when Eliza Snow was visiting for her town. And then Eliza Snow is the one who took it to the prophet John Taylor.

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John Taylor met with her, with Aurelia, said he thought it was a good idea and to go ahead and start it. And one of the other really cool things about this story is initially it came because of boys, but right off the bat Aurelia was like, no, I want girls there too. And so it started with 115 children that first week. And it's kind of funny, they recited poetry, they sang songs, they learned doctrine. And then something that I read was it said that it's one of the things that they taught the boys that week was that they were not supposed to steal fruit from the orchards. And they taught the girls that they were not supposed to swing off of wagons. Those must've been very important to them. So those were some of the things discussed in that first primary meeting, but she truly loved children. And I do think it was because she had lost these, she ended up losing five children in infancy. So she raised seven children. So she had a total of 12 children, but five of them she lost in infancy. When she lived here, it was very primitive type of living because I mean, it basically was a desert the year before she moved here. It was in 1847 when they got here, it was a desert. And then in 1848 was when she moved here. So she's living it here when there's really nothing. She was here in 1855 with the whole seagulls and crickets. And so she lived through all of that. She didn't have a floor. They had homemade type of carpet. Even their roof was made out of just anything you could find in nature, basically. Well, she got here as a teenager, right? Because I'm thinking it wasn't until she got married that she went to Farmington. And Farmington is where she began. And if you go to Farmington now, there's parts of this original church. There's a plaque there, is that right? Somewhere in my life I've seen the plaque. So it started as, because I think today we think of primary of like, okay, well, we got to go to Sunday school or belief society or elders quorum. What are we going to do with the kids? Well, we should put them into primary. But it wasn't back then. And even more modern times, primary

was a weekday thing. Did it start that way as a weekday activity? Yes, I believe so. It was just something that they did on the weekday. Yeah, so she didn't approach this thinking, we need to keep the kids busy during our church block. She wanted to sincerely help them learn and develop in the gospel, right? That's a great point. Yeah, exactly. The other thing I love about this story, and I appreciate this as a mom, is she came up with this idea. She felt good about it. She presented it. They said, yes, you can do this. And then she says in her autobiography, for whole three days, my life was completely peaceful. I didn't worry about anything that I didn't get annoyed with the children at all. I'm like, she must've been like a normal person where, you know, sometimes just things bugged her or whatever, because for her to realize, like for three whole days, just her life felt so calm and peaceful. And then she said, but immediately following that, and she was praying a lot to ask what should this look like? So she took this very seriously and what should this Primer organization look like? And she felt a complete peace, but then all of a sudden it switched and she felt completely like that she wasn't good enough and that how am I going to do this? And, you know, I feel like that was coming from the adversary. Like you're not good enough to do this and this isn't going to work out. And so she really struggled with that. And she said the first few meetings she went to, she went there in tears because she just was like, what have I taken on almost? And I don't think I'm going to be able to do this. And even when people would like give her compliments or try to lift her up, it would do the opposite almost where she was like, no, this isn't working out or whatever. And then eventually that peace came and she said that she got, she was like humbled to the earth is what she said in order to start this organization and to truly listen to what it needed to be. So let me go back to it a little bit. As far as when she started this, she's just starting it in Farmington in her local area. She's gathering the kids. She's just doing it. And I would imagine her local leaders knew what she was doing that, you know, during the week, you know, Aurelia's gathering the kids and, and teaching them not to swing from wagons or pick fruit from orchards. And, um, and, and it just continues on that way. She didn't necessarily have this immediate ambition of like, this needs to be worldwide or like church wide. I need to take this to salt Lake, but she would just beginning something. She was beginning something grassroots. Like you were saying earlier, like I've got this idea and all started, even though I don't feel totally capable, you know, but, but I'll start forward with this idea that I have, and then it can be built upon.

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And then, yeah, I, you know, I'm sure that Eliza Snow and others, so she comes to town and she's like, well, what are you doing here? This is, this is innovative. Exactly. And then, and, and I think that's how things start a lot of time. Other women in the, in the book she did that, that Aurelia is a part of, it's those same ideas where they see a need within their community, within their ward or whatever. It's a small idea. It's not this huge thing. It's just, Hey, I kind of have this idea. And then, you know, as they exhibit faith and as they use prayer and, and use even the people around them to help them. And sometimes I think even it starts one way and it ends up totally different because they're willing to listen to where it needs to be, go, you know, and be

led. Yeah. So she does that. And you said it was two years before she presented to the church then? It was right off the bat that she presented. And then within two years, probably people seeing all this is successful and this is a good thing for the children. And why don't we have this for the children? It makes sense. You know, and there's good things coming out of it. Then two years later, it became an official auxiliary. And then within 10 years, it was in all the settlements is primary. And I'm guessing back then to be an official auxiliary, obviously, you know, the first presidencies saying like, this is what we're doing. You know, this is an organization. And then they're, they gather the board, right? The primary board. And that's sort of really what formalizes it that, you know, we have a group of people that are meeting together. Did they have a primary presidency right off the general primary presidency right off the bat? I think in, in the, like in 1880, then that's when they formed the board. And then she was a part of that the rest of her life. And she was never the primary president. She was never the primary president, but she was also doing a lot of other things in her life. She, like I said, she had 12 children, five of them passed, but she raised seven of them. She also was a suffragist. And so she was heavily involved in that where she spoke on a national level. They sent her back to Atlanta to a national meeting and, and they paid for her. Like they raised money to even pay for her way back there. She sounded like an innovative, well -spoken. And in fact, I didn't know this at the time when I wrote this, when I researched her out, but I went and spoke this summer at a about the book she did. And as part of that, I spoke about Aurelia. And one of my good friends came up after and said, that is like my great, great grandma. I am a direct descendant. It's Aurelia Rogers. And my friend's name is Rochelle Rogers Fleming. And the cool thing about Rochelle, my friend is she's an attorney. She's intelligent. She's articulate. She's this amazing mom. And she's also like non -judgmental and just so many amazing qualities. And as soon as she said that, I was like, yes, you are like who I would picture that Aurelia would be. And so it was amazing to see this is her direct descendant. I know her personally. I know how amazing she is. And if you were sending someone to go to talk about women's rights, yeah, I'd want Rochelle to go represent us. Like that's the type of person she is. And so it's, it's so cool to see that we had Aurelia back in the 1800s doing this stuff for us. And now we have like the Rochelle's of today that are doing the same types of things. And I love, I loved making that connection between these two. I love that. I'm glad you mentioned that. Anything else as far as the details of the formation that, I mean, was there any pushback or stories of people saying, you know, who cares about the kids or I don't know, was there anything else to the story about just starting it that we haven't touched on? Starting it. No, I think we have touched on, I think people were pretty on board from the get -go because, you know, of the time I think that, yeah, people liked the idea in it and it went forward pretty quickly. Yeah. I think it just with, especially when children are involved, like it doesn't, if people want to help children or even youth, like parents get on board pretty quick and then, you know, there's not going to be a lot of pushback that way, but so it gets going. Anything else as far as like after there's some momentum and it's established as an organization, then it sort of grows into what we know today? Yeah. Yeah. I think it just continued to grow and, you know, got more defined of what it is and exactly what we do there. And like you said, there's some trial and error and not even trial and error, but just with progression of, okay, now we're going to have it be on Sundays while the parents are in their classes. And then now, you know, recently we even, we no longer have a sharing time. Now we just have singing time. So I think as different needs have come up that it has been progressive in the way that they've seen the

needs and they've changed it as needed, which I think is a good thing. I think that that's how it should be with most things that we're doing, you know, see the current needs and then adjust it accordingly.

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Yeah. Anything else with Irelia that factoid or historic moment or anything? Well, this isn't really a factoid, but her descendant was mentioning this and I had also read it in the book and I, and it was another one that just made me think like, you know, even these prominent Latter-day Saint people we hear about, they have temptations, they have struggled. And so both her descendant and I, Rochelle, both of us appreciated that she had mentioned this in her autobiography, but when she was younger and growing up, a lot of the older people smoked tobacco and a lot of times they would let the children take a puff off of, you know, whatever they were smoking. And so, and the word of wisdom had already come out in, I believe 1833, but it wasn't, it kind of, each individual person was taking it as they wanted to. It wasn't as rigid as we know today. No, not until I think around 1851, when there was like a general conference talk, like, Hey guys, this is what we need to be doing. So she grew up like smoking, you know, she would smoke and she actually really liked it. But in her autobiography, she mentions, I used to smoke. And when I decided to quit, she tells how difficult this was and that even like, you know, she would smell it and it would trigger something in her and it was a hard thing for her to quit. And so this was something that she would tell the children is that don't start this because it's really hard. It's been a temptation for me almost my entire life, which just makes her even more real that she had this temptation with smoking, you know, but yeah, she, she started this huge organization and she truly loved the children. You asked in her autobiography, she all names of like the 224 children by name who were part of that first primary organization at some point. So she truly had a love for them to remember them. And she wrote her autobiography, like in her seventies, you know, and so she had a great love for these children that she knew all their names and wanted to mention them by name in her book. Because I was going to ask you if a really Rogers deep dive that she wrote an autobiography and anything else you'd recommend. And so it is called life sketches of Orson Spencer, which that's her dad and others and history of primary work. And one cool thing I like about this book is it's a primary source. You know, you're getting it straight from her, but it's also letters from her dad who he's, he's a prominent figure somewhat himself. And while he was over in Europe, he's sending home these letters and you can read about what's going on at the time. They are there in real time. They're living this, they're knowing what's going on in, you know, in Europe during the time with the saints. And then there's letters in here from Wilford Woodruff. She talks about like having experiences with Brigham Young and then she writes about it from her journals and different things. So I love it. I love this book for that reason is that you can really see what was going on because they wrote it right then and then it's in this book. And it is kind of cool even to see from her book what Utah was like when it was first getting settled because she really was one of the first people here and to see how much growth it has now. And I liked reading about, she was a very nonjudgmental person at the

time. She said that she deplored some mothers would use like the indigenous people they would tell their children. They would use them as scare tactics almost like, well, they would tell their children, if you go out into the woods, then, you know, an indigenous person might get you or something. And I really said, I deplored that, that they were using these people to scare their children. People that were different from them. And so I love that, you know, she seemed like she was ahead of her time a little bit. Yeah. I love that thought of that, you know, God putting in her just such a sweet heart that because he knew that she needed to be that person to reach out to children and to love them and to find a place for them in the gospel to be nourished and developed in the doctrines that we so much cherish. Yeah, I agree. Yeah, I think that was important. I think that she lived a life of hardship probably because of with other women in hard and times like a lot of us go through hard times to help them to be better for other people almost like Chieko Okazaki. She is also in the book and it talks about how she was living in Hawaii when it was bombed Pearl Harbor, and that it was bombed by Japan, which is the country of her heritage. And so she talks a lot about discrimination and racism that she experienced herself. And so then later she was able to really reach out to people across cultures, across languages, everything again, ahead of her times.

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And it's probably because she felt this. And so, you know, I think it's beautiful that out of tragedy or things like that, that we see someone turn it to make good out of it. And that's definitely what we see with Aurelia. She had a hard life and she was able to build upon those things, become stronger, and then use what she learned to help others. Yeah. And as she wrote her autobiography, did she see herself at the end of her life as like that she played a significant role in the development of primary or was that just one segment? I'm sure there was other redeeming qualities and whatnot, but in her mind, did she see just what a milestone that was for her to contribute to our religious community? I think she did. I think she realized it only because like she has a couple of chapters on the primary and again, she tells how it was started. And so I think she probably did look back at it and, but more in like a humble sense of I'm thankful that God helped me to do this. Like, you know, she truly said, I was so scared to do this. I didn't want to do it. Once they said, go ahead. I was just didn't feel like I was capable of doing it. And so, so she does really give kind of the glory to God, like he helped me to do this. So yeah, I think she did notice, you know, realize the significance of what had been started by this idea that was put into her or, you know, I feel like it was personal revelation that she received in order to start this organization. Yeah. And that's something we really try and explore on leading saints is that, you know, you can get sort of in this rigid box of like, okay, I'm, I can't really make a difference unless I'm on the ward council or I've been asked to serve and it's not really my place to step forward and influence because I've been asked to do that. And, or the handbook doesn't say that we're supposed to gather the kids and, you know, back then anyways, like maybe I just shouldn't do that. I don't want to overstep my bounds, but you just see that this, you know, highlighting the revelation that she, this prompting, she kept feeling of like, there's a, there's a

bigger mission for you to use your heart. And so lean into this and start something. And then, you know, obviously divinely orchestrated to have Eliezer Snow come in and recognize, wow, I need to take this up the rank and make sure that these ideas get to the top. And now it's changed the world easily. I mean, everybody almost in the church has been impacted by just that organization, you know, even though maybe it looks a little different today. Yeah. I completely agree with you. And I think you had Lauren Dalton on here recently. Yeah. And I love, I listened to his talk also that he gave about, you know, am I feeling this route, this personal revelation is this from heavenly father? Is this just me or where's this coming from? And I love the idea of just act on it. And I think that's exactly what you're saying is, you know, we have these promptings. I even have someone in my ward, she's in Young Women's, but she noticed that there's a boy who's mentally disabled in our that didn't really have a place to go second hour. And so she approached the Bishop about that, like, Hey, is there something even I can do, or can I help with that? And so, yeah, why not, you know, reach out sometimes like we were saying about really, it might fill on a very small level, but you never know what that can lead to. Yeah. That's powerful. So let's mentally take you into a room full of primary presidencies and our primary teachers and just speak for Aurelia in a way, I don't know, you're probably not, you know, that's maybe daunting, but like, what message, knowing Aurelia Rogers better, like what message would you give to that group of women? What I would, if it was primary teachers, and this kind of goes back to my background. So I teach at UVU and I teach kinesthetic learning. And so I teach elementary school teachers about child development and also how they can have like physical activities to help with their curriculum within their classroom. So there is a study that shows that if children who didn't like PE as children, it shows that later in their life, there's a connection to their physical, the amount of physical activity they get. And it's because if they had a negative experience in PE as a child, then they didn't really want to be part of that as an adult. They made a connection between those two. And I've always thought about that with primary and how grateful I am that I had a very positive experience in primary. I was taught these gospel doctrine that I'm a child of God and different things that I felt a lot of love in that people can go back to that and they make a connection between the feelings they had as a primary child and learning those doctrines and feeling that spirit of you are loved and there is a higher power and you can rely on him through prayer and other things.

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And so I think if we can nourish an environment and a space when the child or children are in primary, to just continuously just love them and to show them that, that hopefully later on in their life, no matter where they are, no matter even if they're active in the church, that they can remember those feelings and they can still maybe rely on a heavenly father or prayer, even though they may have stepped away or whatever. So I don't know. I kind of have thought about that just through my work that, yeah, there is kind of a connection there. If you had a negative experience with something as a child, you may not want to go back to that again, but anyway, so, so we can get caught up a lot in the, you know, the sort of leaving our primary calling is very

flustered. Like I can't get little Johnny to sit still. Exactly. But we don't realize the long game that's happening here that even in the simple music time or whatever it is that it's reaching into their, their soul, even if they don't realize it in the minute it's later on when they really need to depend on the gospel and that they need Jesus Christ where they think, oh yeah, remember that song, you know, that, and then just hearing it can do all sorts of things, you know. Oh, I completely agree because I, even when I was having my third child, I was laying in the hospital bed, you know, we're, we're doing all this stuff to prepare me to have the baby. And I needed some comfort at that moment. And I kind of just turned my head and I, and I was singing primary songs in my head. And that was something that just felt very safe and comfortable and kind of brought me peace and calmed me down. So, so yeah, even like you're saying, little Johnny, you come away frustration, which I'm not acting like they're, again, I've been a teacher. I totally get it with that age group, but if it can always come back to, you know, offering a place of love and helping the child to feel that and fostering that type of environment, it'll go further than what you think in the long run. Yeah. There's, there's two different directions I want to go. One related to your book and one related to your background and expertise. And there's no smooth segue here. So let's just go one way and then we'll go the other way. I'm just curious with your background, you know, I hope that as people see the title to this podcast episode that it will hopefully attract a lot of primary leaders, right? I'm just curious, like, what are some general advice that you'd give to those teaching gospel? And you've given some things already, but anything else as far as advice you'd give to primary presidents or primary teachers, or just as far as creating that experience that children will remember as a positive experience? Yeah. And I actually was this, I have been a primary president and stake primary president in my stake. And so I, you know, as I thought about this in my own calling, I feel like I approached it the same way as I really did where, where you receive the calling and you're kind of like, I do feel kind of at first, there's an excitement for me, at least maybe some dread it the second they get the calling. But for me, it was like, okay, this feels a little bit exciting. And I'm like, you know, kind of like, and then maybe, yeah, all of a sudden you feel like, oh wow. Okay. There's a lot to do here. I want to do the very best I can. And so then an overwhelming and yeah, maybe that is from the adversary saying you're not good enough or whatever. And so I do think being in that position myself, I really felt like reaching out to the one and truly seeing the one and trying to get to know their situations. And this is actually what I teach at my profession as well. And we talk a lot about getting to know the individual students, getting to know even their skill level and being able to connect with them on a personal level. And I think if those children know of your love for them, what is the saying? They don't care. It's a - How much you know until they know how much you care, right? Thank you. Yes, exactly. I feel like at the base level, that's what it is. So you can know all the doctrine in the world, but until they know that you love them personally, they're not going to care about all of that. It's not until you reach down and really get to know them and love them then I think that that's when they learn. So I guess that would be my advice. And you asked earlier, what would Aurelia say too? And I think that was at the base of what she was doing too. As I've mentioned, it wasn't like, Hey, I've come up with this idea. It's going to become this worldwide organization. It was, I see a need and I love children and this is what I hope for them. And then she went forward with this idea. And so, yeah, that's really, I think at the core of all of this. Awesome. Any other, I know this probably merits its own podcast, but any

other quick tips, tactics, or approaches that teaching children that you can go to? I have, my son has excellent Sunday school teachers right now.

00:40:11 - 00:45:01

And I think that they are really great examples of letting him know that they know who he is. They see him, they love him. There's a safe space when he comes to church. And the other amazing thing is I've even, we've brought other people to church with us who aren't active. And these two people who are my son's teachers, they come right up to them and they welcome them and make them feel loved. And one of them was a little bit even rowdy in the class. And he didn't like, you know, the teacher wasn't super strict with him. And like, he just kind of went along with it and let the boy be who he needed to be in that space. And I feel like that fosters, you know, love and acceptance and also wanting to come back again. Yeah. That's awesome. Wonderful. All right. Now the other direction I want to go is just, obviously the books, you said 23 women and we've talked about one. So there's 22 other women there. I imagine you had sort of maybe the majority of them sort of in your mind as far as like, these are the women I really want to share with the world and make sure that they think more about. Was there any process you went through to find other women that had extraordinary faith? Yeah. So all of, we feel, Becky Hood is my amazing co-author, but we truly feel like Heavenly Father was guiding us to who should be in this book. And the great thing is, is since we've written it and since we've received feedback from people, we've received texts or messages. And so, you know, a lot of the women we, well, almost all the women we don't know personally, but we had heard their stories somewhere and some, we had heard a lot of stories and then some of the women didn't work out and others did. And so we realized, okay, if they didn't work out, then maybe it wasn't meant to be where some of the other women we found in like miraculous ways almost. And so it was kind of, we thought, okay, this was truly meant to be, but so it's really good when we hear, get these messages from people saying, oh, my, my son-in-law was in the mission where that woman lives. And he has told stories about her before that she truly is like so loving and inviting. And so it was kind of cool to see that, you know, we'd only heard maybe one or two stories about these women and decided to feature them in the book, but then people who truly do know them as a person were like, yeah, this is, she's the real deal or whatever. But another one who's in there that reminds me of is Carmen O'Donnell. And she lived in Guatemala. And just like what we've been talking about, where she saw a need and then she voiced that need to her husband. And then it was brought to the attention of the church headquarters and an entire like policy change because of it. And hers, Carmen O'Donnell was that she, they were living in Guatemala and what we were talking about where you used to go to like your classes during the weekday. So she said, this is really hard for people. They're taking like bus rides for hours to get to church and they have to do it multiple times a week. And so that's in Guatemala city is where one of the places where they consolidated it to a three block hour on Sundays, it was at the suggestion of Carmen O'Donnell. And then another thing that Carmen O'Donnell was doing, and this is in the forties, it might've been a little bit after the forties, but another thing that she

was doing is she hadn't grown up in the church. And so this language to her, the gospel language, I guess, or the vocabulary wasn't very familiar. And so she was doing some lessons that were kind of at a simpler level and visiting authority went to one of her classes that she was teaching. And that's where gospel essentials, that class. That's where that came from. They were like, oh, this is a really good idea for people who are new to the church or don't know a lot of the vocabulary. So yeah, we have some women who, again, grassroots, it's not like they're thinking, I want to change the church. I just think that I can see a better way, especially for the people living in this area. And they brought that to the attention of someone and then it went all the way up to the headquarters or whatever. And we often use the term with leading saints, as far as path, but not in a negative way. That's very positive. And that's really where pure leadership is found. It's not in the title or when somebody just notices, I think I have an idea or this should be done differently. I'm going to lean into that and see what comes of it and God can really step in there and offer help. Yes. Yes. And also another woman who's in the book, her name is she was born in a really unique time period.

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She was born just after the civil war ended. And then she died a week to the day before in the United States when they desegregated schools. So she's in this unique period of time where just a lot is going on. And she was black and she had family who they were enslaved and even her husband had been enslaved. And she wasn't ever like, Relief Society president or something like that. But within her family, she was a leader. Her husband was illiterate, but within her own family, she knew what literacy could do for her family. So she walked with her children. She had four children. She walked to the library once a week and she taught them how to read. She wanted them to teach her father how to read. So she was a leader within her own family. And because of that, it then did change other people because one of her daughters, she went on to be the first Relief Society president of the Genesis group in Salt Lake. And so you see a woman also, who's just helping to be a leader within her own family and to change some things that were going on. And it made a big difference within her own family and then within a lot of other people because of what she was doing within her own home. So I love that as well. Like you were saying, if you're not prominent, whatever, you still, you make these small, you're leading within your own circumstances and it can lead to great things. That's cool. Yeah. This is such a great book for people to reference and maybe those tough days of leadership where it feels like I'm not being heard or like, you know, that this is a frustrating circumstance. I mean that, you know, there's some inspiring stories of others that have pressed on and made a difference. That's really cool. Any other topic, concepts, thing we want to squeeze in here before we wrap up? Do we do? I guess the main point just with the whole leadership stuff is kind of the whole bloom where you're planted and what we've talked about. Just if you do see something positive that can help and that you are receiving revelation and keep thinking about then mention it to someone else. Even if it's something little like what I said before of, hey, I see this person might not have somewhere to go second hour. What can I do to help? And just jump in

and like you were saying, lean into it and that you, it might seem small at first, but that you can make a big difference in others' lives. And that's in particular a powerful, and correct me if I'm wrong, but a powerful message for women in our church to hear that, you know, there's formally, there's just a lot more callings for men to be on that ward council or to be the Bishop and finally, you know, have his say or whatnot. But I would imagine this, I mean, these stories, that's why you did it, right? So the audience is for women to better understand the remarkable faith that's been demonstrated in our history. Yes. And if, and honestly, if you were to, if you were to ask, I think almost all of these women, like, would you see yourself in a book one day? They would be like, what? No. Like, because a lot of these women, you've probably never even heard of them, but they were just women going along, living their lives, trying to magnify their callings or minister to others or build a strong family. And through those things and just living the way, you know, they felt was right. That's where they made the biggest difference was just in kind of the smaller things we have even in here, Butch Cassidy's mom, the infamous outlaw. So she was a, she was born in England and then she came across the plains of the 12 year old. Both of his parents did. And he was the oldest of 13 children. And she was heartbroken when at 18, he decided to become an outlaw basically. So her story, I love her story because it, she was never, she was just a mom trying to kind of survive. And she was heartbroken that her son not only was going against like what she believed personally, but also he was in a dangerous path that was against the law and that could, it ultimately killed him because, you know, because of, yeah. Yeah. Anyways, so. Yeah. Talk about wayward children, right? Even back then, there were mothers and fathers struggling with these wayward children, even outliers. Yeah. And so as I was trying to, because, you know, a lot of times we tell stories of, Oh, this was happening. It was bad. And then here's the happy ending. But that's not always the case. And with hers, when I was trying to figure out like, how do I end her essay? You know, like he died, he got killed, supposedly there's different, we won't go into the different theories. It really is. But if he, if he did actually die, you know, in South America, but she was, she never saw him after he was 18 and she adored him. She loved him. And so, so she and her daughter writes, her daughter wrote a autobiography and she said, she just saw her mom. If she said, if I lived to be 200, I'll always remember my mom kneeling down to pray for my brother that he would be okay. And so as I was finishing up her essay, it's not like I could give a happy ending.

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It truly was, you know, at the end of the day, all she could do is kneel and pray to heavenly father and say, he's now in your hands basically. But she always, what she tried to do to help her with this was stay busy. She had, you know, 12 other children. She took dinner to the elderly man who lived down the road. She took in an indigenous boy to help him. So she did a lot of things to stay busy and to try to stay positive, even though life was hard. So you write a book. I mean, obviously this is a lot of work. And so where, where do you go from here? Is there a part two of 23 more? I don't know. Yeah. So we'll, I think a desert book, they have a certain period where you wait and then, and then you see if, yeah, let's go ahead and do another edition, but

Hey, I would write them all. I love, we did so much research about every single one of the women and I loved learning about their lives. And I think that was the most rewarding thing was it made me be a better person, seeing what these women had done. And then as we've received some feedback from people and it, a lot of people have said, it's made them want to look into their own like ancestry and learn more about their own parents and grandmothers. And, you know, because once that's gone, you kind of lose, you lose your own, like, well, where am I from? You know, and I think these stories of hearing where people are from and us as a culture and remembering what strong Latter-day Saint women have come before us and their testimonies and their faith, and they experienced hard things and, you know, they became stronger because of it. And I think those stories are important to tell and to remember. And so that's another reason why I love your podcast too, is just highlighting people and their stories and how to be better wherever you are, whatever you're doing. Yeah, that's fantastic. Obviously it's published by Desert Book, so people will find it at Desert Book or online as well. You know, we're Amazon. I'm guessing it's on Amazon. All right. So people can check it out that way. I have a typical question I ask at the end of interviews, I will just a little bit, but how has reading and learning and researching about women leaders helped you become a better disciple of Jesus Christ? That's a great question. I think one of the things that I learned the most about from reading about these women is that you can use your voice for change, or you can use it just to share your testimony. You can use your voice, but also your actions. And I believe that's what a lot of these women did is they lived their lives, how they felt was best. And then they move forward with faith. I think they embrace their futures with faith, despite their circumstances. And sometimes we're compelled to do that just because, you know, they are our circumstances. But I think it has also given me a lot of sympathy and empathy for others who maybe, you know, I haven't experienced some of the things that these women have in their life, but it's helped to open my eyes to what their situation maybe looks like. And hopefully that helps me to become a better minister of Christ because I realized that there are so many different situations and people out there and struggles and that I can try to be kinder and more loving and more understanding and more accepting and more non-judgmental. And a lot of that has come from what I've learned about these women and the way they lived. Now that we've reached the end of the episode, I quickly want to thank you for supporting the Leading Saints podcast. There's so much content out there to consider and you picked this one. If Leading Saints has made an impact in your life, we would sure like to hear about it at [leadingsaints.org slash contact](http://leadingsaints.org/contact). And if you could quickly text or email this episode to a leader, you know, I bet it will bless their life. You can mark off your good turn daily and let's even call it ministering. Okay. Maybe not that far, but seriously, thank you. And help us share this content. Remember the Jody Moore presentation about youth and mental health is waiting for you at [leadingsaints.org slash 14](http://leadingsaints.org/14). 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. 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.